

## Beethoven's Natures

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### **Abstract:**

Beethoven loved nature. The composer was not entirely unusual in this regard: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart before him admired birds and wrote pastoral music (cf. Beckerman 1991: 93-102; Hertz 1991: 107-115), and Gustav Mahler after him was actively engaged in experiencing and representing nature (cf. Johnson 2005: 23-36; Peattie 2002: 185-198). Nor were these German musicians unique in their engagement with the natural world; from musical and philosophical engagements with birds throughout medieval Europe (cf. Leach 2007), to American composers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (cf. Von Glahn 2003, 2013), and from places beyond the West and to nonhuman species (cf. Feld 1982, Martinelli 2009), humans have had a deep and wide fascination with connecting music and sound with the natural world—even if the explicitly named field of ecomusicology is only a relatively recent phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> As an icon of Western musical culture in general and German culture in particular, Beethoven's love of nature has a significant, if sometimes overlooked, place in his biography, music, and reception. Examining this situation contributes to understanding the role of ecological thought in German culture.

**Keywords:** Ludwig van Beethoven | ecomusicology | German culture | Pastoral Symphony

### **Book chapter:**

**\*\*\*Note: Full text of chapter below**

## Chapter 24

# Beethoven's Natures

Aaron S. Allen

How fortunate you are to be able to go into the country so soon. I cannot enjoy this happiness until the 8th, but I look forward to it with childish excitement. How delighted I shall be to ramble for a while through bushes, woods, under trees, through grass and around rocks. No one can love the country as much as I do. For surely woods, trees, and rocks produce the echo which man desires to hear.

—Ludwig van Beethoven to Therese Malfatti; Mödling,  
Vienna, May 1810

Beethoven loved nature. The composer was not entirely unusual in this regard: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart before him admired birds and wrote pastoral music (cf. Beckerman 1991: 93–102; Heartz 1991: 107–115), and Gustav Mahler after him was actively engaged in experiencing and representing nature (cf. Johnson 2005: 23–36; Peattie 2002: 185–198). Nor were these German musicians unique in their engagement with the natural world; from musical and philosophical engagements with birds throughout medieval Europe (cf. Leach 2007), to American composers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (cf. Von Glahn 2003, 2013), and from places beyond the West and to nonhuman species (cf. Feld 1982, Martinelli 2009), humans have had a deep and wide fascination with connecting music and sound with the natural world—even if the explicitly named field of ecomusicology is only a relatively recent phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> As an icon of Western musical culture in general and German culture in particular, Beethoven's love of nature has a significant, if sometimes overlooked, place in his biography, music, and reception. Examining this situation contributes to understanding the role of ecological thought in German culture.

In summarizing critical responses to Beethoven in the two centuries since the composer's death, Scott Burnham articulated four ages of reception: Beethoven as romantic revolutionary hero (1827–1870), as spiritual and political redeemer (1870–1927), as lawgiver regarding classical values (1927–1970), and as cultural product and culturally constructed hero (after 1970) (cf. Burnham 2000: 272–291). Eggebrecht found that the major themes in Beethoven reception (particularly of the nineteenth century) included the composer's suffering, striving, and overcoming (cf. Eggebrecht 1994).

An important if curiously minor theme throughout this reception has been Beethoven's well-known love of nature. Beethoven's frequent (and enjoyable) trips into the countryside out of Vienna and his reverence for nature are well-established facts. In his authoritative biography, Lewis Lockwood provided but a single sentence on the issue: "That [Beethoven] loved the countryside and relished taking excursions into the woods and fields is clear from biographical evidence of all kinds" (Lockwood 2003: 225). In his encyclopedia about the composer, Nettl wrote of Beethoven's "unusual love for nature" that manifested itself in what today we might refer to as the pastoral: "It is well known that Beethoven was an enthusiastic nature-lover who took every opportunity to leave the city. Döbling, Heiligenstadt, Baden, Mödling, and Nussdorf were his favorite spots, and he enjoyed the beauty of the Wiener Wald more than any other place" (Nettl 1956: 149). Beethoven's amanuensis and (not always trustworthy) biographer Anton Schindler described the composer: "In his fifty-fourth year he could be entirely satisfied only by nature, and nature and his art alone were able to hold him. People and houses seldom pleased him for both had too many faults" (Schindler 1966: 381). And as Beethoven himself put it: "It seems as if in the country every tree said to me 'Holy! Holy!'—Who can give complete expression to the ecstasy of the woods?" (qtd. in Thayer 1991: 501).<sup>2</sup>

