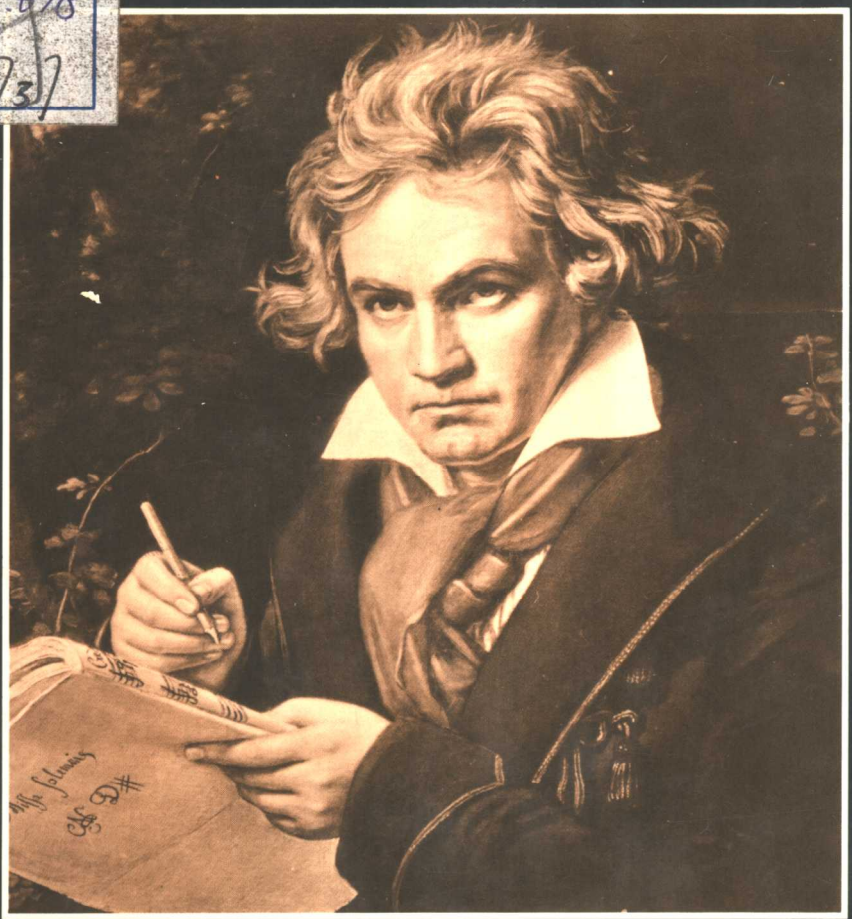
BARRY COOPER

BEETHOVEN AND THE CREATIVE PROCESS



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Abbreviations

Abbreviations for titles of individual books appear in the Bibliography.

A-	Letter no. in Anderson, *Letters* (see Bibliography)
AcM	*Acta Musicologica*
BeJ	*Beethoven-Jahrbuch*
BS	*Beethoven Studies*
FAM	*Fontes artis musicae*
GdM	Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien
Hess	Item no. in Hess, *Verzeichnis* (see Bibliography)
JAMS	*Journal of the American Musicological Society*
JRMA	*Journal of the Royal Musical Association*
ML	*Music & Letters*
MQ	*The Musical Quarterly*
MR	*The Music Review*
MT	*The Musical Times*
NCM	*19th-Century Music*
ÖMz	*Österreichische Musikzeitschrift*
PRMA	*Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*
SBH	Item no. in Schmidt, SBH (see Bibliography)
SPK	Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin
SV	Item no. in Schmidt, SV (see Bibliography)
WoO	Werk ohne Opuszahl (work without opus number) as listed in KH (see Bibliography)

