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Wired Ensemble

11/15/12

## The Immortal Beloved

### A Meaning between the Lines

In Beethoven's love letter to his Immortal Beloved, Beethoven uses imagery of heaven to idolize the woman of his adoration. Through his choices for idealistic words and metaphors, Beethoven constructs an image of a companion who is simultaneously desirable and unreachable. As Beethoven further portrays his lover as something that is beyond human, he forces her into the position of an unattainable prize, an image of perfection. In doing so, he is creating a barrier more burdensome than that of physical space.

Despite this letter being known as Beethoven's letter to his "Immortal Beloved," Beethoven only references his lover as such once in its entirety. This reference falls towards the end of the letter when Beethoven states, "my thoughts go out to you, my Immortal Beloved" (IB, 50-51). Despite Beethoven's surface intentions, his choice of endearing terms indicates a deeply rooted problem. The word immortal, as defined in the Oxford dictionary, can mean imperishable and everlasting, but it also carries this reference to supernatural qualities. It implies that the one possessing this quality is of some standing that differs from mere mortals. In this context, Beethoven is distancing

himself from the object of his affections. He is implying that she is beyond human and potentially rewarding her with god-like status. In this regard, he is placing her on a pedestal and forcing her to become something more like an unreachable prize than merely one half of this developing relationship.

Beethoven refers to his immortal beloved by various terms of endearment throughout the letter. He never seems to run short of sweet names for her. Of particular interest is the way he addresses the letter. The very first words to flow forth from his pen are “my angel, my all” (IB 1). At the top of his conscious is this image of his beloved as an angel, a messenger of God. This angel is a spiritual being. She does not take human form, but is merely represented by it. This key choice as the first noun by which to address his love interest, further cements the idea that Beethoven viewed her as something he loved deeply, but could not be with. Angels are meant to be symbols of all things good and pure, but they are not beings we regularly interact with. This implies that Beethoven saw his love interest as an image of perfection, instead of someone he could actually be with.

These terms of endearment are only the beginning of Beethoven’s idealistic views of his beloved. Later in the letter, he uses metaphors of heaven to emphasize the importance of his romantic interest. At one point he even compares their love to heaven, saying, “Is not our love truly a heavenly structure, and also as firm as the vault of heaven” (IB, 47-48). On the surface this is a truly powerful statement that compares their

love to something ideal and unwavering. On a deeper level it raises some concerns.

Beethoven is referencing the firmament, a dome that represents the sky and a great divide between the heavens and earth. He is describing a love that acts as a barrier between worlds. Once again there is this idea of separation and distance. In particular the vault of heaven is the border between mere mortals in the earthly realm and the pure souls that inhabit heaven. After describing his love as a heavenly, divine creature, it is interesting that he chooses this barrier as a metaphor for their love. Their relationship has become a gap that he cannot cross. He has begun to picture his beloved as an object that is always just barely out of his grasp.

Beethoven provides deeper imagery of his immortal beloved in a much later passage in the letter. At this point he begins to describe how saddened he is by the distance keeping him from his beloved. He explains it as the following:

“I am resolved to wander so long in distant lands 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 into you into the land of spirits.” (IB, 53-56)

On the surface, Beethoven has explained his pain through quite poetic prose. The deeper meaning lies in his choice of metaphor. Beethoven has implied, less directly than before, that he views his beloved as a distant angel. He cannot be with her until he flies to her and is resolved to be distant until that day. He further explains that he will be at home with her when they are in “the land of the spirits.” This passage seems to create

emotional distance under the guise of romance. He almost appears to be mourning the loss of someone who is not yet gone. Beethoven's love is merely physically distant from him, but his choice of metaphor makes it appear that they are separated on a much deeper level. She is still this pure, unreachable ideal, and he is merely a man gazing up at the heavens and envisioning a perfect lover above him. His resolution implies that he is on some level aware of this mental or emotional separation and is not keen on trying to combat it.

Throughout Beethoven's letter to his immortal beloved, he makes multiple attempts to convince her of how deeply and truly he loves her. He writes with incredible passion and eloquence, but there is still something off. Through his chosen terms of endearment and metaphors, he ends up distancing himself from the girl he so badly wants to be nearer to. He idolizes her and places her on a pedestal where she is emotionally out of his reach. In his attempts to be closer to her, through a letter that conveys his feelings, he is driving them apart. Beethoven's immortal beloved will forever be remembered through the words of this letter and the meaning that can be found between the lines.

### Works Cited

Beethoven, L. "Immortal Beloved Letter". In Beethoven (second revised edition) by Maynard Solomon. New York: Schirmer, 1998.