



## Ignaz Joseph Pleyel: The Life and the Work

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The “profile” of a research library is shaped by the needs and research interests of its patrons; the source materials and the end products that it holds define areas of strength and of future growth. One example in The University of Iowa Libraries is the extensive collection of scores and other material associated with Ignaz Joseph Pleyel (1757-1831) housed in the Rare Book Room of the Rita Benton Music Library. One of the legion of composers of the Classical period (roughly 1750 to 1825) overshadowed by the towering figures of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, Pleyel is today little more than a name even among musicians. Yet he, more than his famous contemporaries, embodied the musical life of his time. He successfully pursued interests in many areas of music—as a prolific composer and arranger, as a publisher, as a practicing musician, and as an instrument maker and merchant. The University of Iowa’s holdings of Pleyel-related materials are a legacy of the late Dr. Rita Benton, former Music Librarian at Iowa and eminent Pleyel scholar. This article will focus on the Rita Benton Score Collection, the latest group of Pleyel materials to join the cataloged items in the Music Library’s Rare Book Room, and the efforts to bring the collection to the attention of the larger scholarly community.

Ignaz Pleyel’s life was as cosmopolitan as was the music of his time. He was born in Rappersthal, Austria, in 1757, and at an early age displayed a talent for music. The fifteen-year-old Pleyel was sent to Eisenstadt in 1772 to commence musical studies with Joseph Haydn. He worked and lived with the master for five years and produced his earliest extant compo-

sition, the marionette opera *Die Fee Urgele*. He subsequently served as chapel master to Count Ladislaus Erdödy, who had underwritten Pleyel's studies to the tune of 100 *louis d'or* yearly, with a bonus payment of two horses and a carriage.<sup>1</sup> Erdödy also financed Pleyel's several trips to Italy; such a pilgrimage was considered almost obligatory for a young composer.

In 1783, Pleyel took on a more prestigious position, that of assistant to Franz Xavier Richter, *maître d'chappelle* of the Strasbourg Cathedral. He also had responsibility for organizing a series of public concerts in the city. Thus began Pleyel's most prolific period as a composer. Although he wrote church music as a requisite of his job, little of it was published; on the other hand, chamber music, orchestral works, and arrangements of his own works and the compositions of others came off the music presses of Paris, Vienna, Bonn, Berlin, London, and elsewhere with dizzying speed. The shrewd Pleyel was able to arrange for some works to go to press at four publishing houses simultaneously; pirated editions brought his music even wider circulation.

Richter's death in 1789 brought Pleyel the former's post at the Strasbourg Cathedral, but the French Revolution soon brought an end to both the religious activities of the city and the public concerts. Thus he was free to accept the leadership of the Professional Concerts, a subscription series of programs given in London between December, 1791 and the following May. This visit cemented the English public's affection for Pleyel, well-documented by the many English editions of his works that had already appeared. Legend has it that upon his return to France he was harassed by the authorities, who suspected him of having anti-Republican leanings. The story goes that Pleyel then composed the "Revolutionary hymn," *La revolution*

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<sup>1</sup>Herbert Seifert, "Die Verbindungen der Familie Erdödy zur Musik," *Haydn Yearbook* 10 (1978), p. 151.

*du dix Août 1792, ou le tocsin allégorique*, a massive work for voices and orchestra and reportedly satisfied officials of his patriotism.<sup>2</sup>

In 1795 Pleyel settled in Paris and began business as a music publisher and vendor; in 1807 he added instrument manufacture and sales to his business. The firm managed to endure and prosper through political difficulties, lawsuits, and the musical public's changing tastes. After his son Camille joined the firm in 1815, Ignaz Pleyel gradually retired to his rural estate. He died in Paris in 1831.<sup>3</sup>

This short biographical sketch barely suggests Pleyel's importance to the musical culture of his time. His compositions pleased amateurs and professional musicians alike; one statistical study of the offerings listed in the music catalogs of a German dealer between 1787 and 1792 showed Pleyel's compositions to be the most numerous.<sup>4</sup>

Audiences heard his works in concert as often as they did those of his better-remembered contemporaries. At its best, his music compares favorably with that of his teacher Haydn—an opinion seconded in Pleyel's own lifetime by Mozart, who said in a letter to his father:

I must tell you that some quartets have just appeared, composed by a certain Pleyel, a pupil of Joseph Haydn. If you do not know them, do try and get hold of them; you will find them worth the trouble. They are very well written and most pleasing to listen to. You will also see at once who was his master. Well, it will be a lucky day for music if later on Pleyel should be able to replace Haydn.<sup>5</sup>

The judgment of the musical public was even more striking—not only did Pleyel's works prove to be marketable all over Europe, but some, like the mythological Proteus, seemed able

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<sup>2</sup>Rita Benton, "Ignaz Pleyel, Disputant," *Fontes artis musicae* 13 (1966), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>Rita Benton, "Pleyel, Ignace Joseph," *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 20 vol., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), XV, p. 6 ff.