Note on the Transcriptions

As explained in Chapter 7, many of Beethoven's sketches are difficult to decipher and in places it is impossible to be certain precisely what he intended. The accuracy of the transcriptions therefore cannot be guaranteed in all cases, although every effort has been made to reproduce faithfully what he appears to have intended. In places where there is great doubt, a question mark has sometimes been placed above the relevant note, but this should not be taken to imply that there is no doubt about adjacent notes. In certain cases a named pitch is placed editorially above a note: for example, if the note looks like a B in the sketch but a C was perhaps intended, then 'c?' is placed above a printed B. To aid in the reading of the sketches, certain other notes and signs have been added editorially, especially in places where Beethoven's intentions are clear to the author but might not be to the reader. These additions are all placed in square brackets or indicated by standard conventions—dotted barlines and crossed slurs and ties. In many cases, however, Beethoven's notation has been left incomplete or even inaccurate so that its ambiguities may be seen as they stand. Angle brackets ⟨ ⟩ are used to denote material deleted by Beethoven in the original. The extracts do not indicate whether they start at the beginning of a sketch or in the middle, but where a sketch continues beyond the passage quoted, '[etc.]' is placed at the end of the extract; it is not to be confused with 'etc' (without brackets or full stop), which is sometimes used by Beethoven at the end of a sketch.

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I

PROLOGUE: Approaching Beethoven's Creative Process

THE creative process of any composer is always to a certain extent shrouded in mystery. Even the composer himself will not fully understand the psychological processes by which ideas occur to him, nor remember afterwards exactly how he put a piece of music together. The problems of understanding how Beethoven composed are even greater than those with a living composer, and any attempt to present a complete picture of his compositional activity must be doomed. Nevertheless more than enough relevant documents survive for us to be able to gain considerable insight on the subject. In fact there is so much source material that it will take years for it all to be thoroughly examined, and any conclusions reached here must be somewhat provisional; but it is still useful to bring together now what is currently known on the subject. Much has of course been written on it already, and a traditional picture of his compositional process (derived chiefly from nineteenth-century studies by Gustav Nottebohm) has existed for many years. But this picture, which portrays Beethoven as a slow and laborious worker who composed with great difficulty, has been modified in recent years by more detailed research. Hence one of the aims of the present study is to establish a more up-to-date but comprehensive view, based on a more wide-ranging and detailed assessment of the sources than was possible in Nottebohm's day. Another aim is to see what were Beethoven's chief compositional goals, and what difficulties he had to overcome in order to achieve them.

The sources that throw light on these and related questions come in a variety of forms, including letters written by (and to) Beethoven, other writings of his (diaries, memoranda, etc.), conversation books, memoirs and accounts by his contemporaries, and similar documents. The music itself can also, by its own structure, provide clues as to how it was put together. But by far the most informative sources are the numerous rough drafts and sketches that Beethoven made for his compositions. Around 8,000 pages of such sketches still survive,[1] in addition to all the preliminary, cancelled versions of passages which can be found in the surviving autograph scores and which could also be called sketches in the broadest sense. All these sketches show his works in the actual course of being created, and they are therefore central to any understanding of his creative process.

[1] See Schmidt, SV, p. 7; Schmidt's total of over 7,500 pages has been supplemented by various additional discoveries since 1968.

Perhaps the two most fundamental questions that can be asked about Beethoven's creative process are why he composed and how he composed. As Beethoven himself expressed it, in another context: 'Let us begin with the primary original causes of all things, how something came about, wherefore and why it came about in that particular way and became what it is.'[2] Both the 'why' and the 'how' questions can be asked either generally, about Beethoven as a composer, or specifically, about a particular piece. Thus it can be asked why he composed at all, and why he composed a particular work at a particular time and in a particular way. Such questions form the basis of Part I of the present book. Similarly it can be asked both how he composed in general, and how he composed certain works in particular. These questions form the basis of Parts II and III. Why and how are not altogether independent lines of enquiry. One can ask why, say, *Fidelio* was composed, and find musical, extramusical, and professional reasons why Beethoven wrote it. But when one asks more detailed questions about why it ends in C major, is scored for particular forces, or (at the most detailed level) why particular notes occur where they do, the answer lies in Beethoven's aesthetic sense; and this was brought into sharpest focus in the sketches, where he was constantly having to select between alternative versions and ideas, and where we can now see what other directions the music might have taken. Hence an understanding of how the work was composed helps to explain 'why it came about in that particular way and became what it is', to use Beethoven's words again. Some of the more general conclusions reached will hardly be unexpected, but it is at least reassuring to find out that Beethoven's masterpieces, like any documents of comparable complexity, reached their final form only after much planning, drafting, reworking, additions, excisions, and last-minute amendments.

