

# ANTON SCHINDLER AS DESTROYER AND FORGER OF BEETHOVEN'S CONVERSATION BOOKS: A CASE FOR DECRIMINALIZATION

Theodore Albrecht  
KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Ludwig van Beethoven is recognized the world over as a composer who achieved his many musical triumphs in the face of gradual deafness, beginning in ca. 1798. By 1818, he had begun to carry small blank books with him, so that, when in public places, where his friends' raised voices might attract undue attention, they could simply write what they wished to say, and he would reply orally. Occasionally, Beethoven, too, wrote in the books themselves: remarks in his hand indicate clearly that he was sensitive to his surroundings.<sup>1</sup>

As his hearing continued to deteriorate, Beethoven relied increasingly upon the conversation books, mostly in public, but often at home when raised voices were not effective or when a slate that he also kept for conversational purposes was not conveniently at hand. He began to use the books more often to make reminders to himself to write letters, to buy clothing or household items, to seek out a newly published book, to investigate potential lodgings, and even (all too rarely) to jot a few notes for potential compositions.

Taken together, the 139 surviving conversation books provide us with an incomparable, albeit incomplete and imperfect, record of the composer's final decade, everyday life as well as the great milestones: the legal battle for the custody of his nephew Karl, the marketing of the *Missa solemnis*, the completion of the ninth symphony, and their first Viennese performances in 1824, the composition and first performances of the final string quartets, nephew Karl's suicide attempt, and Beethoven's own decline in health until ca. 6 March 1827, three weeks before his death.

---

<sup>1</sup> Karl-Heinz Köhler, "... tausendmal leben!": *Konversationen mit Herrn van Beethoven* (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1978). A good English-language summary of this 200-page book can be found in his "The conversation books: Aspects of a new picture of Beethoven", *Beethoven, performers, and critics: The International Beethoven Congress, Detroit 1977*, ed. by Robert Winter and Bruce Carr (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1980) 147–61. An even briefer overview of the topic may be found in Nicholas Marston, "Conversation books", *The Beethoven compendium*, ed. by Barry Cooper (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1991) 164–67. For a different linguistic perspective, see "Gesprächshefte" in Theodor Frimmel, *Beethoven-Handbuch*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1926) vol. 1, 168–69.

After Beethoven's funeral, his sometime secretary Anton Schindler (1795–1864) took from the composer's estate surviving letters and documents—including the conversation books—that might prove useful to his later role as biographer. In January 1846 (at a time when he himself faced financial insecurity), Schindler sold the conversation books to the Prussian Königliche Bibliothek in Berlin. Although a few leaves of various conversation books are found scattered in libraries and collections around the world, only two other small volumes remain intact, nos. 1 and 95, now in the Beethoven-Haus in Bonn.<sup>2</sup>

**EARLY ATTEMPTS AT A GERMAN EDITION.** As he had projected, Anton Schindler made considerable use of the conversation books in assembling material for the major editions of his *Biographie* of Beethoven, the first in 1840 and the third edition in 1860.<sup>3</sup> Once the conversation books were in the Königliche Bibliothek, the American researcher Alexander Wheelock Thayer (1817–97) likewise examined them all, making extensive notes for his own future biography, probably beginning in October 1849, but especially during the period from November 1854, to February 1856.<sup>4</sup> Although the final decade of Beethoven's life had to be reconstructed from Thayer's notes after his own death,<sup>5</sup> it

---

<sup>2</sup> The standard edition is Karl-Heinz Köhler, Grita Herre, and Dagmar Beck, eds., *Ludwig van Beethovens Konversationshefte*, in collaboration with Ignaz Weinmann, Peter Pötschner, Renate Bormann, Heinz Schöny, and Günter Brosche, 11 volumes to date (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1968–2001). The three primary editors were based in Berlin, their numerous collaborators in Vienna. Heft 95 has recently seen a separate facsimile publication: *Beethoven im Gespräch: Ein Konversationsheft vom 9. September 1825*, transcription and commentary by Grita Herre, with English translation by Theodore Albrecht (Bonn: Verlag Beethoven-Haus, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Anton Schindler, *Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1840); English translation, with additional materials, as *The life of Beethoven, including his correspondence with his friends, numerous characteristic traits, and remarks on his musical works*, ed. by Ignace [sic] Moscheles, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1841). Although the Viennese-trained Ignaz Moscheles (1794–1870) noted that the majority of the English version was Schindler's work, he insensitively omitted the original author's name from the title-page, thereby creating enmity that may have intensified any feelings of anti-Semitism that Schindler may have harbored earlier.

Schindler's next major revision appeared as *Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven* (3rd. ed.; Münster: Aschendorff, 1860); English translation as *Beethoven as I knew him*, trans. by Constance S. Jolly, ed. by Donald W. MacArdle (London: Faber & Faber; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966, and subsequent reprints by W.W. Norton, 1972, and Dover, 1996). In this greatly expanded edition, Schindler attempted to minimize Beethoven's positive interactions with Jewish musicians such as Ignaz Moscheles. At one point, Schindler now wrote, "Beethoven himself was never in the least acquainted with Moscheles", and, while dismissing Moscheles later, wrote of "Beethoven's hatred for the children of Israel in the arts" (Schindler–MacArdle, 322 and 371–74). While an understandably shocked MacArdle rather naively commented, "No explanation can be suggested for ... Schindler's vicious blast at Moscheles" (note 259, pp. 359–60), such attacks were very possibly a reaction against Moscheles' having omitted Schindler's name from the English edition of the biography, above, and possibly a reflection of the growing anti-Semitism in Germany as a whole, but in no way a reflection of Beethoven's own attitude. Just as Wagner's disappointing experiences with Meyerbeer, Mendelssohn, and hornist Joseph Rudolph Lewy were later generalized into a certain, though always selective, anti-Semitism by the 1850s, so too Schindler's own experience with Moscheles in 1840–41 might have become generalized by 1860, and then attributed anachronistically back to Beethoven.