<sup>4</sup>Jan LaRue, "Haydn Listings in the Rediscovered Leuckart Supplements: Breslau 1788-92," in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Music: A Tribute to Karl Geiringer*, ed. H.C. Robbins Landon (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), pp. 311-312.

<sup>5</sup>*The Letters of Mozart and His Family ...*, trans. and ed. by Emily Anderson, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 875.

to assume almost any guise. Indeed, one of the major challenges of Pleyel scholarship has been distinguishing between original works and arrangements, a task made no easier by the composer's predilection for reworking his own compositions.<sup>6</sup> Why, then, is a figure so prominent in the musical life of his own time so unknown today?

A paucity of surviving music cannot explain Pleyel's obscurity. Though little of it has been republished since his lifetime, the libraries of Europe are filled with both printed editions and manuscript copies of his works. And there the problem lies; in the words of Robert Eitner, a pioneering music bibliographer of the last century, "Seine Kompositionen sind wie Sand am Meere ...." ("His compositions are as plentiful as sand on the seashore ....").<sup>7</sup> Eitner gives what he admits is only a summary list of Pleyel's works, excusing himself on the grounds that the greater part of them is of little worth ("Da sie grösstenteils wenig wert sind ...").<sup>8</sup> Although Eitner probably had seen more of Pleyel's music than anyone else at the time, his list shows that he could make little sense out of the chaos of opus numbers, arrangements, and variant editions that would bedevil anyone brave enough to essay Pleyel research. Until someone was able to put together a complete list of Pleyel's works, to distinguish the arrangements from their progenitors, and to provide a rational ordering for the works into a catalog, research and exchange of material would be a nightmare.

The scholar destined to bring order to Pleyel began her association with The University of Iowa Libraries on the heels of her M.A. degree in music, awarded in 1951. The following year she began work as a half-time employee of the University Libraries, assisting with the reclassification project associated with the move into the new Main Library building. She

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<sup>6</sup>Rita Benton, *Ignace Pleyel: A Thematic Catalogue of His Compositions* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1977), vii.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Eitner, *Biographisch-bibliographisches Quellen-Lexikon der Musiker und Musikgelehrten christlicher Zeitrechnung bis Mitte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 2. verb. Aufl. (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1959), VII, p. 478.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

remained on the staff and accompanied the music materials to the Music building's basement (Eastlawn) with the establishment of the Music Library there in 1957. While at the helm of the Music Library she continued her studies and earned a Ph.D in 1961. The research for her dissertation, *Nicholas Joseph Hüllmandel and French Instrumental Music in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century*, brought her up against another composer with ties to Strasbourg—Ignaz Pleyel. Benton soon recognized the bibliographical problems with Pleyel's *oeuvre*, and accepted the challenge of compiling a thematic catalogue of his works. She combined this task with her duties as part-time music librarian and cataloger; a term as the president of the Music Library Association (1962-63); supervision of the Music Library's move into the new School of Music building (1971); authorship of an impressive list of journal articles and translations; a growing involvement in the International Association of Music Libraries (IAML), including the editorship of the Association's journal, *Fontes Artis Musicae*; and service as general editor of the *Directory of Music Research Libraries*.<sup>9</sup>

Her work on the Pleyel catalogue took her overseas several times to examine copies of his works in libraries, monasteries, and private collections. Her success in gaining the cooperation of the librarians at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris was especially striking. In the course of Dr. Benton's research she purchased many imprints from antiquarian dealers (who apparently regarded her as a valued customer deserving of an occasional gift) and ordered microfilm copies of many other works. This material began to appear in the Music Library's card catalog as early as 1967, often cataloged by Benton herself. Other items continued to trickle in during the 1970s, and by the time the thematic catalog appeared in print in 1977, the University had developed a respectable collection of Pleyel's

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<sup>9</sup>This sketch draws material from articles about Dr. Benton in *New Grove* (q.v.), the *New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 4 vol., ed. H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1986), and from Barry S. Brook and André Jures, "Rita Benton—In Memoriam," *Fontes Artis Musicae* 27/2 (April-June 1980), p. 65-66.

works, as well as other publications from his press (including a collected edition of Haydn's string quartets). Dr. Benton had also amassed a large collection of her own, designated in the catalogue with the designation IOBenton.