Whence and whither Beethoven's love of nature? In this chapter I present a panoramic understanding of Beethoven and nature based on his biography ("The Nature of Beethoven"), music ("Beethoven's Nature"), and reception ("Beethovenian Nature"). We can find the whence of Beethoven's love of nature in his biography (particularly regarding his childhood and life-long struggles), and we find the whither manifesting itself both in Beethoven's music and in the reception of his life and works. Beethoven loved nature and incorporated some ideas of nature into his music; he has also been held up as an artist who had a significant connection to nature. Such an understanding of his life and music have shaped and impacted our very understanding of him, which have in turn promoted the connections between the idea of nature (as representative of ecological thought) and German culture.

## THE NATURE OF BEETHOVEN: BIOGRAPHY

Beethoven came from a musical family of modest means. What in particular about Beethoven's biography engendered his life-long love of nature? The following emphasizes just three biographical elements that impacted and reflect Beethoven's engagement with nature: his places and travels, personal struggles, and markings in a book about nature.

Born in Bonn in 1770, Beethoven moved in 1792 to Vienna, where he remained (with the exception of occasional travels) until his death in 1827. The owners of the Beethoven family home in Bonn reported that young Beethoven loved the Rhine River, which he could see from the back of their house. Furthermore, they reported that when Beethoven's musician father was off duty because the Elector was away, he regularly took young Ludwig into the countryside to places such as Rheinbach, Flamersheim, Ahrweiler, Hennef, Siegburg, Bensberg, and Oberkassel (cf. Thayer 1991: 62).

Bonn was an important cultural city in the eighteenth century, but Vienna was the *non plus ultra* for musicians due to larger audiences and a greater concentration of wealthy patrons to support music. Its larger size and population combined with its summer heat were also reasons to escape the city. As Beethoven wrote in 1813 to his patron Archduke Rudolf, "To stay in town during the summer is torture to me" (Anderson 1961: #429, 423). Beethoven changed residences continually within Vienna, and he took lodgings just outside the city every summer between 1800 and 1826.<sup>3</sup> Writing in 1801 to his childhood friend Franz Wegeler, he said: "You will rent a house for me in some beautiful part of the country and then for six months I will lead the life of a peasant" (Anderson 1961: #51, 60). Today many of the villages where Beethoven sojourned have been incorporated into the urban metropolis that is Vienna; in the early nineteenth century, they were rural areas. Heiligenstadt, Hetzendorf, and Mödling were regular summer destinations for Beethoven, but his favorite spot was Baden bei Wien in the Wiener Wald, where he stayed over a dozen times. When Beethoven was unable to go to the countryside, he lamented; during the 1809 French occupation of Vienna he wrote to his publisher Breitkopf & Härtel that, "The whole course of events has in my case affected both body and soul. I cannot yet give myself up to the enjoyment of country life which is so indispensable to me" (Anderson 1961: #220, 234). Beethoven's working methods and daily schedule relied significantly on nature: in and out of Vienna, rain or shine, he took long walks every day, during which he would contemplate the world and make compositional notes. As the artist August von Klöber recounted in 1818, "I encountered Beethoven several times on my walks in Mödling, and it was most interesting to see him, a sheet of music paper and a stump of pencil in his hand, stop often as though

listening, and then write a few notes on the paper" (qtd. in Jones 1995: 20).<sup>4</sup> Beethoven's sojourns and daily constitutionals were essential for his creative process.

In some cases, Beethoven's summer residences were with those of his patrons (e.g., in Troppau with Prince Lichnowsky in 1805), but many were spent at spas where he could take a cure (e.g., Baden and Teplitz). Hence another important biographical element: his personal health struggles also connected him to nature. Perhaps none is more famous than the musician's deafness (addressed below), but he also suffered from a number of other ailments (mostly related to gastrointestinal and rheumatological complaints, for which the posthumous diagnoses have ranged the gamut) (cf. Kubba and Young 1996). As others did before and after him, Beethoven found in nature a salve for his body. He acknowledged as much to Archduke Rudolph in 1813: "Baden [. . .] is still very empty so far as people are concerned; but all the more fully and lavishly is Nature decked out in her profusion and ravishing beauty [. . .] I am convinced that the glorious beauties of Nature and the lovely surroundings of Baden will restore my balance and that a twofold calm will take control of me" (Anderson 1961: #426, 420).

