„Drei Briefe von Beethoven". Genese und Frührezeption einer Briefkomposition Bettina von Arnims von Heinz Härtl (review)

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„Drei Briefe von Beethoven". Genese und Frührezeption einer Briefkomposition Bettina von Arnims.
Von Heinz Härtl. Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2016. 188 Seiten + 1 s/w Abbildung. €19,80.

With his latest monograph, Heinz Härtl adds to the large body of work that he has already devoted to Bettina von Arnim (1785–1859). As is the case with his previous studies, Härtl pays close attention to variations in texts from one version to the next, the socio-historical contexts of the variations, the reception at the time and since, and their enduring impact on cultural developments in Germany. As the title indicates, the focus in this work is on three letters ostensibly from Beethoven to Bettina. As he points out, due to their contentious authorship, Beethoven scholars have paid more attention to these letters than Bettina scholars (cf. 14). However, as Härtl demonstrates, these letters should be considered a "raffinierte[s] Kleinkunstwerk" that represents the "Verflechtung von Authentischem und Fingiertem" that characterizes Bettinas "fiktionalisierte Brieferinnerungsbücher," *Goethe's Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde* (1835), *Die Günderod*e (1840), *Clemens Brentano's Frühlingskranz* (1844), and *Ilius Pamphilius und die Ambrosia* (1848) (14). Furthermore, these letters, in particular the third one, are the source for a cultural myth regarding Beethoven and Goethe that remains in circulation to this day (cf. 177).

Härtl's work, I would argue, definitively resolves the issue of the "authenticity" of the letters; as recently as 2011, in a monograph entitled *Beethoven's Immortal Beloved,* Edward Walden aimed to 'prove' that they were written by Beethoven but also asserts that Bettina is the mysterious woman known as the "immortal beloved" (cf. 163). Härtl's argument, however, is not to decry the letters as "Fälschung" (cf. 163), even though two of the three are authored by Bettina, but rather to connect them to the aesthetics of much of Bettina's œuvre, to her understanding of "genius" as well as to her political engagement in the *Vormärz* era. These three threads result in the fictional story "Beethoven" relates in the third letter. He and Goethe encounter the emperor's family in the spa town Teplitz. Beethoven refuses to show the customary deference to the royals: "ich druckte meinen Hut auf den Kopf, knöpfte meinen Oberrock zu und ging mit untergeschlagenen Armen mitten durch den dicksten Haufen" (10). Goethe, in contrast, moves to the side of the walkway, removes his hat, and bows, remaining so until the royal family has passed by (cf. 10). The opening line of the letter makes it clear that genius is not something that kings and princes can confer upon others. Indeed, it is something that they, too, must and should respect (cf. 9–10). This depiction of the two men who, above all, represented Bettina's "Menschenvergötterung" became one of the greatest myths of nineteenth-century German culture (cf. 55).

In documenting the genesis of the "Three Beethoven Letters," Härtl is able to explicate their relationship to factual reality (lived experience, actual correspondence, and historical events) and, as he puts it, to "eine die Wahrheit des Faktischen transzendierende Wahrheit des inneren Erlebens [. . .] [eine] Außerordentlichkeitspoesie" (177). This is, he argues, Bettina's own variation of the Heidelberg Romanticism established by her brother, Clemens Brentano, and her husband, Achim von Arnim (cf. 175–180).

Bettina did meet Beethoven in Vienna in 1810, and as Härtl demonstrates, Bettina's fascination with Beethoven lasted almost 50 years and was, together with

her admiration of Goethe, one of her most enduring passions (cf. 15). Härtl traces the depictions of Beethoven in all of her epistolary *Erinnerungsbücher*, in addition to the two printings of the "Three Letters" in the Nürnberg-based journal *Athenæum* (1838/1839) and the Berlin-based journal *Athenäum* (1841). These letters are based on a brief correspondence between Bettina and Beethoven after they initially met. While none of Bettina's letters to Beethoven have survived, letters to others at the time plus the mention of two letters from Bettina in the one existing letter known to be written by Beethoven are evidence of the correspondence. This Beethoven letter is only slightly modified as the second letter of the trio (cf. 84–85). Furthermore, Bettina, Beethoven, and Goethe were all in Teplitz in the summer of 1812, providing a historical basis for the events Bettina narrates in Beethoven's voice in the third letter. Perhaps most seminal for Härtl's reconstruction of the letters' genesis is Bettina's Beethoven "story" in an unprinted letter to Prince Hermann von Pückler-Muskau in 1832 (cf. 28–45). The essence of the third letter appears in this story, but careful editing makes the letter all the more ingenious (cf. 85). Without Härtl's extensive knowledge of various correspondences, his ability to use information in the letters to build a credible timeline even when some of the letters are undated, his appreciation of Bettina's aesthetic, and his placing of all the documents in their cultural-historical frameworks, the significance of the letters is obscured. It has been reduced to battles over whether they were really written by Beethoven (Beethoven scholars since the nineteenth century; cf. 122–160) or devoid of attention (Bettina scholarship).

With this study, Beethoven and Bettina scholars should develop a new appreciation for the import of these letters. Indeed, these two groups seem to be the primary audience for the monograph. The density of the meticulously documented argument (with single footnotes occasionally extending over three pages) and cultural or historical references familiar to scholars of the period but not necessarily to a broader reading public limit access to this fascinating chronicle. There is, however, the potential that the sources and information in this work could be transformed into a powerful teaching unit on Bettina's preferred form of "epistolary autobiography," as Katherine Goodman calls it in *Dis/Closures* (1986), and her role in the cultural debates of nineteenth-century Germany.

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Sibling Action: The Genealogical Structure of Modernity.
By Stefani Engelstein. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017. xiii + 360 pages + 17 b/w illustrations. $65.00 hardcover, $64.99 e-book.

Stefani Engelstein's fascinating and genuinely creative *Sibling Action* states its two overarching aims at its outset: first, Engelstein proposes to undo the anachronistic tendency to read the genealogical in the (very) long nineteenth century purely in terms of linearity and descent, recuperating "a set of theories and practices that placed the sibling—envisioned as relation, structure, and *action*—at the foundation of epistemological systems on which subjectivity, civic organization, economic networks, and scientific methodologies were grounded" (1). Second, she argues that this recuperation offers a model for scholars across disciplinary boundaries to conceive of a form of relation and differentiation that is both crucial and unstable, a "splinter within all