<sup>4</sup> Grant W. Cook, "Alexander Wheelock Thayer: A new biographical sketch", *Beethoven journal* 17/1 (summer 2002) 2–11, particularly 3–4. Thayer spent October 1849–Spring 1851, November 1854–February 1856, September 1858–May 1859, and December 1859–February 1860 (among other periods) working in Berlin.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Wheelock Thayer, *Ludwig van Beethoven's Leben*, trans. by Hermann Deiters, 3 vols. (Berlin: Ferdinand Schneider; W. Weber, 1866, 1872, 1879), covered through 1816. His *Ludwig van Beethovens Leben*, trans. by Deiters, ed. by Hugo Riemann, 5 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1907–08 and 1910–17), contained the reconstructed final decade. His *The life of Ludwig van Beethoven*, trans. by Henry Edward Krehbiel, 3 vols. (New York: Beethoven Association, 1921) included essentially the full biography, omitted Riemann's analyses, but also abbreviated some of Thayer's original historical background. His *Thayer's life of Beethoven*, ed. by Elliot Forbes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964–67) was based on Krehbiel's version, but included the latest biographical scholarship. It remains a significant lacuna in Beethoven scholarship that English-language readers still do not possess the full historical text as Thayer wrote it in 1866–79.

became obvious that the conversation books greatly enriched the material that he had intended to include.

Thus, scholars soon realized the desirability of a complete edition of the conversation books themselves, so that other researchers could benefit from the variety of insights they might offer. Although Schindler, Thayer, and even Beethoven had sometimes dated the books with greater or lesser accuracy, one major problem in editing still lay in dating the entire sequence of booklets. Another problem was deciphering the handwriting of hundreds of different individuals who had made entries in the volumes, sometimes in pencil that had become smudged over the years—possibly even while the books rode around in Beethoven's coat pocket—and then *identifying* those writers.

The first scholar to attempt a complete edition was Walther Nohl, who published three small fascicles (covering March 1819 to March 1820) in 1923–24.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, Nohl was defeated by the editorial difficulties associated with the materials, as well as by Germany's post-World-War-I economy. During the 1930s, Georg Schünemann (1884–1945) answered the challenge anew and, with more sophisticated scholarship, produced three full-length volumes (covering from February 1818 to July 1823) between 1941 and 1943.<sup>7</sup> World War II halted progress on this series, and the ensuing political division of Germany further impeded its completion.

Meanwhile, Jacques-Gabriel Prod'homme (1871–1956) issued an extensive volume in French (1946), including excerpts from the conversation books from 1819 to 1827.<sup>8</sup> With the German edition still in limbo, Donald W. MacArdle produced an index (1962) of people and places encountered in the Schünemann edition and the Prod'homme anthology.<sup>9</sup>

**THE PRESENT GERMAN EDITION.** Finally, in 1968, a Berlin team headed by Karl-Heinz Köhler (1928–97), and including Dagmar Beck and Grita Herre, began to publish their own edition of the conversation books, starting with volume 4, essentially at a point in the chronology where Schünemann had broken off a quarter century earlier. Here, however, was a considerably more meticulous method of transcription and annotation: diplomatic transcriptions of the conversational entries themselves, with footnotes indicating sundry peculiarities in the handwritten material, as well as an extensive array of explanatory endnotes (often based on information supplied by collaborative scholars in Vienna). In the following years, the Köhler team worked forward in the chronology, but also soon went back to the earliest material (which had been published by Schünemann) and produced volumes that continued to represent state-of-the-art transcription and annotation. At first, Köhler's team did not provide any indexes (volumes 4 and 5), but by 1972 had begun to provide indexes of names and compositions (but not of subjects). Ultimately, name and composition indexes to vols. 4 and 5 were included at the end of vol. 11 in 2001.

In 1977, however, the Köhler team suffered a discrediting and demoralizing blow. At a Beethoven Congress in Berlin in March, Dagmar Beck and Grita Herre, after years

<sup>6</sup> Walther Nohl, ed., *Ludwig van Beethovens Konversationshefte* (München: O.C. Rech/Allgemeine Verlagsanstalt, 1923–24).

<sup>7</sup> Georg Schünemann, ed., *Ludwig van Beethovens Konversationshefte*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Max Hesse, 1941–43).

<sup>8</sup> Jacques-Gabriel Prod'homme, trans. and ed., *Cahiers de conversation de Beethoven, 1819–1827* (Paris: Éditions Corr ea, 1946).

<sup>9</sup> Donald W. MacArdle, *An index to Beethoven's conversation books* (Detroit: Information Coordinators, 1962).

of research and careful observation, noted that many of Anton Schindler's entries in the conversation books had apparently been made only after Beethoven's death, often on pages that, for one reason or another, had initially been left blank or only partially filled.<sup>10</sup> In the discussion period that followed, the Vienna-born British pianist and critic Peter Stadlen (1910–96)<sup>11</sup> claimed that he had already detected these forgeries years before, and had given a talk about them on BBC radio in 1971. He then hurried into print several articles that created an anti-Schindler scandal in the musicological world, a scandal that also seemed unfairly to imply scholarly negligence on the part of the Köhler-led Berlin editorial team.<sup>12</sup> After a list of Schindler's previously published *fingiert* (or "forged") entries was provided as a supplement to vol. 7 (1978) and the texts of all of Schindler's "forged" entries were published separately in 1979,<sup>13</sup> the Berlin team's speed

---

<sup>10</sup> Dagmar Beck and Grita Herre, "Einige Zweifel an der Überlieferung der Konversationshefte," *Bericht über den Internationalen Beethoven-Kongress, 20. bis 23. März 1977 in Berlin*, ed. by Harry Goldschmidt, Karl-Heinz Köhler, and Konrad Niemann (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1978) 257–94. At a Beethoven conference in Detroit on 4–6 November 1977, Köhler briefly summarized his colleagues' findings and ably defended them against the growing "criminal sensation", although the gentlemanly Thuringian-born Berliner never mentioned the attacker(s) by name (Köhler, "Conversation books: Aspects", 160–61).

<sup>11</sup> Stanley Sadie, "Stadlen, Peter", *The new Grove dictionary of music and musicians*, ed. by Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), vol. 18, 45–46; with death date and additional publications in *The new Grove* (2nd ed.; London: Macmillan, 2001), vol. 24, 247–48. Sadie characterized Stadlen thus: "His critical writings show his strongly committed standpoint on controversial matters and an unusually allusive style."