Pendragon Press published *Ignace Pleyel: A Thematic Catalogue of his Compositions* in 1977. The reviews for this 482-page work were full of praise for the dedicated scholarship that produced it, and for the extensive indexing that allowed users to locate a given item in a number of different ways. A few criticisms centered around typographical errors and several inconsistencies in dates— certainly understandable in a work of such scope and ambition. Reviewers also cited other collections that Dr. Benton did not include. Yet even her detractors recognized the enormity of the task Rita Benton had faced, and the comparative success of her efforts.<sup>10</sup>

The criticisms did not go unnoticed. Dr. Benton began to ferret out the problems, and kept track of newly-discovered early editions and of the growing number of modern editions. Her own copy of the printed catalogue is marked with corrections and additions, and holds slips with bibliographic citations and incipits for works not included in the catalogue.

Her sudden death in 1980 denied Dr. Benton the opportunity to issue a revised edition of the catalog. Her husband, Dr. Arthur Benton, Professor Emeritus of Psychology and Neurology at Iowa, made sure that the "IOBenton" materials came to The University of Iowa. Packed in nine archival boxes, the collection took up residence in a locked cabinet in the Rare Book Room of the Rita Benton Music Library. This added material brought the total number of Pleyel items in the Music Library's collection to around 200 titles.

An inventory list for the Benton Collection had been prepared in 1982, but the crush of current acquisitions and gifts left

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<sup>10</sup>The major reviews of the Pleyel thematic catalog include critiques by Lenore Coral, *Notes* (Music Library Association) 35/1 (1978), p. 75-76; by Alan Tyson, *Fontes Artis Musicae* 26/2 (1979), p. 139-141; by Floyd K. Grave, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 33/1 (1980), p. 204-207; by H.C. Robbins Landon, *Haydn Yearbook* 11 (1980), p. 212-213, and by Ludwig Finscher, *Die Musikforschung* 35/1 (1982), p. 35-36.

the University Libraries unable to devote the time and resources necessary to catalog such rare materials properly. Without representation in the card catalog, these materials were invisible to library patrons, and at best difficult to find even for seasoned researchers.

Through the years Arthur Benton maintained a cordial relationship with the Music Library that now bore his late wife's name. A conversation between Dr. Benton and current Music Librarian Dr. Joan O. Falconer inspired him to provide the funds for a research assistantship in musicology through the School of Music. A master's candidate in musicology with a degree in library and information science served as a half-time cataloger. Working under the supervision and guidance of Music Cataloger Grace Fitzgerald and Rare Books Cataloger George Mullally, his assignment was to provide new cataloging for the Benton Score Collection and to convert cataloging for other Pleyel scores from the card catalog to machine-readable form so that they would be included in OASIS, the University's online public access catalog. Through computer networks, the University of Iowa Libraries provides access to the Pleyel cataloging to library users across the nation. The cataloging also includes references to the numbering of items and works in the Benton thematic catalog and in Series A of the *Repertoire international des sources musicales* (RISM), an international union catalog of music printed before 1800. These numbers allow scholars to identify more precisely a piece in hand, especially important for those researchers interested in studying printed music as bibliographical artifacts.

What significance does the material at hand and its newly-enhanced access have to scholars at Iowa and elsewhere? Let us take a closer look at the Benton Collection. The Rita Benton Score Collection numbers 154 items; of these, 114 are publications of original works or arrangements of Ignaz Pleyel's compositions. Thirty-three of the remaining forty items were published by Pleyel, including part of Pleyel's edition of the

complete piano works of Mozart and six compositions of Camille Pleyel, Ignaz's son and partner in the publishing house from 1815.

The lion's share of the music in the collection is instrumental chamber music, with a few individual songs, several collections of vocal music, and single parts for several of Pleyel's orchestral works, called "symphonies periodiques." The title indicates that these works were composed and published at regular intervals, evidence of the lively state of Parisian music publishing in the late eighteenth century.

Thanks to the high rag content of the paper, most of the items in the collection are in very good condition. Obtaining quality papers was a constant concern for publishers still catering to a largely well-to-do clientele, and Pleyel undertook risky business deals to do so.<sup>11</sup> As music publishing (and publishers in general) began to market their wares to the burgeoning middle class in the mid-nineteenth century, the demand for paper skyrocketed. Applying mass-production technology to the problem satisfied the demand, but produced paper that contained the seeds of its own destruction—high levels of acidity. One of the latest items in the Benton Score Collection, an edition of the Pleyel-Dusseck piano method dating from around 1834, is extremely brittle because of the effects of this "slow fire."

