

“Song and Dance: Writing Beethoven’s Seventh”
Serious Poetry

Song and Dance: Writing Beethoven’s Seventh

Teplice, Bohemia, 1811

The Symphony [No. 7 in A major] is the apotheosis of the dance.
—Richard Wagner

His own head is the cage he’s trapped in,
a bird whose song is sung for the sake of others.
As for himself, listening to that song is like looking
at the world through the broad end of a telescope.

He thrashes at the keys of his old Érard only to hear
what is tantamount to the sound made
by a little girl’s music box. Stuffed under a cushion.
In the far corner of a room across the hall.

Sometimes, it seems as though the cage of his head
holds nothing more than silence and that endless
ratcheting ache behind his eyes. And in the evening,
the creeping fog of wine, with its brief surcease.

[Stanza break]

Movement I: Coda. He squints and scribbles out
the gentle galloping line he hears down in the cellos.
His fingers stumble through the thicket of black keys,
fumbling along the bass register *like crazy old Ludwig himself*
shuffling to his slops jar. He chuckles at his own bon mot,
then kicks the jar; a silent slosh of warm piss
wreathes the floorboards under the piano.
That’s why I always keep it handy!

The boozy fingers latch onto B sharp,
which is to an A-major chord like vinegar poured
over teacakes. Even in the dead silence
of his cage, he can hear it growling in the cellos
and contrabasses, nipping at the heels of the flutes’
and violins’ sunny E, the clarinets’ bell-like
held G sharp, the horns’ top-of-lungs-ecstatic E over A.

He’s quick to jot down B sharp. *Let the damned thing stand,*
he mumbles (or maybe shouts; to him it’s all the same).
It is the sound of wine dogging pain and of pain
dogging wine in an endless mocking dance.