Born in Vienna in 1910, Stadlen studied there and, from 1929 to 1933, in Berlin. Embarking on a pianist's career, he championed the music of Schoenberg and Webern, and settled in England before World War II.

In London in 1946, he met Hedi Keuneman (née Hedwig Simon, 1916–2004), whom he had known in Vienna before the War. An assimilated Jew, a sometime atheist, and a grand-niece of Johann Strauß, she had been born in Vienna and entered the university there. In the face of growing National Socialist violence, she emigrated to Switzerland, the United States, and ultimately England, where she enrolled in Cambridge University. She became a dedicated political activist with the Communist Party, and, through such contacts, met and, in 1939, married Pieter Keuneman, the son of a Dutch Supreme Court Justice in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Moving to Ceylon in 1940, the couple continued their communist-socialist activism throughout the War. She returned to London in 1945, subsequently divorced Pieter Keuneman, and married Peter Stadlen.

In 1956, a hand injury compelled Stadlen to turn to music criticism and research. With his wife Hedi as unnamed collaborator, he undertook a study of Beethoven's intentions in his metronome markings. The results, in a complex writing style and with Beethoven's brother Johann's name spelled as Johan (Hedi's Dutch influence?), appeared in Stadlen's "Beethoven and the metronome", *Music & letters* 48/4 (1967) 330–49. The article, suggests that, in conjunction with metronome markings appearing in Beethoven's conversation books, Stadlen had already been examining documents written by Schindler. Although this controversial article was designated as Part I, its conclusion never appeared in the journal.

Stadlen reworked his material several times, always with the same title, whether in English or its German translation: "Beethoven und das Metronom", *Beiträge '76–78: Beethoven-Kolloquium 1977. Dokumentation und Aufführungspraxis*, ed. by Rudolf Klein (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1978) 57–75; another "Beethoven und das Metronom", *Beethoven: Das Problem der Interpretation*, ed. by Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn (München: text & kritik, 1979) 12–33; and then another "Beethoven and the metronome", *Soundings* 9 (1982) 38–73.

Details about Hedi Stadlen were derived from [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hedi\\_Stadlen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hedi_Stadlen).

<sup>12</sup> Peter Stadlen, "Zu Schindlers Fälschungen in Beethovens Konversationsheften", *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* 32/5–6 (May–June 1977) 246–52; original English version as "Schindler's Beethoven forgeries", *The musical times* 118/7 (July 1977) 549–52. Similar to the pattern of repeated variants on the same theme, established with his controversial metronome studies, Stadlen continued his arguments in "Schindler and the conversation books", *Soundings* 7 (1978) 2–18; translated as "Schindler und die Konversationshefte", *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* 34/1 (January 1979) 2–18. (Coincidentally, the two paginations were identical.)

Stadlen noted that he gave his BBC lecture on 14 March 1971, but it has never been made entirely clear why he waited six years to present these findings to an audience of Beethoven scholars or to the musicological community in general. As with his metronome studies, Stadlen was heavily influenced, in his attack against Schindler's forgeries, by his political-activist wife Hedi (noted in wikipedia ... Hedi\_Stadlen). Among his last writings was "Österreichs Exilmusiker in England", *Österreichische Musiker im Exil. Beiträge der Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Musik* 8 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1990) 125–33.

<sup>13</sup> Dagmar Beck and Grita Herre, "Anton Schindlers fingierte Eintragungen in den Konversationsheften", *Zu Beethoven: Aufsätze und Annotationen*, ed. by Harry Goldschmidt (Berlin: Verlag Neue Musik, 1979) 11–89.

in publication slowed considerably. Köhler moved to Weimar in 1979, Beck turned to Weber studies in the early 1990s, and Grita Herre became responsible for the most recent vol. 11, including the last surviving conversation book, which appeared in 2001. Volume 12 is projected to include loose conversation book leaves and a cumulative index.

**SCHINDLER'S ROLE.** Beethoven's sometime secretary and later biographer Anton Schindler was probably an irritating character during the composer's lifetime, and his *Biographie* has long been considered somewhat self-serving and suspiciously inaccurate. Schindler was born in Medlov (Moravia) in 1795, studied violin with his father, and came to Vienna in 1813 to study law. He may have first met Beethoven when he was a law clerk in the office of the composer's attorney, Dr. Johann Baptist Bach, but probably did not form any sort of ongoing relationship until he was engaged as concertmaster of the new orchestra of the Theater in der Josephstadt in September 1822. He then ingratiated himself into the composer's service as unpaid secretary, remaining until the end of May 1824 (after arguments over the first performance of the ninth symphony), and then returning in December 1826, when Beethoven was ill, helping him with various chores until and even after the composer's death on 26 March 1827. Thus, Schindler's total personal relationship with Beethoven may have been as little as two years and one month—eventful though they were. By the time that Beethoven died, Schindler had become a rehearsal pianist and assistant conductor at the Kärntnertor Theater, and in September 1827, went to Pest; then, back to Vienna in 1830; to Münster in northwestern Germany as conductor in 1832, and to nearby Aachen from 1835 to 1840. He visited Paris in 1840, returned to Münster in 1846, and in the same year moved to Frankfurt, where he died in the western suburban village of Bockenheim in 1864. Musically, his was a useful, but relatively minor (and probably frustrated) career. Even during his lifetime, however, his major claim to fame was that he had known Beethoven personally and could write about him with a certain degree of authority and even authoritarianism.