Some of the trios and quartets apparently went straight from music shop to shelf; their pages have not been trimmed of the ragged edges formed in the paper-making process. Moreover, the parts in these unused sets are sewn together with a single stitch. Most parts show evidence of use, such as fingerings, articulations, or corrections added in pencil or ink. Some parts bear the signatures of their owners; a few have labels identifying them as the former property of private lending libraries. Sewing holes, fragments of leather clinging to the folds, and added numberings in ink testify that many parts have been

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<sup>11</sup>See Else Radant, "Ignaz Pleyel's Correspondence with Hoffmeister & Co.," *Haydn Yearbook* XII (1981), 122-174, for a look at Pleyel the entrepreneur.



disbound from larger collections. While this practice favored the specialized interests of modern-day collectors, it has destroyed artifacts that could offer clues to musical tastes and music-making during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Rita Benton Music Library is fortunate to have a number of these made-up collections preserved intact in the Rare Book Room, including several donated by Rita and Arthur Benton. Three different sets represent attempts to assemble a complete set of Pleyel's string quartets. One volume is made up of first violin parts (and some flute parts, because the compiler included a group of quartets for flute, violin, viola, and violoncello); another contains viola parts (and some violin parts, thanks to the inclusion of the group of quartets mentioned above), and the most impressive is a set for which all four partbooks survive, bound in vellum. Other made-up collections were not limited to a single composer; in the Rare Book Room may be found a volume of piano trios by Pleyel, Haydn, and lesser-known contemporaries such as Leopold Kozeluch and Muzio Clementi. An early owner removed several works, taking care to scratch out the entries in the handwritten table of contents.

The Pleyel materials in the Rita Benton Music Library bear witness to Pleyel's activities as composer, teacher, publisher, and performer. The wondrous thing is that the 200-plus titles in the library represent but a fraction of the estimated 2000-plus editions of Pleyel's music in circulation during his lifetime.<sup>12</sup> The collection is strongest in keyboard trios and string quartets, though it can claim a substantial number of duets and works for keyboard with instrumental accompaniment and several of Pleyel's arrangements of works by other composers. Some of Iowa's holdings are the only known surviving copies in this country.

Pleyel the pedagogue is represented by two editions containing exercises for keyboard students, which he wrote as exam-

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<sup>12</sup>Benton, *Ignace Pleyel ...*, op. cit., viii.

ples for a keyboard method with text by Johann Ladislaus Dussek, a Bohemian-born musician who had found favor in London. Subsequent editions expanded the number of exercises, omitted any reference to Dussek, or sometimes printed only the exercises themselves. In trying to trace the relationships among these variants, Rita Benton comments that “the puzzling history of the keyboard method issued by various publishers under the names (singly or together) of Dussek and Pleyel may never be untangled.”<sup>13</sup>

A less-obvious reference to Pleyel’s teaching activities comes from the title-page of the Bland edition of his three sonatas for piano or harpsichord accompanied by violin and violoncello, B. 337-339 (Benton 4450): “Three sonatas for the piano forte or harpsichord, with accompaniments for a violin and violoncello; composed and humbly dedicated to Miss Elizabeth Wynne by Ignace Pleyel, op. XXI.” The subject of this dedication was 12 years old when the trios were first published, and living near Strasbourg. We know from her published diaries that Pleyel, then employed at the Cathedral in Strasbourg, was Elizabeth’s harpsichord teacher, coming to her house to give lessons to her and her sister. For example, the entry for August 17, 1789 reports: “I began to accompany him [Pleyel, perhaps playing the violin], but it did not go well, so that we played a few Sonatas.”<sup>14</sup> On October 21, she mentions that “Mons Pleyel sent me three sonatas, duets;”<sup>15</sup> it is possible that these were the set bearing her name, since the violoncello part would not be considered necessary for performance.

Pleyel and his wife apparently were family friends as well; for several years, they are mentioned frequently in the diaries. The French Revolution’s attacks on the Church put Pleyel out

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<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 355.