Nature was also a salve for Beethoven's soul regarding social matters; his retreat to nature was simultaneously an escape from difficult personal situations and a substitute for missing human connections. While his father was an important guide early in life,<sup>5</sup> the elder Beethoven was chronically depressed, alcoholic, and often absent (exacerbated by the loss of Ludwig's mother in 1787, which resulted in the teenager both taking on the role of *pater familias* and assuming greater importance to his two younger brothers). He remained frustrated in love and a bachelor for his entire life, with few and mostly insignificant female relationships. Beethoven also had a drawn-out custody battle regarding his nephew, Karl; the repeated, stressful interactions with family and court, as well as the strained relationship with Karl, took their toll.<sup>6</sup>

Beyond the physical and social aspects were Beethoven's metaphysical concerns. The 117 markings in 72 different essays from Christoph Christian Sturm's *Reflections on the Works of God in the Realm of Nature and Providence* help characterize Beethoven's understanding of nature as sacred territory. The then extremely popular book provides daily moral, religious, and scientific reflections on the celestial, human, and nonhuman worlds. Sturm was an ordained minister from a successful family of scientists; his approach used scientific reasoning to explain natural phenomena, create a sense of wonder, and find God in nature. Beethoven seems to have agreed with the passages he read and annotated (likely in 1816) (cf. Witcombe et al. 2003).<sup>7</sup> Not all of those passages deal with nature, but most do.<sup>8</sup> Some topics that captured his attention include plants (flowers, trees), animals (birds, insects), the elements (minerals, water), and the heavens (seasons, stars, sun). Some

markings are characterized by what we might understand as science (in careful examination, natural history, and connections between different biotic and abiotic realms that indicate a sense of what would later be known as ecology), empathy (in advocating a sense of understanding of what other species and individuals might feel), and aesthetics (in finding beauty in the processes and messiness of nature that do not fit neatly into more traditional categories of human-created art).

Beethoven's physical, social, and metaphysical struggles come together in the "Heiligenstadt Testament," a powerful and often-cited document written as an unsent letter to his brothers after he realized he was going deaf. Beethoven wrote it in the summer of 1802 in the rural village of Heiligenstadt outside of Vienna, where he went on doctor's orders to address the malady afflicting his hearing. Upon realizing that he was not improving, he concluded: "As the leaves of autumn fall and are withered—that hope has faded for me. I leave here almost in the same condition in which I came; even that buoyant courage that often inspired me in the beautiful days of summer has vanished. O Providence! Grant me but one day of pure joy! It is so long that the inner echo of real joy has been gone from me—Oh when—oh when, Almighty God—shall I hear and feel it again in the temple of Nature and humanity?—Never?—No—Oh, that would be too hard" (qtd. in Lockwood: 120). Lockwood interprets the "temple" as a reference, via Mozart's *Magic Flute*, to Masonic rituals that required tests of fire and water for admission to the brotherhood. Beethoven faced significant personal challenges, certainly; but it also stands to reason that he sought personal purification and strengthening through experiences in nature in order to confront those challenges.<sup>9</sup>

In the context of biography, we find the foundations for Beethoven's love of nature in his childhood. As the adult Beethoven faced intertwined health, social, and religious challenges, he drew on that elemental love of nature, even acknowledging its "childish" aspects as he retreated to and relied on it. Equally important, however, is historical context: Beethoven was in the right place at the right time, as Enlightenment ideals had taken hold (e.g. Rousseau) and as romantics were fascinated with nature and organicism (e.g. Goethe; cf. Baron 1972). Thus, while Beethoven-as-nature-lover may be a product of the times, nature was also a personal necessity that allowed Beethoven to do his work: to create music that reached and continues to reach many people in many ways across time and space.

### BEETHOVEN'S NATURE: MUSIC

Beethoven's love of nature is manifest in his chosen medium of artistic expression—but in only a remarkably few, if concentrated, examples.

