

Beethoven's Folksong Settings WoO 158 – Insights into the Compositional Process

In 1816/1817 Beethoven wrote 27 settings of continental folksongs with the accompaniment of piano, violin and violoncello for George Thomson in Edinburgh (WoO 158). Beethoven collected the songs himself. He found them, for example, in folksong collections, musical inserts in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* or he chose arias from popular *Singspiele*. Some of Beethoven's folksong settings are closer to the original songs than others. Sometimes Beethoven made very few alterations to the vocal part and to the piano accompaniment and only added the parts for violin and violoncello. In other settings he altered larger parts of the original song, but nevertheless kept substantial portions of it. Mostly, however, he took over only the melody and the text of a song. Depending on the extent of the material he retained in his setting, Beethoven chose different working methods. Some of these methods differ from his general compositional process.

How Beethoven proceeded when he had chosen a song for a setting can be reconstructed by interpreting the traces of his work (references like "vi-de" or different shades of ink), which are preserved in the autographs. Nevertheless in some cases those traces of the writing process cannot be understood without consulting other sources. To be able to give a plausible interpretation of the metatexts which can be found in the autographs, you also have to consult the corrected copies and the original songs. With the help of several examples, this paper will show how new insights about Beethoven's working methods can be gained in this way.

One result of the findings about how Beethoven composed his folksong settings WoO 158 is that the autograph tradition of the settings WoO 158 No. 5, 6, 8 and 22 is not incomplete, as was assumed so far. These autographs in large part only contain the string parts without vocal part or piano accompaniment. Because of this the manuscripts were believed to be drafts and it was supposed that there existed other autograph sources which were not preserved, but were the basis for the copies. This paper argues why this is not the case.

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