**SCHINDLER THE DESTROYER?** According to Alexander Wheelock Thayer, who spent “several hours” with the former secretary in Frankfurt on 19 and 20 October 1854,<sup>14</sup> Schindler told him that “only about 400” conversation books survived at Beethoven's death. Thayer added that Schindler further related that he had long preserved them intact but, since few others valued them, “their weight and bulk had led him in the course of his long unsettled life by degrees to destroy those which he deemed to be of little or no importance.”<sup>15</sup> In 1977, Köhler lamented that “Schindler ... passed on only ... about three-eighths of the original number of conversation books.”<sup>16</sup>

How many conversation books originally existed is difficult to estimate. The earliest surviving booklet dates from February–March 1818, followed by another in March–May 1819. After that there is a sequence of fourteen conversation books (dealing largely with the final phases of Beethoven's legal battles for guardianship of nephew Karl) from

<sup>14</sup> Cook, “Thayer: A new biographical sketch”, 3. Thayer described Schindler as “a tall man, face somewhat marked by a small pox, very erect in his carriage”, consistent with the photo of him, widely published in the Beethoven literature (see, for instance, Robert Bory, *Ludwig van Beethoven: His life and his work in pictures* [Zurich; New York: Atlantis Books, 1960], 175).

<sup>15</sup> Thayer–Deiters–Riemann, vol. 4, 152; Thayer–Krehbiel, vol. 3, 11; Thayer–Forbes, 730.

<sup>16</sup> Köhler, “Conversation books: Aspects”, 148.

mid-November 1819 through mid-September 1820. At this point in the chronology, there is a major gap of twenty-two months until another single surviving book from June 1822, and then nearly five months more until surviving Heft 18 on the days around 4 November 1822. A relatively consistent continuity, however, begins only with Heft 19 in mid-January 1823, lasting (with perhaps three dozen breaks of much shorter duration) until Heft 139, three weeks before Beethoven's death in March 1827. Thus, roughly 120 conversation books survive from the final four years and two months of Beethoven's life. The lacunae in the chronology suggest that at least another 40 books may have existed, but do not survive, for a total of ca. 160 books originally filled in Beethoven's final 50 months of life. If conversation books were used as consistently during the sparsely surviving period from March 1818 to January 1823 (which they probably were not)—a period of ca. 58 months—there could conceivably have been another ca. 180 booklets filled during that period, bringing our hypothetical total to roughly 340 booklets filled, much closer to the ca. 400 that Thayer remembered Schindler's saying that still existed when Beethoven died.

In 1842, however, long before Thayer interviewed him, Schindler himself had written that he possessed—not 400—but many more than a hundred (“viel über hundert”) conversation books. Three years later, in the seldom-cited 1845 second edition of Schindler's *Biographie*, the publisher wrote of the conversation books: “There are 138 of them in the possession of Prof. Schindler” (“Es befinden sich davon 138 im Besitz des Herrn Prof. Schindler”).<sup>17</sup> This number, then, corresponds almost exactly to the 137 booklets that he sold to the Königliche Bibliothek in 1846. Therefore, in 1854, Schindler surely told Thayer that he had owned “viel über hundert” conversation books, which the American unfortunately misheard as “vier hundert.”

Fortunately, both corroboration and an explanation lie in Beethoven's surviving correspondence, specifically the survival rate of letters written to Beethoven in the years prior to 1823. The texts of most of these documents do not survive in the actual letters that Beethoven received, but instead in versions that remained in the copybooks of his correspondents—Countess Josephine Deym, the publishers Simrock, Peters, Thomson, Breitkopf & Härtel, and so forth. As I pointed out a decade ago, however, certain items (the autograph book presented to Beethoven upon his departure from Bonn) and categories of correspondence (especially letters containing poetry or libretti that authors hoped Beethoven might set to music) seemed to have survived in the composer's possession until his death, while the remainder did not. Indeed, 1821 stood out as a year in which virtually no letter received by Beethoven could be identified as having survived. Only in late 1822 and early 1823 did the survival rate of letters to Beethoven—now the physical letters themselves—increase exponentially.<sup>18</sup>

As we have noted above, the year 1821 is also without a single surviving conversation book, and their relatively continuous sequence begins only in January 1823. Thus there is a significant similarity in the survival rates of both the conversation books and the letters received by Beethoven before early 1823. Fortunately, a contemporary account provides posterity with a logical explanation.

---

<sup>17</sup> Anton Schindler, *Beethoven in Paris: Ein Nachtrag zur Biographie Beethoven's* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1842) 31; idem, *Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven, Zweite, mit zwei Nachträgen vermehrte Ausgabe* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1845) 275.

<sup>18</sup> Theodore Albrecht, *Letters to Beethoven and other correspondence*, 3 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), vol. 1, xxviii–xxix.

**SPORSCHIL'S REPORT.** Sometime, probably in late 1822 or January 1823, Johann Chrysostomus Sporschil made Beethoven's acquaintance, presumably also making notes to himself concerning their encounters. Born in Brünn (Brno) on 23 January 1800, Sporschil attended gymnasium there and then moved to Vienna, where he completed the prescribed courses for legal and political studies at the University of Vienna in 1823. Embarking on a career as an author, journalist, and historian, he left Vienna for Leipzig in 1827, and, as an "enlightened Catholic", was successfully active in the Protestant North until his return to Vienna in August, 1858. He remained active as a correspondent for several foreign journals and died in the Habsburg capital on 16 December 1863.<sup>19</sup>

Probably in October 1823, Sporschil committed his observations concerning Beethoven to paper in a form remarkably close to what journalists today would term a "feature story". It was published in the Stuttgart *Morgenblatt* on 5 November and reprinted in Vienna's *Allgemeine Theaterzeitung* on 15 November.<sup>20</sup> Sporschil introduced his subject by journalistically observing that Beethoven had joined Mozart and Haydn to constitute "the unequalled Triumvirate of New Music". He noted that Beethoven was little concerned with the external world and lived "at one with Art". He described Beethoven's embarrassment when the new overture to *Fidelio* was not yet played at first performance of the revised opera in 1814, his insistence upon excellence, his intolerance for injustice, his "tender respect" for women, his gentleness and wit with friends, his sarcasm against his enemies, and that "spoken conversation with him is possible only on his part". Sporschil noted Beethoven's admiration for Goethe, his love of Nature, his daily regimen, his health, his devotion to nephew Karl, and his works in progress, including the possibility of "a biblical oratorio (in the English language and sent to him from the United States through the American consul)."<sup>21</sup> In noting that "almost daily, he receives ... acknowledgement of his talent from all parts of Europe and even from distant America", Sporschil provided vital evidence as to the reason why most of the letters and probably even most of the conversation books before fall 1822, do not survive:

It was very painful for him that, last year [1822], when moving from the country into the city—perhaps through carelessness or perhaps through the treachery of those commissioned with the transfer of his effects (because this man, who is occupied with his Art, is frequently cheated)—all of his correspondence was lost.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Constant von Wurzbach, "Sporschil, Johann Chrysostomus", *Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich*, ed. by C. von Wurzbach (Wien: Universitäts-Buchdruckerei, 1856–91), vol. 36 (1878) 247–52. Wurzbach knew Sporschil personally, included a bibliography of his works (unfortunately beginning only in 1828), and (as noted above) spelled his name "Sporschill". In his death record, doubtless based on information supplied by his widow, he is called "Johann Sporschil", see Vienna, Magistrat, Totenbeschauprotokoll, 1863, S, 16 December (Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv).