Cataloging Beethoven's (or any prolific artist's) works is complex; but to simplify, consider his circa 350 works in three categories. First are the approximately 100-vocal works that include texts for singing (some of these singular works are collections of as many as twenty-six short songs, while others are multi-movement, hour-long affairs). These texts are mostly German poetry, although there are also other languages and Catholic religious texts. The second significant category is instrumental works without lyrics. These pieces are Beethoven's best known: piano sonatas, string quartets, symphonies, and so on. Finally, a small portion of these instrumental works do have titles, such as those Beethoven designated (Sixth Symphony, "Pastoral"), a title from an earlier melody on which Beethoven based his composition (24 Variations on Righini's "Venni amore"), something a publisher assigned (Piano Sonata no. 8, "Pathétique"), an idea that a posthumous third party ascribed (Piano Sonata no. 14, "Moonlight"), or even a feeling interpreted from the style of the music but not from Beethoven's own pen (Piano Sonata no. 15, "Pastoral").

When considering the relationship of Beethoven's music to nature, there is an obvious advantage to the pieces in those first and third categories with texts (lyrics or titles), as they provide for the ready identification of salient issues relating to nature and the environment. At the same time, these texts can be deceiving. Some texts were added to preexisting music, so the relationship becomes complex. The texts may be vague and send us down the rabbit hole of interpretation (which may be insightful but, in volume, may also be distracting), and/or the texts may be accretions (although these too may be insightful if distracting). While texted works would seem to be the primary source of representations of nature in Beethoven's music, instrumental works without and with titles are remarkably informative.

David Jones has identified vocal works as precursors to the most significant work that manifests Beethoven's love of nature: the Sixth Symphony, "Pastoral," Op. 68. While there are other works invoking the topos of the "pastoral" (such as movements of the purely instrumental Septet Op. 20, the Piano Sonata Op. 101, a bagatelle from Op. 33, and a section of the vocal *Missa Solemnis* Op. 123), the Sixth is the *locus classicus* for Beethoven's nature—that is, his representation of nature in music. The only other work bearing Beethoven's pastoral label is a movement from the ballet music *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus* Op. 43 (the movement's title may have related to the stage action). Beethoven wrote over forty songs by the time the Sixth premiered in December 1808, and a number of these have texts contemplating nature. "Maigesang" (Op. 52, no. 4) compares young love with the sun, dawn chorus, and flowers. In "Der Wachtelschlag" (WoO 129), the repeated call of the quail exhorts thanks to God. Texts by Christian Gellert are the poetry for the cycle Op. 48, which includes two songs that reflect Beethoven's interests in finding God in nature (as in Sturm's *Reflections*): "Die Ehre Gottes

aus der Natur" and "Gottes Macht und Vorsehung" (Jones 1995: 22–24). Beethoven's song cycle "An die ferne Geliebte" (Op. 98), composed about seven years after the Sixth on poetry by Alois Jeitteles, is built on powerful nature-love metaphors. The music of the vocal cantata *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt* (Op. 112) reflects those calm seas.

Purely instrumental music, such as the symphony, has long had an association with "absolute" or "abstract" music that, ostensibly, does not provide much ground for programmatic or narrative interpretations—yet such instrumental pieces can indeed express ideas about nature.<sup>10</sup> Such absolute/abstract instrumental music is often placed in binary opposition with instrumental program/narrative music. For this latter, the composer usually provides explanatory prose (poetry, titles, descriptions) not intended for performance but rather only for contemplation prior to hearing. (The reality is, of course, messier: different works can function in different ways, and so we are better off thinking along a continuum of uses from more or less pure absolute or abstract instrumental music to more or less pure program or narrative music.)

An iconic work in this abstract-program debate is Beethoven's Sixth. Influential twentieth-century critics have claimed that the symphony in general is a text that exists only in relation to itself, and American, British, and German critics alike have claimed Beethoven's Sixth as a purely abstract/absolute work, irrespective of the obvious program Beethoven provided. Rather than engage in those aesthetic and semantic debates, in the following, I take Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony as a programmatic work that illustrates a few main ideas of Beethoven's nature.