First let us examine the different types of sources to establish what sorts of information each type can provide, and what are their limitations and pitfalls. Of nearly 1,600 known letters of Beethoven, about a quarter make some kind of reference to his compositional activity, and it is misleading to say that 'he wrote almost exclusively letters that concerned everyday affairs and the sale and publication of his works'.[3] But many of his references to composing are brief and superficial. Some simply indicate that a certain work has been completed, thus providing valuable dating evidence but little more; and even these dates must be treated with caution, since works were often not as advanced on paper as his letters imply.[4] His letters are, none the less, often the most reliable means of dating the composition of a work, and are

[2] A-1068. [3] Unger, 'Workshop', p. 323; cf. also TF, p. 247.

[4] See e.g. A-1085, where he refers to a quartet as 'not quite finished' even before he had started sketching it; A-1106, where he describes a new Mass as 'not yet finished' although he only ever made a few sketches for it; and A-1159, where he says the Ninth Symphony will be finished in a fortnight, although other evidence indicates he had not at that time finished even the first movement and took nearly a year to complete the work.

a much better guide to chronology than opus numbers, which indicate only an approximate order of publication (rather than composition) and contain many anomalies.[5] The letters may equally refer to periods of inactivity in his composing—mostly caused by illness, but sometimes due to other distractions such as preparing concerts, legal action concerning his nephew, or demands by his patron Archduke Rudolph for frequent lessons.[6] Other interruptions were caused by such things as the French invasion of Vienna in 1809,[7] and even the effects of champagne or bad weather.[8]

The letters also include quite a few details about the final stages of composition (e.g. correction and amendment lists, metronome marks, and notational problems), and about works he was planning to write—these are often mentioned in response to a request from someone for a particular type of piece. In addition Beethoven made a number of statements about his artistic aims and the role of the artist (see Chapter 2), and occasionally made general comments about his creativity—for example, he mentioned that he often produced three or four works at the same time,[9] and that he had to 'scrawl' for money to support himself while he wrote a great work.[10] He rarely, however, wrote anything about the initial conception of new works. The letter about the canon 'O Tobias' (WoO 182), a piece which he said originally occurred to him in a dream while on a journey and which he elaborated and wrote out the following day,[11] is quite exceptional in the way it describes both the mental processes and the external circumstances surrounding the creation of the work.

Direct references to his sketches are so rare in his letters that each case is worth mentioning individually. In 1794 he wrote that he was planning to make a fair copy of a sonata (WoO 51) because the original draft was 'practically only a sketch' ('fast nur Skizze').[12] He used a similar phrase ('beinah nur Skizze') for the original score of some Scottish folksong settings, Op. 108.[13] In about March 1814, when he was working on the revision to *Fidelio*, he reported that before a recent concert on 27 February he had 'just made a few sketches here and there'.[14] And a few days before his death he reported that he had sketched a new symphony (the unfinished Tenth).[15]

More elliptical references to his sketches are only slightly commoner. When a collection of fifty-three folksong settings sent to the Edinburgh publisher George Thomson had apparently been lost in the post, Beethoven said that he had been forced to complete 'my first ideas which still remained in manuscript, and to make so to speak the same composition twice',[16] implying there was some kind of rough draft to work from. When he feared

[5] WoO numbers are of even less help: WoO 63 was probably his first piece and WoO 62 his last!

[6] A-1167.

[7] A-220. [8] A-1427 and A-1303. [9] A-51. [10] A-903.