<sup>20</sup> *Allgemeine Theaterzeitung* 16/137 (15 November 1823), 548, signed "S ... l", and appearing under the generic heading "Musikalischer Wegweiser". Beethoven was at least marginally acquainted with the *Zeitung's* founder, publisher, and editor Adolf Bäuerle (1786–1859), who had customarily been kind to him in the journal's pages.

Stadlen, "Schindler's Beethoven Forgeries", 551 (citing Köhler et al, *Konversationshefte*, vol. 4, 369, note 447, published in 1968, nine years earlier), attributes the loss to 1823, and glosses over it, possibly because it stood outside his purpose to vilify Schindler.

<sup>21</sup> Beethoven first learned about the article, presumably at midday dinner on ca. 20 November, when nephew Karl reported that his Greek teacher told him that the previous Saturday's *Theaterzeitung* contained an article about Beethoven's domestic life, including a mention of Karl. They discussed the possible identity of author "S ... l", that the article discussed Beethoven's walks, love of Nature, and habit of composing while on his walks, and (gratefully) that it contained nothing against religion or the state. Even so, at the end of his conversation with his uncle, Karl hurried out to buy a copy of the *Zeitung*. Köhler et al., *Konversationshefte*, vol. 4, 237–38 (Heft 45, Bl. 31v–32v).

<sup>22</sup> The original German reads: "Sehr schmerzlich fiel es ihm, daß im verflossenen Jahre bey Gelegenheit seiner Uebersiedlung vom Lande in die Stadt, vielleicht durch Nachlässigkeit, vielleicht durch Treulosigkeit des mit dem Fortschaffen der Effekten Beauftragten—denn häufig wird der nur mit seiner Kunst Beschäftigte hintergangen—seine

Our normal assumption that Beethoven used trunks or boxes of some sort for storing and moving his possessions is confirmed in a conversation book entry of April 1820, when the composer was moving from his apartment on the Glacis, just north of the Auersperg Palais, to Mödling. In conjunction with the move, his friend Franz Oliva noted: "It depends upon what you take along, whether all the books and music; the two chests [*Kisten*] are really quite inconvenient to bring in the cart and take a great deal of space."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the correspondence that Sporschil reported as lost in 1822 must represent the contents of at least one such chest.

Beethoven had spent the summer of 1822 in Hetzendorf and Baden, visiting the city occasionally to take care of business matters. Starting late September, he probably spent a week or ten days back in Vienna for activities surrounding the reopening of the newly remodeled Theater in der Josephstadt on 3 October (with repeat performances of the fourth, fifth, and sixth symphonies). For this occasion, he provided his decade-old incidental music for *Die Ruinen von Athen*, as well as a new overture and chorus, with the whole entitled *Die Weihe des Hauses*. The reconstituted orchestra's "solo violinist" (for whom Beethoven wrote a solo in the accompaniment of the new chorus) was the teen-aged Léon de St. Lubin, but its concertmaster was Anton Schindler, who now, rather than several years earlier, probably began his close acquaintance with the composer. After the premiere of *Die Weihe des Hauses*, Beethoven seemingly went back out to Baden for two or three weeks, returning from his prolonged summer sojourn in late October or, at the latest, 1 or 2 November,<sup>24</sup> and moving into an apartment in the building next to his brother Johann in suburban Laimgrube (about three blocks distant from the Theater an der Wien). Thus, the person entrusted with moving Beethoven's effects from the country back to the city in 1822, against whom the composer complained to Sporschil in conjunction with the loss of "all of his correspondence", may have been Johann or the cart drivers he might have employed,<sup>25</sup> because the tone of Schindler's first surviving entries in the conversation books (made in conjunction with the latest revival of *Fidelio* on 3 November) suggests that his acquaintance with Beethoven was still in its early stages and not to a point where the composer would ask him for such a large favor.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore it seems highly probable that most of Beethoven's conversation books that were used before ca. 1 November 1822 (which, themselves, could easily have numbered over 100), were lost along with his earlier correspondence during the move from Baden back to Vienna at about that time, and that Schindler was in no way responsible for the loss.<sup>27</sup>

---

ganze Correspondenz in Verlust gerieth."

<sup>23</sup> Köhler et al., *Konversationshefte*, vol. 2, 19 (Heft 11, inside front cover).

<sup>24</sup> Much of Heft 18 (beginning with Bl. 9r) was filled in at a dinner for the Josephstadt Theater's director Hensler on 4 November, but earlier entries made by Beethoven and nephew Karl suggest that the book may have begun during the day of 3 November, and that Beethoven was still getting his new apartment furnished properly. Köhler et al., *Konversationshefte*, vol. 2, 278–83 (Heft 18, Bl. 1r–8v). If Beethoven had projected conducting *Fidelio* at the Kärntnerter Theater on 3 November, and had unsuccessfully attempted it at the dress rehearsal (as Schindler reports), that would have necessitated his return to Vienna from Baden by 1 November or so. See Schindler–MacArdle, *Beethoven as I knew him*, 236–37.

<sup>25</sup> Probably on 21 November 1823, nephew Karl (recalling the wording slightly inaccurately) remarked: "The author probably knew very well who 'the person commissioned with the transportation of the implements' was." Köhler et al., *Konversationshefte*, vol. 4, 223 (Heft 45, Bl. 10r).