Beethoven's Sixth Symphony is in five movements. As such, it exceeds the symphonic norm of four, but interpretations of this general form may vary: the latter three movements are played *attacca* (there are no pauses between them, creating a quasi-three movement form), while the fourth movement is sometimes glossed as an extended introduction to the finale (thus conforming to the four-movement norm). Beethoven provided pithy descriptive titles for each of the five movements:

- i. The Awakening of Joyous Feelings on Getting Out into the Countryside
- ii. Scene by the Brook
- iii. Merry Gathering of Country People
- iv. Thunderstorm
- v. Shepherd's Song. Happy and Thankful Feelings after the Storm

His other textual indications include naming birds toward the end of the "Scene by the Brook," the explanatory phrase "More an expression of feeling than tone painting" appended to the title page of the published score, and numerous comments in his private sketchbooks. The general narrative

and musical aspects of the Sixth reflect a "Memory of Country Life" (as per Beethoven's sketch notes) and the "joyous" and "merry" feelings of the suspended passing of time in what was, for Beethoven, sacred territory. The interruption of the storm, which provides dramatic and sublime tension, leads to the "thankful feelings" of the finale. Critics have provided divergent views on both the minutia and generalities of the Sixth for over two centuries (see Jones 1995: 81ff.; Will 2002b: 205–215).

Seven musical features of Beethoven's Sixth reflect pastoral nature. First, the speed is mostly moderate; fast tempos are not too fast, slow tempos not too slow. Second, consonance and major keys are prevalent, to the near exclusion of dissonance and minor keys. Third, harmonic motion is both prolonged (sonorities linger before changing) and constrained (the usual contrast of tonic relaxation with dominant tension is rare, and there is more gentle contrast of tonic with subdominant). The exception to these three features is the "Thunderstorm," in which we hear faster tempos, minor and dissonant harmonies, and extended use of the dominant (which prepares for the "thankful" arrival of the tonic in the final movement), as well as the first use in this symphony of piccolo, trombone, and timpani. Overall, however, the moderations of tempo, key, and harmonic motion reflect equanimity in nature and a languid sense of time.

The fourth feature is this sense of time. Richard Will argues that time is differentiated in the Sixth between the timelessness of the idyll and the historicity of the real world with its threatening storm. The contrasts between the two halves of the symphony—the first two movements constituting a "symphonic half" are distinct from the latter three movements constituting a "characteristic half"—give the sensation that "[t]ime seems to run differently in each half" (Will 2002a: 171). The contrast of the storm provides a kick-start to time, a reminder that interrupts the placid arrival, daydreaming, and festivities of the previous three movements. This interruption leads to the "happy and thankful feelings," a sort of arrival on a higher appreciative plane of humility and respect for creation. The concluding movement is a "Shepherd's Song" intoned by the horn; it may be a secular hymn but, along with "organlike sonorities" (Will 2002b: 212), it appears nevertheless as a grateful song of praise—be it to the deity, the blue sky of the idyll, or the return to the less structured time of pastoral grace.

The fifth feature concerns the "Scene by the Brook" movement, which is a popular locus for programmatic interpretation. Reactions have ranged from the picturesque images it evokes to the debated (and highly unlikely) possibility that it reflected the moment when a goldfinch foretold Beethoven's deafness. The imagery derives mostly from the continual motion in the low strings, which evoke flowing water, and the high string trills of birds. At the end of the movement, Beethoven identifies the birds: nightingale (flute), quail (oboe), and cuckoo (two clarinets). This musical depiction of natural space

comes closest to painting a picture of the pastoral visitor dreaming near a waterside aviary.<sup>11</sup>

The sixth feature relates to a common component of symphonies: the use of a stylized dance movement. Most such third movements (known as minuets or scherzos) have two main parts: the dance itself and a lighter trio, after which the dance repeats. Beethoven's "Merry Gathering of Country People" continues the major-mode emphasis of the entire symphony, while the internal trio increases the joviality with a faster, louder dance (a traditional minuet's trio might scale back in volume and texture, but this one increases both). The accented drones are a common pastoral trope and continue the trend of slow harmonic change. The emphatic presence of festive humans in the idyll reflects a realistic view of the natural world: one that is neither wild nor somehow pure, but rather one that reflects humanity's place in nature.