[11] A-1056. [12] A-9; KH, p. 497. [13] A-1063; KH, p. 310.

[14] A-479. [15] A-1566. [16] A-319.

that the Quartet Op. 132 had been lost, however, he observed that the ideas ('das Concept') were only jotted down on small scraps of paper and that he would not be able to compose the work the same again,[17] thus implying that the sketches were much more fragmentary on this occasion. Another reference to early drafting occurs in connection with the three piano sonatas Opp. 109–11. Of Op. 109 Beethoven says: 'On account of my ailing condition I had written down the draft more fully than usual.' But normally he would merely 'jot down certain ideas . . . and when I have completed the whole in my head, everything is written down, but only once.'[18] The latter part of this statement is actually rather misleading as it stands, since he clearly did not normally work everything out in his head before beginning to write out a final score; but he means that there was usually only one complete draft apart from all the sketches and rejected material. On another occasion he referred to his habit of writing down his first ideas at once, even if they came to nothing,[19] thereby indicating that amongst his sketches were many unused ideas. And in 1819 he mentioned that there were in his desk several compositions that he hoped to 'work out' later,[20] which again implies the existence of some kind of preliminary drafts or sketches.

One further reference to his working methods that appears in his letters comes in some instructions on composition sent to Archduke Rudolph in 1823. Assuming Beethoven practised what he preached—and there is considerable evidence that he did[21]—we have here quite a detailed account of certain aspects of his composing methods, and it is worth quoting at length.

> Your Imperial Highness must now continue, in particular, your exercises in composition and when sitting at the pianoforte you should jot down your ideas in the form of sketches. For this purpose you should have a small table beside the pianoforte. In this way not only is one's imagination stimulated but one learns also to pin down immediately the most remote ideas. You should also compose without a pianoforte; and you should sometimes work out a simply melody, for instance, a chorale with simple and again with different harmonies according to the laws of counterpoint and even neglecting the latter. This will certainly not give Your Imperial Highness a headache; nay, rather, it will afford you real enjoyment when you thus find yourself in the very swim of artistic production.—Gradually there comes to us the power to express just what we desire and feel; and to the nobler type of human being this is such an essential need.[22]

Thus we can gather from Beethoven's letters that he certainly made sketches for many of his works. But we learn virtually nothing about the nature of those sketches—how many there were for each work, what types of sketches there were, the thought-processes that he went through as he planned a work, in what order he composed the various parts of a work, and similar questions. The same conclusions apply with his other non-musical writings. Many of them, including his memorandum book of 1792–4 (the

[17] A-1410; TDR, v. 542.
[18] A-1060.
[19] A-558.
[20] A-948.
[21] JTW, pp. 4–6.
[22] A-1203.

so-called *Jugendtagebuch*), make no references to his activity as a composer. His other *Tagebuch*, of 1812–18, is somewhat larger and much more diverse in content, but only a small proportion of it is concerned with composition. The only mention of his sketches is a reference to dividing up his musical manuscripts into various types including 'sketchbooks'.[23] In addition he made two other slightly puzzling references to his compositional process: 'Certainly one writes more beautifully as soon as one writes for the public, even when one writes rapidly'; and 'The best opening phrases in canons are built around harmonies';[24] but the former remark could refer to handwriting rather than musical style. However, the *Tagebuch* also contains several references to Beethoven's determination to sacrifice everything to his art, to study hard, and to leave Vienna in order to compose better,[25] and there are a few references to planned compositions—a hymn, an opera, a symphony, a choral cantata, and church music in general.[26] Since the *Tagebuch* was a private record, these ideas were certainly profound intentions and not just empty promises such as might be made to a demanding publisher, and they reveal what sort of music he really wanted to write. Thus the *Tagebuch* is of limited help in understanding his creative process, but it is by no means negligible.