<sup>26</sup> Köhler et al., *Konversationshefte*, vol. 2, 283–85 (Heft 18, Bl. 9r–12v). Beethoven and Schindler were never close enough to address each other with the familiar "du" form.

<sup>27</sup> In this context, it becomes quite possible that Schindler told Thayer that there must originally have been about 400 conversation books, which would have been a fair estimate of the total used. Even so, probably half that number



**OPINIONS OF SCHINDLER SINCE 1977.** As noted above, when Peter Stadlen launched his campaign against Schindler's forgeries in earnest in 1977, members of the Beethoven scholarly community had their "smoking gun" and proceeded to vilify Schindler in unprecedented terms. Three decades later, their outrage and indignation continue virtually unabated. Barry Cooper, for instance, has called him the "chief scoundrel", and has written:

Schindler related [in his *Biographie*] a large number of stories about Beethoven and his music, but most have proved to be either completely or partly false. He even inserted numerous entries in Beethoven's conversation books after the composer's death, in order to enhance his own reputation.... Anything reported by Schindler must be assumed to be doubtful or false, unless supported by independent evidence (in which case, Schindler's contribution is redundant).<sup>28</sup>

Elsewhere, Cooper had noted "his notorious propensity for falsification."<sup>29</sup>

William Kinderman has found him "untrustworthy", adding: "He had no scruples about fabricating history and did not hesitate to falsify sources to support the account published in his Beethoven biography."<sup>30</sup> Motivated by Schindler's falsified entries in the conversation books, Kinderman recently published a study that successfully demonstrated that Schindler's supposed eyewitness observations of Beethoven's composing the *Missa solennis*, and published in the *Biographie*, were fictitious and based on erroneous dating that could be proven by the chronology for the *Missa* and—naturally—the late piano sonatas in the sketchbooks.<sup>31</sup>

And yet, like all Beethoven scholars, Kinderman has accepted Schindler's testimony when it proves convenient, for instance the story that, in *Die Weihe des Hauses* overture, Beethoven fulfilled a long-cherished desire to write in the style of Händel, and even that the "Muss es sein" superscript in the string quartet op. 135, derived from one of the composer's bouts of melancholy.<sup>32</sup> Thus, our love-hate relationship with Schindler continues, even among his critics.

**TO BELIEVE OR NOT TO BELIEVE.** When the Berlin editors published vol. 7 of the *Konversationshefte* in 1978, they included a supplement listing ca. 120 of these *fingiert* (or "falsified") entries that had appeared in the five earlier volumes (vols. 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6). In the remaining volumes, they retained the falsified entries, but labeled them as such

---

had already been lost in the 1822 move, essentially before Schindler became Beethoven's factotum. If this is not the case, then Thayer must have either heard or remembered incorrectly what Schindler told him concerning the surviving conversation books. Similarly, Schindler's supposed claim that he had destroyed conversation books that burdened him during his moves must be reevaluated and, in any case, taken with a grain of salt.

The surviving conversation books that predate the late-1822 loss essentially deal (at least in part) with the litigation over the guardianship of nephew Karl. Therefore Beethoven could easily have placed those booklets in a separate area with other guardianship papers (many of which likewise survive), and not with his general correspondence.

<sup>28</sup> Barry Cooper, *Beethoven*. Master musicians series (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) ix. Cooper takes several more opportunities to disparage Schindler elsewhere in this volume. In his *Beethoven and the creative process* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) 44, Cooper had applied the general condemnation above to more specific situations: "any statement by Schindler purporting to give an authentic interpretation about the meaning of a particular piece is especially likely to be fraudulent, even though such statements have been widely quoted and accepted."

<sup>29</sup> Barry Cooper, "Schindler and the Pastoral symphony", *Beethoven newsletter* 8/1 (spring 1993) 7.

<sup>30</sup> William Kinderman, *Beethoven* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 153, 160.

<sup>31</sup> William Kinderman, "Anton Schindler as Beethoven's biographer: New evidence from the sketchbooks", *Kunstwerk und Biographie: Gedenkschrift Harry Goldschmidt*, ed. by Hanns-Werner Heister (Berlin: Weidler Buchverlag, 2002) 313–23.

<sup>32</sup> Kinderman, *Beethoven*, 252, 332.

in the course of the text. Although several observers would have preferred that these entries be removed altogether, this would surely have been a great mistake.

Now that scholars know that the falsified entries are present, they seem transparent enough, perhaps a trifle comical, and even a bit pitiful, especially those entries in which Schindler supposedly addresses Beethoven as “O Great Master” or some similar fawning phrase, or when he states something that would have been obvious to Beethoven: “I now have the violoncello parts before me.” Other falsified entries seem to repeat what Beethoven has just said. Still others include supposed discussions of Beethoven’s works, past or present, with implications that Beethoven is telling or has told Schindler some key to their origins or interpretation: the famous “zwei Principe”, for instance. As scholars know from surveying Beethoven’s correspondence, authentic passages in his conversation books likewise strongly suggest that Beethoven seldom discussed his creative process, his external motivations, or the analysis of his works with his friends and colleagues, and certainly not in the almost systematic way that many works—piano sonatas, chamber music, and symphonies—appear in Schindler’s falsified entries.

One of Schindler’s falsified entries, supposedly reflecting mid-July 1824 (when he was estranged from Beethoven), is a good case. Thumbing through Heft 73 two decades later, Schindler probably spied an empty page and filled it in:

I received your letter too late. // When are you going back to Baden[?] // Then I’ll hurry here and we’ll go to B. together. // You are more sun-burned than before; you look like an Egyptian. // I now mingle very little with people; everything is also too distracting. // It is cool here. [//] I have only recently taken up the 3rd movement, because it is very difficult. — soon I shall not tolerate various instructions about it. // Those are common remarks, and I shall never second them. // Good fellow—*You often allow yourself to be misled*—unfortunate! very unfortunate!<sup>33</sup>

While we know that the entry is falsified, it does provide a clue that Schindler may actually have asked Beethoven questions about particular works, and that the composer did not always, if ever, provide him with straightforward answers. In this light, Schindler’s anecdote in the *Biographie*, linking the interpretation of piano sonatas op. 31, no. 2, and op. 57, takes on a new significance in that Beethoven reportedly did *not* tell him any meaning, but merely dismissed him by telling him to go read Shakespeare’s *Tempest*. Schindler’s anecdote therefore becomes more credible, if cautiously so.<sup>34</sup>

One problem with the *fingiert* entries is that many of their severest critics have concentrated primarily on those falsified passages made in the books dating *before* late 1822, when Schindler gradually became Beethoven’s secretary. My recent archival research to identify the Viennese orchestral musicians who premiered Beethoven’s works,<sup>35</sup> however,

---

<sup>33</sup> Köhler et al., *Konversationshefte*, vol. 6, 302–03 (Heft 73, Bl. 8v). My editorial strokes (//) represent the lines usually drawn by Schindler and others of Beethoven’s acquaintances to indicate the points in the conversations where he would reply orally.