The final feature is the religious aspect. Aside from general associations of the pastoral with sacred music, the religiosity of the Sixth comes out in both musical and biographical contexts. Numerous procedures and sonorities evoke relationships with Haydn's oratorios *The Creation* (1796–8) and *The Seasons* (1799–1801). While the texts of these are, as is typical, biblical, the latter is an unusual example of a non-religious oratorio. In *The Seasons*, librettist Baron Gottfried van Swieten based his texts about weather on the pastoral poem (1726–8) by James Thomson. Beethoven's repetitions of one related tune resemble the form of a church hymn. In his draft sketches for the storm, Beethoven wrote "Lord, we thank thee," and accordingly the title of the ensuing movement is often translated as "Shepherd's Hymn" rather than "Song." This personal paean is also reflected in Beethoven's interest in finding the divine in nature, as in Sturm's *Reflections*.

### BEETHOVENIAN NATURE: RECEPTION

Critics have not universally accepted this interpretation of the Sixth as "Beethoven's nature." Soon after the premiere of the Sixth, the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* provided an overall positive reaction but critiqued the programmatic element in a symphony: "it might have been better if this composition had been named 'Fantasia of a composer upon the subject named by Beethoven' rather than the symphony" (qtd. in Jones 1995: 46). French composer Claude Debussy critiqued audiences more than Beethoven when he wrote in 1903 that "the popularity of the *Pastoral* Symphony rests upon the common and mutual misunderstanding that exists between man and nature" (qtd. in *ibid.*, 87). Two prominent music critics interpreted the Sixth in the terms of twentieth-century New Criticism (which focused on the text itself and ignored biographical and contextual matters); in the 1930s, British critic

Donald Tovey wrote that the Sixth was a classical (i.e., absolute) symphony just like Beethoven's others; and in his 1973 Norton Lectures at Harvard, the American composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein suggested that we should focus on pure musical processes and ignore the pastoral program of the Sixth (Will 2002a: 19-20).

Composers approached Beethoven's Sixth with caution, as they recognized Beethoven's own ambivalence about painting with music.<sup>12</sup> German composer Robert Schumann remarked: "In composing his *Pastoral Symphony* Beethoven well understood the dangers he incurred. His explanatory remark, 'Rather expressive of the feeling than tone painting,' contains an entire aesthetic system for composers. And it is absurd for painters to portray him sitting beside a brook, his head in his hands, listening to the babbling water" (qtd. in Jones 1995: 82). Later, Schumann would write his own symphony with titles indicating feelings associated with spring; he removed the movement subtitles but kept the title "Spring" (Beethoven likely would have agreed with Schumann's approach). French composer Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* (1830) is influenced by Beethoven's Sixth (see Allen, forthcoming). The cosmopolitan European Franz Liszt wrote piano reductions of all Beethoven's symphonies and held the Sixth in high regard. Liszt's own program music emphasized mood rather than detail (qtd. in Jones 1995: 84).

Nevertheless, painting the music has been an important way to disseminate Beethoven's Sixth. Staging, dance, and scenery were regularly used in nineteenth-century performances of it (as in 1829 in London, 1832 in Lyons, 1863 in Düsseldorf) (cf. *ibid.*, 81, 84). Earlier, poetic drama provided a different non-musical medium; Friedrich Mosengeil's 1810 essay set Beethoven at the center of a five-act drama related to the movements of the Pastoral. In the twentieth century, the global popularity of Walt Disney's 1940 animated film *Fantasia* continued these nineteenth-century traditions. The Disney setting excerpts music of the Sixth for a Greek mythological setting of watery glades, mountains, forests, and temples, populated by cupids and families of winged horses and centaurs, interrupted in their revelry by a storm. In 1941, the *Los Angeles Times* declared *Fantasia* a "masterpiece" ("*Fantasia*," 2011), although critics and composers derided the cuts and choices and some even felt "brutalized" by viewing it (cf. Barron 1993; Thompson 1940). While *Fantasia 2000* used Beethoven's Fifth Symphony rather than the Sixth, the Sixth was included in a 1991 video game version. *Fantasia* continues in the world on a multiyear (circa 2014–2016) international tour of film showings accompanied with live orchestral performances. Thus, *Fantasia* remains an important medium of diffusion for Beethoven, his Sixth Symphony, and his connection with the idea of nature.