The 140 surviving conversation books are likewise of limited use, but for rather different reasons. Their main drawback is that they normally only include one side of the conversations, for Beethoven would reply orally to the remarks written down by his friends. Moreover, most of the conversations are about such mundane matters as food and accommodation, and when music is mentioned it is often in connection with concerts or rehearsals rather than composition. Occasionally, however, the conversations contain clues about compositions—for example, indications that new works were being composed by a particular date, or (in one case) a reference to the otherwise unknown canon 'Hol euch der Teufel' (WoO 173).[27] Beethoven himself also made numerous entries in the books. A few times he wrote down his side of the conversation—presumably when he did not want to be overheard—but more often his entries are memoranda of various kinds; sometimes they are trivial matters such as shopping items or copies of newspaper advertisements, but a few are musical ideas and sketches for various works in progress. Thus the conversation books are often most revealing where they have been used in this way rather than for their proper purpose, while actual conversations imply quite a lot but allow frustratingly little to be deduced with certainty about his compositions.

After Beethoven's death several of his personal acquaintances wrote accounts and memoirs of their association with him, and many of them have something to say about his composing activity. Some, including Ferdinand

[23] Solomon, 'Tagebuch', no. 51.
[24] Ibid., nos. 16 (translation amended) and 37.
[25] Ibid., nos. 25, 40, 41, 48, 119, 169.
[26] Ibid., nos. 41, 84, 116, 119, 153, 162, 168.
[27] KH, pp. 678–9; TF, p. 744.

Ries, Carl Czerny, and Anton Schindler, knew him for an extended period of time, while others, such as J. R. Schulz, Louis Schlösser and Friedrich Rochlitz, wrote about their experiences of him after only a brief visit. Needless to say, some had more accurate memories than others; and while many attempted to report as accurately as they could, some were prone to deliberate distortion and fabrication. Most prominent in the latter category is Schindler, who not only made numerous errors and deliberate distortions, but even went to the trouble of inserting over 600 fake entries in Beethoven's conversation books after the composer's death—entries which were identified as spurious only quite recently.[28] Schindler's biography of Beethoven is therefore of very little use in understanding the composer's creative process.

Another writer with little regard for accuracy is Schlösser. His reminiscences include a supposedly verbatim report of what Beethoven said on one occasion about his creative process. This report has been widely quoted, yet it was almost certainly Schlösser's own invention, as has been demonstrated by Maynard Solomon.[29] Certain other writers, however, are much more reliable, for example Ries and Karl Holz. Occasionally they might make a mistake about a date (it is easier to recall what happened in an incident than precisely when it happened), but they seem never to have deliberately distorted, and many of their reminiscences are corroborated by independent evidence.

Clearly, then, it is often difficult to establish which writers and which accounts can be relied on; but where several witnesses have reported roughly the some observations we can be fairly sure that they are substantially accurate. And where there are differences it is sometimes possible to reconcile them. Consider three accounts of Beethoven's working day:

> Beethoven rose every morning the year round at dawn and went directly to his desk. There he would work until two or three o'clock, his habitual dinner hour. In the course of the morning he would usually go out of doors once or twice, but would continue to work as he walked. These walks would seldom last more than an hour, and may be compared to a bee's excursions to gather honey. Beethoven would go out in every season, heeding neither cold nor heat. His afternoons were regularly spent in long walks. Late in the afternoon he would go to a favourite tavern to read the papers, unless he had already satisfied this need in a coffee-house.... Beethoven always spent his winter evenings at home reading serious works of literature. Only very rarely did he work with musical scores during the evening, for the strain on his eyes was too great. It may have been otherwise in his youth, but we know that he never composed at night. He would go to bed at ten o'clock at the latest.[30]

Thayer's account of Beethoven's life at his brother's estate in Gneixendorf in 1826, apparently derived direct from Beethoven's servant Michael Krenn, is similar in many ways:

[28] The identification was first made by Peter Stadlen; see also Beck and Herre, 'Schindler', where all the fake entries are transcribed.

[29] Solomon, 'Invention'.

[30] Schindler/MacArdle, *Beethoven*, pp. 385–6.