<sup>34</sup> Schindler–MacArdle, *Beethoven as I knew him*, 406, discussed thoroughly in Theodore Albrecht, “Beethoven and Shakespeare’s *Tempest*: New light on an old allusion”, *Beethoven forum* 1 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992) 81–92.

<sup>35</sup> Theodore Albrecht, “Elias (Eduard Constantin) Lewy and the first performance of Beethoven’s ninth symphony”, *The horn call* 29 (May 1999) 27–33, 85–94; “Beethoven’s timpanist Ignaz Manker”, *Percussive notes* 38 (August 2000) 54–66; “When Went went: The demise and posthumous activities of Viennese wind band leader Johann Went (1745–1801)”, *Journal of band research* 36 (spring 2001) 22–45; “Franz Stadler, Stephan Fichtner and other oboists at the Theater an der Wien during Beethoven’s ‘heroic’ period”, *Double reed* 25/2 (2002) 93–106; updated version in German, trans. by Josef Bednarik and Thomas Gröger, *Journal der Gesellschaft der Freunde der Wiener Oboe* 18 (June 2003)

reveals that, at least in some instances, later entries often contain a certain amount of truth, and therefore cannot entirely be ignored for what they might reveal.

For instance, in a falsified entry in Heft 60, positioned at ca. 26 March 1824, during the preparations for the ninth symphony's premiere, Schindler supposedly ascertains that Beethoven wanted all the contrabasses to play the recitatives in the finale, and asks whether they should be in strict tempo or in a singing tone, and then tells Beethoven, "If old Krams [Grams] were still alive, one could let them go without worry, because he led 12 *bassi*, who had to do what he wanted."<sup>36</sup> Although added later, this entry probably reflects, at least in part, the composer's own sentiment in 1824. Anton Grams (1752–1823) had come to Vienna from Prague in ca. 1801, had been the Theater an der Wien's principal contrabassist when Beethoven wrote the third movement of the fifth symphony, and was reputed as a fine section leader. After he became principal at the Kärntnertor Theater in 1813, Grams had played in the premieres of the seventh and eighth symphonies, but died on 18 May 1823. Beethoven surely felt his loss as he projected rehearsing and performing the cello/contrabass recitatives in the finale of the ninth symphony, and Schindler's conversation book entry—even falsified later—provides concrete evidence that this was, most probably, the case.<sup>37</sup>

The reference to Grams, however, complements another entry—this time authentic—in Heft 63, on 24 April 1824. After nearly two months of discussions and even arguments among Beethoven's inner circle about whether the premiere of the ninth symphony should take place at the Theater an der Wien, the Kärntnertor Theater, or even the smaller Saal of the Lower Austrian Assembly, Schindler has concluded the agreement with the Kärntnertor Theater for the concert that would take place on 7 May. In this entry, Schindler meets with Beethoven and relates: "Schuppanzigh is 'very hellaciously' glad that he doesn't have to have anything more to do with the Bohemians of the [Theater an der] Wien's orchestra."<sup>38</sup> The allusion here has escaped earlier writers. From ca. 1802 until ca. 1808, however, many of the newly hired musicians in the Theater an der Wien's orchestra were of Bohemian origin, possibly because its personnel manager Joseph Rabe hailed from there, but more probably because the theater (and the

---

3–12; "Anton Grams: Beethoven's double bassist", *Bass world* 26 (October 2002) 19–23; "Beethoven's 1814 'green sheet'", *International musician* (American Federation of Musicians) 101/1 (January 2003) 22; "Benjamin Gebauer (ca. 1758–1846): The life and death of Beethoven's copyist C, with speculation concerning Joseph Arthofer, ca. 1752–1807", *Bonner Beethoven-Studien* 3 (2003) 7–22; "Benedict Fuchs, Franz Eisen, and Michael Herbst: The hornists in Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony at its first performances in Vienna, 1805–1809", *The horn call* 34 (October 003) 39–49; "A case of mistaken gender: The hornist Camillo Bellonci (1781– ?)", *The horn call* 34 (February 2004) 107–08; "First name unknown: Anton Schreiber, the Schuppanzigh quartet, and early performances of Beethoven's string quartets, op. 59", *Beethoven journal* 19/1 (summer 2004) 10–18; "The musicians in Balthasar Wigand's depiction of the performance of Haydn's *Die Schöpfung*, Vienna, 27 March 1808", *Music in art* 29/1–2 (2004) 123–33; "The Teimer family and a revised dating for Beethoven's trios for oboes and English horn, op. 87 and WoO 28", trans. by Josef Bednarik and Thomas Gröger, *Journal der Gesellschaft der Freunde der Wiener Oboe* 24 (December 2004) 2–10; "Anton Dreyssig (ca. 1753/54–1820) Mozart's and Beethoven's *Zauberflötist*", *Words about Mozart: Essays in honour of Stanley Sadie*, ed. by Dorothea Link (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2005) 179–92; "Philipp Teimer, Beethoven, and the English horn in Vienna, 1793–1817", trans. by Josef Bednarik and Thomas Gröger, *Journal der Gesellschaft der Freunde der Wiener Oboe* 25 (March 2005) 3–9; "Henriette and Philipp Teimer: New biographical details of a musical family", trans. by Josef Bednarik and Thomas Gröger, *Journal der Gesellschaft der Freunde der Wiener Oboe* 27 (October 2005) 6–7.