Scholars from various national backgrounds have also considered Beethoven's love of nature in general and in relation to the Sixth Symphony. Consider just three regional examples, from Asia, Italy, and the United

States. Fascination with Beethoven in China and Japan is well documented, particularly regarding the Ninth Symphony (Cook 1993: 95ff.). Two articles by Chinese scholars have related beauty in nature to Beethoven's music, particularly regarding inspiration from personal experiences of nature (cf. Hou 1995; Shao et al. 2005). One Japanese scholar has claimed (perhaps hyperbolically) a unique position for the Sixth: it represents Beethoven as modern man (cf. Sasaki 2005).

In Italy, the Sixth was performed as early as 1813 and 1816 in Austrian-dominated Milan but not again until 1846 in Florence. Scholarly discussions of it were minimal but there were arguments, pro and contra, regarding the imitation of nature. For example, in 1847 L.F. Casamorata used the "Storm" from the Sixth as an example of a "beautiful effect" imitating nature but stressed that "the composer must carefully consider doing it so as not to lapse into the trivial or puerile" (qtd. in Allen 2006: 276). In 1857, Francesco D'Arcais offered a more generalized lesson from the Sixth that echoed Beethoven's dictum that the work was more feeling than painting; D'Arcais said that "the greatest merit of a symphony will always be that it makes us think about what is happening in life" (qtd. in *ibid.*: 276).

Beethoven was also the subject of a short fictional anecdote widely distributed in five Italian periodicals in 1834 and 1853. The story tells how when Beethoven was a child he had a pet spider that appeared while he practiced his violin; his mother killed the spider, and Beethoven mourned excessively (cf. *ibid.*: 333). The source history for this story is curious, and it illustrates how Beethoven's love of nature was fascinating to observers and critics. The original anecdote appeared in 1800, although in relation to a French musician named Berthaume; the name was changed to Beethoven and repeated in Wilhelm Christian Müller's reflections shortly after the composer's death in 1827. Beethoven apparently had no recollection of such an incident with a spider, saying (in Schindler's not always completely reliable re-telling) that "it was more to be expected that everything would have fled from his bad [violin] scraping, even flies and spiders" (qtd. in Thayer 1991: 58).<sup>13</sup>

In his adroit reception history of Beethoven in the United States, Michael Broyles argues that nature and the Transcendentalists (such as Ralph Waldo Emerson) are "fundamental to any understanding of America" (Broyles 2011: 42). They are also relevant to understanding Beethoven in America. When the Transcendentalists did identify with music, it was particularly with Beethoven and his symphonies. These Americans found in Beethoven a kindred spirit—although nature idealization took different approaches across the Atlantic. There were distinctions in approach between European romantics and American Transcendentalists: the former embraced pantheism (finding evidence of God, but not God, in nature), while the latter embraced pantheism

(God is in nature and is equivalent with the universe). In nineteenth-century America, Beethoven's Sixth was eclipsed only by his Fifth in popularity. Two transcendentalists, Margaret Fuller and John Sullivan Dwight, were also music critics who wrote enthusiastically about the Sixth. Fuller said it was like a painting of "the enameled fields on a day of bluest blue sky," and that the birds, peasant dance, and storm were "glorious gifts nature makes to every man." Yet Fuller also found it too superficial, picturesque, and too popular a composition that "does not require a depth in the life of the hearer, but only simplicity to feel its beauties." Dwight understood the Sixth less literally as a description of nature and more as the feelings of an experience of nature (along the lines of Beethoven's own admonition): "They do not say; look at this or that . . . but they make you feel as you would if you were lying on a grassy slope in a summer's afternoon."<sup>14</sup>

Beethoven's life and works do not present him as a proto-environmentalist, proto-ecologist, or proto-ecomusicologist. That conclusion differs from one made about his fellow early-nineteenth century artist from across the Atlantic: Henry David Thoreau (Titon 2016: 69–79). Beethoven was also not part of the main channel of German intellectuals that contributed to the emergence of ecological thinking. Rather, Beethoven's love for nature was personal. In fact, his relatively small output of music that explicitly engaged with nature could even lead us to conclude that his love for nature was private. Nature allowed Beethoven to do what he needed to do: write music that connected with many listeners. In turn, listeners and critics since Beethoven's own time have reacted strongly to the importance of nature for Beethoven. As a result, Beethoven has contributed, perhaps inadvertently, to our own understandings of the connections both between music and nature and between German culture and ecological thinking.

