

Some Reflections on the Genesis of the Eighth Symphony op. 93

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An anecdote, quoted by the composer Ferdinand Hiller, refers to an observation of the editor Johann Anton André, who described Beethoven working on the score of the Seventh Symphony. According to André in the manuscript, at that moment, “there were blank pages, so that what was written before the blank had no connection at all with what was written after the blank” (*Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy. Briefe und Erinnerungen*, Köln 1874, p. 6). Benito Rivera explained this sentence starting from an analytical interpretation of the first movement of this Symphony, but some questions about its meaning and reliability are still open today.

Starting from the methodological perspective of the genetic criticism, the project “Beethovens Werkstatt” explores the issue of Beethoven’s creative process, in order to provide a deeper understanding of the variety of working methods he could have used, seeking also to answer questions like those above. The compared study of the materials for the first movement of the Eight Symphony op. 93 – sketches and drafts contained in the Petter Sketchbook (D-BNba, HCB Mh 59), autograph score (D-B, Mus. ms. autogr. Beethoven 20/1) and surviving parts (F-Pc, Ms 19 and A-Wgm, XIII 2457/A) – sheds light on some particular writing procedures of Beethoven not yet investigated, which could also relate to André’s report. On one hand, some empty bars of the autograph score, deleted by the composer himself show that in his autograph he sprung over sections not yet defined, which were then composed in a second moment probably directly on the autograph. This evidence emerges in the comparison between the autograph score and the continuity drafts and proves that in this case the manuscript should be better defined, according to Lewis Lockwood’s terminological purpose, as a “composing score”. On the other hand, the variants for the closure of the first movement – already discussed in essays by Alfred Orel, Willy Hess and Bernhard R. Appel – show, compared with the surviving parts, how the preparation of different sorts of manuscript flowed simultaneously. Both cases demonstrate that the principal score was completed gradually, fragment by fragment. Furthermore, on a methodological level they point out the strategic relevance of parallel sources, which can help to identify intermediate stages of the composition, stages now “stratified and solidified” together in the same manuscript.