<sup>36</sup> Köhler et al., *Konversationshefte*, vol. 5, 249 (Heft 60, Bl. 30v). The original reads: "wenn der alte Krams noch lebte, könnte man unbesorgt sie gehen lassen, denn der dirigirte 12 Bässe, die thun mußten, was er wollte."

<sup>37</sup> Grams's name does not appear in any edition of Schindler's biography, and modern researchers have been slow to recognize the importance of even those orchestral players whose names do appear in his pages. See Albrecht, "Grams", Albrecht, "Wigand", 124, 128–29, 132; and Albrecht, *Letters to Beethoven*, no. 181.

<sup>38</sup> Köhler et al., *Konversationshefte*, vol. 6, 67 (Heft 63, Bl. 2r). The original reads: "Schup.[panzigh] freut sich ganz höllisch, daß er mit den Böhmen des Wiener Orchest.[ers] nichts mehr zu thun hat."

music associated with it) enjoyed the support of the Bohemian Prince Joseph Franz Maximilian Lobkowitz (1772–1816), Beethoven’s ardent patron. One of its Viennese musicians, however, was the respected concertmaster Franz Clement (1780–1842), with whom Ignaz Schuppanzigh (1776–1830) might also have felt a certain rivalry in Beethoven’s eyes.<sup>39</sup>

In view of such recent perceptions, where complementary entries and corroborative factual material suggest that Schindler’s falsified entries may contain elements of factual material and opinions current in Beethoven’s circle, it would seem prudent to treat them as less “criminal” than some recent critics have regarded them.

**THE RANKE PERSPECTIVE.** Unfortunately for Schindler, he lived in a major transitional period, not only in the writing of musical history, but of history in general. In 1824, his North German contemporary, the young Leopold Ranke (1795–1886),<sup>40</sup> destined to become his generation’s most important influence on historical methodology, had published his *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1535*. In its “Vorrede,” he laid down his new principles of documentary writing:

To history has been given the function of judging the past, of instructing the present for the profit of future years. The present essay does not aspire to such a lofty undertaking. It merely wants to show how it actually was [*wie es eigentlich gewesen*].... The foundations of the present writing, the origins of its subject matter, are memoirs, diaries, letters, reports from embassies, and original narratives of eyewitnesses.<sup>41</sup>

While Schindler preserved many original documents, indeed the type to which Ranke refers, for use in his biography of Beethoven, he would fall into the trap of altering them and interpreting them largely to suit his purposes, sometimes in the service of accuracy, other times not. Two decades younger than Schindler, however, Alexander Wheelock Thayer, both in his research techniques, which almost exactly mirror those specified above, as well as in the organization of his published research,<sup>42</sup> became a *true* disciple of Leopold von Ranke, and sought—more than any other writer before or since—to present Beethoven’s life “as it actually was”.



---

<sup>39</sup> Theodore Albrecht, “Ethnic identity and the orchestra of the Theater an der Wien in Beethoven’s time”, paper presented at the 17th congress of the International Musicological Society, at Leuven, 6 August 2002, as well as articles on Grams, Dreyssig, Stadler, Gebauer, Schreiber, and Teimer, noted above.

<sup>40</sup> By the time that Ranke became ennobled as Leopold von Ranke in 1865, Schindler had been dead almost a year.

<sup>41</sup> “Man hat der Historie das Amt, die Vergangenheit zu richten, die Mitwelt zum Nutzen zukünftiger Jahre zu belehren, beigemessen; so hoher Amter unterwindet sich gegenwärtiger Versuch nicht: *er will bloß sagen, wie es eigentlich gewesen.*” Quoted in his *Historische Charakterbilder*, selected and ed. by Richard Sternfeld (Berlin Deutsche Buch-Gemeinschaft, s.a.) 10. This popular collection of Ranke’s biographical sketches, culled from many of his works and issued in the mid-late 1920s, suggests his wide appeal and influence in professional circles and beyond. The trans. above by W.A. Iggers and Konrad von Moltke, in *German essays on history*, ed. by Rolf Sältzer (New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1991) 89–90; translation emended.

The influential Berlin-born cultural historian Peter Gay has translated the passage thus: “History has been assigned the office of judging the past, of instructing our time for the benefit of future years. This essay does not aspire to such high offices; it wants only to show how it had really been.” In *Historians at work*, ed. by Peter Gay, 4 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972 and 1975) vol. 3 (1975) 16.

<sup>42</sup> Thayer’s own 1878 account of his life and research activities is reprinted in Thayer–Forbes, vii–viii. Further biographical details and, especially, first-hand accounts of Thayer’s methodology appear in Grant W. Cook, “Thayer: A new biographical sketch”.

Thus, Anton Schindler, the former law clerk turned musician who became Beethoven's unpaid secretary, preserved documents from the composer's estate that might otherwise have been discarded or dispersed to the four corners of the earth. Because a sizable number of the conversation books had probably already been among the correspondence lost in Beethoven's move from Baden back to Vienna late in 1822, Schindler probably took "many more than a hundred" of the booklets away from Beethoven's apartment after his death. In any case, it now becomes abundantly clear that Schindler never possessed any ca. 400 conversation books, and that he never destroyed roughly five-eighths of that number.

In the course of organizing the 137 volumes in his possession, Schindler—probably innocently, at first—started to annotate them: dating, identities of writers, circumstances under which an entry was made, then, perhaps, occasionally what he said under his breath or *wished* he had said. Sometimes, even an annotation to reflect what *Beethoven* had said or *might* have said.

At some time, possibly in the 1840s, shortly before Schindler transferred the conversation books to Berlin, his annotations may have become almost complete fabrications, possibly as he was trying to fill in lacunae in his *Biographie*. As we have seen, just which annotations and anecdotes are involved and the *extent* of their fiction are subjects for ongoing investigations.

While Schindler may have shared Leopold Ranke's awareness that documentary evidence must constitute the basis for sound historical writing, he did not possess the ultimate respect for the document as an inviolable historical entity. *That* perspective would come only later, too late for Anton Schindler, who was—in the end—merely a product of his time in musical and general historiography.