## NOTES

1. For more on the field (not discipline) of ecomusicology, see Aaron S. Allen and Kevin Dawe, "Ecomusicologies," in *Current Directions in Ecomusicology*, ed. Aaron S. Allen and Kevin Dawe (New York and London: Routledge, 2016), 1–15. See also Aaron S. Allen, "Ecomusicology from Poetic to Practical," in *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, ed. Hubert Zapf (Berlin: DeGruyter Mouton, 644–663); idem., "Ecomusicology: Bridging the Sciences, Arts, and Humanities," in *Environmental Leadership: A Reference Handbook*, ed. Deborah Rigling Gallagher, vol. 2 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012), 373–81; and Aaron S. Allen, Jeff Todd Titon, and Denise Von Glahn, "Sustainability and Sound: Ecomusicology Inside and Outside the University," *Music and Politics* 8, no. 2 (2014): <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0008.205>.

2. Beethoven wrote down that statement, perhaps circa 1810, on a selection from Johann Gottfried von Herder's *Blumenlese aus morgenländischen Dichtern*.

3. For a chronological list, see Thayer, *Thayer's Life of Beethoven*, 1109–1110.

4. Klöber made a number of sketches of the composer during his lifetime; see Alessandra Comini, *The Changing Image of Beethoven: A Study in Mythmaking* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987).

5. Such a relationship is important for establishing a sense of wonder in nature. As Carson put it, "If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder [ . . . ], he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in." Rachel Carson and Nick Kelsh, *The Sense of Wonder* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998 [1965]), 55.

6. On Beethoven's family, relations with women, and nephew Karl, see Lockwood, *Beethoven*, 42ff, 196ff, 355ff, *et passim*.

7. Witcombe calls Sturm's approach of finding "God in nature" "pantheistic" (2003a: 11); a better distinction would be to call it "panentheistic" (see also my subsequent discussion of Beethoven reception in the United States, in this chapter).

8. Witcombe figures that, of the 72 essays with markings, Beethoven marked "fifty-six separate passages in twenty-nine different essays that discuss nature" (2003: 16). I find this number low because it relies on a narrow interpretation of nature. Including topics on the stars and planets, scientific inquiry, and nature metaphor, I find that Beethoven marked approximately double that number of essays.

9. In Sturm's entry for March 11, "The Various Means That Contribute to the Fertility of Nature," Beethoven marked a paragraph and underlined the following two sentences: "my God: do not stop working on my improvement. [ . . . ] Let me only return to you in whatever way it may be and become fruitful through good works." Similarly, the entry for May 17, "The Tulip," compares life to a flower that ultimately dies; Beethoven underlines the sentence: "Its death was less sad because its life was pleasing and useful." (In Witcombe et al., 93, 97.) Other excerpts from Sturm are provided in David Wyn Jones, *Beethoven: "Pastoral Symphony"* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 20–21.

10. The following material on Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony (to the end of the section "Beethoven's Nature: Music") is taken from my "Symphonic Pastorals Redux," in *Extending Ecocriticism: Collaborative and Cross-Disciplinary Approaches*, ed. Peter Barry and William Welstead (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming). In that essay, I analyze the pastoral elements of various symphonies through the framework established by Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). Beethoven's Sixth Symphony illustrates Marx's simple, or "popular and sentimental," pastoral (5), reflecting "the felicity represented by an image of a natural landscape, a terrain either unspoiled or, if cultivated, rural" (9). Marx's characterization of a journey "away from the city and toward the country" (9) is apropos both for Beethoven's life and his Sixth Symphony.

11. Such imagery is explored in Roland Schmenner, *Die Pastorale: Beethoven, das Gewitter und der Blitzableiter* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1998).

12. This ambivalence is explored in Lockwood, *Beethoven's Symphonies*, 225–226.

13. See also Wilhelm Christian Müller, "Something on Ludwig van Beethoven," trans. Wayne Senner, Robin Wallace, and William Meredith, eds., *The Critical Reception of Beethoven's Compositions by His German Contemporaries* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 101–111, at 106 and 108. The essay by Müller was originally published as "Etwas über Beethoven," *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 29 (23 May 1827): 345–354.
14. Both Fuller and Dwight are cited in Broyles, *Beethoven*, 45–46.

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