

The Mexican poet Octavio Paz wrote: "... the past is a function of the future... the will of the future makes the dead rise and imposes order to their works. Thus, by turning our eyes to the past and questioning ourselves about the meaning of that mass of debris, we look for the signs of the future. We yearn to comprehend in order to do. That comprehension is, in its own way, poetry and invention."

The best way to understand Beethoven's First Symphony is to analyze what he did in the following ones. Some say that this symphony is in the style of Haydn, his predecessor. I believe that it is in Beethoven's style from beginning to end. However, to make this affirmation we must first define what is "Beethoven style". We could say, succinctly, that Beethoven's symphonic structure begins with a conflict that is addressed by emphasizing his individuality (usually at the end of the first movement). After establishing this "verticality", he searches for harmony with the world around him, now moving more and more "horizontally". He works at this from inside himself in order to reach a union that is usually ecstatic and sometimes even orgasmic. This format was copied by most symphonists of the 19th century. However, what they could not copy was Beethoven's internal process, particularly his conviction of individual affirmation, without which, the rest is a lie.

The endings of Beethoven's symphonic first movements tend to be particularly strong and savage: a fist that comes down breaking any resistance. Where does that conviction and self-confidence come from? It seems to impose itself as if it were a force of nature. I believe we can find the origins of this in Homer. He was the first Western artist, even then establishing an individualistic and defiant attitude. In *The Iliad* we see how Diomedes, twice, detects the presence of an immortal in the Trojan lines during a battle before Troy, attacking him immediately and even succeeding in wounding the god in both cases. In *The Odyssey*, Ulysses is not content with narrowly escaping from being swallowed by the Cyclops Polyphemus, but proceeds to challenge Poseidon, the monster's father. As his ship sails away, he shouts that it was Ulysses, "sacker of cities", that has blinded him. For this moment of hubris, Poseidon will take vengeance on Ulysses, causing him great harm before he returns home. Westerners are different from other people of the world in only one thing: some of us will not bow to the gods.

Undoubtedly, we feel some uneasiness when we read how these heroes were proud to be called "sacker of cities". However, we should try to understand this attitude, which differentiates them from the Trojans who hide behind defensive walls. The city represents civilization, order and law. But a truly free man will not tolerate walls, and will heed no law that does not come from inside him.

After the first movement of his First Symphony ends in pounding affirmation, Beethoven begins to move horizontally in the second movement, searching for the fluidity necessary for action in the world. From the initial theme there is a sense of moving forward. The third movement is named a Menuetto, but it is no courtly dance. Already in this First Symphony we can hear the sounds of a scherzo: a diabolical dance where Beethoven reaches deep within his psyche for the strength needed to liberate himself.

The last movement is perhaps the most conventional: a romping allegro. However, even here, as we get to the Coda, the tympani remind us that this is Beethoven, and in the last bars, if phrased correctly in one rather than the conventional two to a bar, we can feel something that approaches Dionysian ecstasy. Not quite the orgasmic ecstasy we will hear in later symphonies, but a start nevertheless.

Thus, Beethoven's usual process of liberation goes through four steps: 1. affirmation of self, 2. integration with the world around us, 3. using one's elemental inner forces to gain strength, and 4. breaking out of one's shackles in an ecstatic explosion. Already in this First Symphony, all of these steps are present, although not fully worked out.

In the West we understand that all creation implies destruction, and we are willing to go forward even if it requires defying the gods that represent order and the status quo. Three hundred years after Homer, another Greek said that "man is the measure of all things", but it is in Homer that one can feel it and live it. And so, can we feel it and live it in the music of his heir Beethoven.