It was Beethoven's custom to get up at half-past 5 o'clock, seat himself at a table and write while he beat time with hands and feet and sang.... The family breakfast was eaten at half-past 7 o'clock, after which Beethoven hurried out into the open air, rambled across the fields shouting and waving his arms, sometimes walking very rapidly, sometimes very slowly and stopping at times to write in a sort of pocket-book.... At half-past 12 Beethoven would come home for dinner, after which he went to his room until about 3 o'clock; then he roamed over the fields until shortly before sunset, after which he never went out of doors. Supper was at half-past 7, and after eating he went to his room, wrote till 10 o'clock and then went to bed.[31]

Ignaz von Seyfried gives a slightly different version of the routine:

The whole forenoon, from the first ray of light till the meal hour, was devoted to mechanical labour, i.e. to transcribing; the rest of the day was given to thought and the ordering of ideas. Hardly had he put the last bit in his mouth before he began his customary promenade... that is to say, he hurried in double-quick time several times around the city, as if urged on by a goad; and this, let the weather be what it might.[32]

The three witnesses agree that Beethoven spent much of his time on long walks, regardless of the weather, but whether his periods indoors were before breakfast and after lunch (Krenn), during much of the morning (Schindler), or during the whole morning (Seyfried) is unclear. The differences in the accounts may have occurred because the authors were observing Beethoven at different stages of his life; but all three give the impression of a regular and well-ordered routine. Yet against these accounts must be balanced Czerny's report:

Beethoven had no fixed working hours. His active imagination was always at work, morning and afternoon, early and late. He would often get up at midnight, startling his neighbours with loud chords, thumping, singing, etc.[33]

It seems, than, that Beethoven had a sort of regular routine, but that it was often broken by particular circumstances and varied at different times of his life. Probably no two days were quite the same. There is general agreement, however, that much of his composing was done out of doors, particularly in later life; in addition to the accounts quoted above, several other witnesses refer to this habit, and to his habit of singing or humming while composing. Seyfried reports: 'He was never to be seen in the street without a small notebook, in which he jotted down whatever occurred to him at the moment.'[34] Similarly August von Klöber records: 'On my walks in Mödling I met Beethoven repeatedly, and it was most interesting to see how frequently he stopped, with a sheet of music-paper and a pencil-stump in his hands, as if listening, looked up and down and then scribbled notes on the

[31] TF, pp. 1007–8; cf. an entry of 1815 in Beethoven's *Tagebuch* (Solomon, 'Tagebuch', no. 48): 'Always study from half-past five until breakfast.'

[32] TF, p. 373.

[33] Czerny, *Performance*, p. 16.

[34] Quoted from Arnold and Fortune, *Companion*, p. 445; cf. TF, p. 372.

paper.'[35] Likewise Karl Braunthal: 'Now and then he took a second, sturdier notebook from his heart-pocket—I mean the left breast-pocket of a plain grey coat—and wrote with half-closed eyes.'[36] Ries refers to Beethoven's humming in an episode that happened in 1804: 'He had been all the time humming and sometimes howling, always up and down, without singing any definite notes. In answer to my question what it was he said: "A theme for the last movement of the sonata [Op. 57] has occurred to me."'[37] J. R. Schulz heard some similar humming in 1823: 'At other times he seemed quite lost in himself, and only hummed in an unintelligible manner. I understood, however, that this was the way he composed.'[38]

There is therefore quite a detailed picture of the external circumstances that surrounded Beethoven's composing acitivity; but it does derive almost exclusively from such eye-witness accounts. Beethoven hardly ever recorded the time of day at which he made a sketch, or the date or place: a note amongst some sketches of 1818 stating that they were 'written while walking in the evening between and on the mountains'[39] is most unusual. Thus we are forced to rely mainly on accounts and anecdotes of varying reliability when trying to establish where and when Beethoven did most of his composing.

As for his actual method of composing a piece, this could not be observed by his associates unless they either watched him very closely while he wrote sketches, or heard him composing at the piano. Nobody seems to have done the former, and although a few people heard him doing the latter, none of them recorded how he put a movement together. Treitschke, for example, referring to the composition of the aria 'Und spür' ich' in *Fidelio*, simply says that Beethoven 'seemed to conjure the motive of the aria' while sitting at the piano, and he gives no details.[40] And Beethoven himself made no explicit general statement on the subject (discounting the spurious statement reported by Schlösser).

The composer did, however, make something like a general statement about his creative process, but this comes in the form of a stylized representation in music.[41] The passage in question is, of course, the beginning of the finale of the Ninth Symphony, which is as specific and programmatic as anything he wrote. Three possible themes (from earlier movements) are in turn rejected by the bass instruments.[42] A fourth idea is then hit upon—a kind of preliminary version of the 'Freude' theme (bars 77–80)—and is then refined to form the 'Freude' theme itself. Finally after much progress all is rejected in favour of a movement with voices (bars 208–21). This sequence

[35] TF, p. 703. [36] Quoted from Unger, 'Workshop', p. 326. [37] TF, p. 356.
[38] *The Harmonicon*, ii (1824). p. 11; for identification of the author, see Tyson, 'Op. 70 No. 1', p. 2. [39] TF, p. 715. [40] TF, p. 573.
[41] He once stated that he had 'a greater impulse to reveal myself to the world by means of my compositions' than by writing about music; see A-1270.
[42] We know this is the meaning intended for this passage, because of some texts Beethoven planned for it at one stage; see N-II, pp. 189–91 (tr. in TF, pp. 892–4).

of events reflects what can be seen over and over again in Beethoven's sketchbooks—several ideas rejected, another taken up and refined, and an important new element incorporated at a relatively late stage.

The sketches themselves, despite being of such central importance for an understanding of Beethoven's creative process, present many difficulties. They are so hard to read that until the 1960s few scholars had attempted the task; and even when they have been deciphered, relating them to each other and to finished works is a slow and complicated process that calls for careful examination of every note. Many of the sketches have consequently not yet been thoroughly examined, and one of the aims of the present study has been to derive insights from sketches not previously assessed, as well as from those already well known. Another major drawback with the sketches is their fate since Beethoven's death. Although he himself had kept them reasonably well intact, many of them became scattered after the auction of his personal effects on 5 November 1827. Most were bought by publishers—chiefly Domenico Artaria—and during the next few decades most of the actual books of sketches had individual pages removed, these pages often being given away to friends of the owners as souvenirs of Beethoven. The loose leaves that had never belonged in a sketchbook became even more jumbled than they had been during Beethoven's lifetime, and one sketchbook was even dismembered completely, the individual leaves being sold off at a profit by the owner, Ignaz Sauer. The detailed history of Beethoven's sketches since 1827 is related in a recent monograph[43] and does not need repeating here. Suffice it to say that today the sketches are split up into over 400 sources (ranging from single leaves to complete sketchbooks), and scattered over many parts of the world.[44]

The first person to make a detailed and wide-ranging study of their musical contents was Gustav Nottebohm, who from the 1860s until his death in 1882 published many studies of them, including two monographs and a long series of articles that were later collected together and published in revised form as *Beethoveniana* and *Zweite Beethoveniana*.[45] Nottebohm's work was of such a high standard that not much work was done on the original sources of Beethoven's sketches for many years afterwards. Nottebohm said relatively little, however, about the musical significance of the numerous sketches he had transcribed, and considerable progress was made in this area in 1925 with the publication of a study of certain aspects of Beethoven's sketching process by Paul Mies, even though Mies relied on Nottebohm's transcriptions rather than making his own.[46] A later study of Beethoven's creative process was

[43] JTW; see esp. pp. 13–43.

[44] There is no complete inventory published at present, but almost all the sources are listed in SV and/or JTW.

[45] N-I and N-II; the two monographs are N-1803 and Nottebohm, *Skizzenbuch*.

[46] Mies, *Sketches*.