<sup>14</sup>Elizabeth Wynne Fremantle and Eugenia Wynne Campbell, *The Wynne Diaries*, 3 vol., ed. Anne Fremantle (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1935-1940), v. 1, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14.

of a job, and he fled the area. Elizabeth Wynne's last entry about Pleyel records a rumor of his death.<sup>16</sup>

From 1795 on, publishing became Pleyel's primary activity. He published many of his own works, both in their original forms and in arrangements by himself and others. Perhaps the best-known item from his press is the collected edition of the Haydn string quartets that appeared in 1801. Its position as an edition published in the composer's lifetime makes it an important source in establishing the canon of Haydn's quartet compositions.<sup>17</sup> Eventually his son Camille came into the business, and the firm of Pleyel et fils aîné survived until 1834, three years after the founder's death. The press's output reflected the changing tastes of the musical public; editions of symphonic and chamber music gave way to songs with sentimental texts and to fantasies, rondos, and potpourris on operatic airs.<sup>18</sup>

Pleyel's lasting contribution to music publishing is the introduction of the miniature score, a boon to subsequent generations of music students. These first began to appear in 1802 in a series entitled *Bibliothèque musicale*, which includes four symphonies by Haydn, ten volumes of his string quartets, and chamber works by Beethoven, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, and George Onslow.<sup>19</sup> While these publications seem large when set next to today's pocket-sized copies, they did represent a greatly reduced format from that customary at the time.

The Benton Score Collection documents eighteenth-century music printing as practiced in the main printing centers of Europe—London, Berlin, Vienna, Amsterdam, Milan, Paris, and elsewhere. Most music published at the time was printed from engraved copper or pewter plates. Though a few works in Iowa's holdings appear to have been engraved in their entirety, the more common method was to “punch-in” note heads,

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<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>17</sup>Benton, *New Grove*, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

QUATUOR

[illegible]

First violin part from *Trois Quatuors Concertans*, op. 67, no. 3 (Strasbourg, 1803).

clefs, accidentals, and expression markings. An edition of Pleyel's *quatuors concertants*, B. 365-367, produced by Reinhard in Strasbourg in 1803, is a beautiful example of the early use of another technique of music printing, that of stereotype. In this process, an impression in soft metal or clay is taken of a typeset block of text or music; a lead mold of the whole is made. Because multiple copies of the mold could be produced, several presses could be devoted to printing the same text, and the type could be distributed for subsequent re-use.<sup>20</sup>

Title-pages impart explicit and implicit information about music publishing and selling and about aesthetics. The items in the Benton collection offer a full range of devices common in the eighteenth century. Most title-pages were engraved and sometimes bore the name of the engraver—"Gravé par Richomme" or "J. Johnson sculp[si]t." Many editions mixed Roman lettering with flowing script; more fanciful calligraphy might employ candystriping or crosshatch designs. Blank spaces to allow the printer to fill in an opus number were common in this time when composers issued works such as string quartets or trios in sets of three or some multiple thereof. German and English publishers seemed most inclined toward incorporating into the title-page such decorative elements as cartouches, portraits, and illustrations.

Musical instrument manufacture and sales kept the family name alive in France long after Ignaz Pleyel's death. Begun in 1807, Pleyel's manufacturing activities centered on pianos, borrowing and improving upon English building techniques. When Camille Pleyel became a partner in the firm in 1815, he assumed increasing responsibility for the piano-making. His connections with eminent pianists of the first half of the nineteenth century—Daniel Steibelt, Johann Cramer, Ignaz Moscheles, and most importantly Frédéric Kalkbrenner and Frédéric Chopin—provided great publicity for Pleyel pianos, which were popular throughout the nineteenth century. Later

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<sup>20</sup>Ro[bert] L[echêne], "Printing," *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 30 vol., (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1974), Macropaedia, XIV, p. 1054.

owners added other instruments to the firm's line, most notably a chromatic harp without pedals, and harpsichords. The name survived several mergers until the German firm of Schimmel bought out the parent company in 1976.<sup>21</sup>

The title-pages of several of the periodic symphonies allude to Pleyel's activities as a performer and impresario. While the organizing and conducting of public concerts had been part of Pleyel's duties in Strasbourg, the high point of this aspect of his career certainly was the series of programs known as the Professional Concerts, presented in London from December of 1791 to May of 1792, at the same time as Haydn's second tour of duty as leader of the Hanover Square Concerts. Perhaps because of a dearth of outstanding native composers, London music-lovers had a long-standing tradition of importing music and musicians from the Continent. The keen interest and intense passions that fueled English musical life bred intrigues, rumors, and celebrity worship that should be familiar to modern-day observers of the pop-music scene. Various parties tried to make a duel out of the rival series, pitting the pupil against the master; for their own part, Pleyel and Haydn seemed to pay little heed to the brouhaha. They socialized together, had gracious words for each other, and in fact featured each other's compositions on their programs.<sup>22</sup>

This brief article should serve to suggest the important place that Pleyel's life and works deserve in studies of eighteenth-century music. Nonetheless, he is yet to receive his due. No full-length biography has so far been published, and analytical and stylistic studies of his music have been restricted to certain genres such as the periodic symphonies and the trios. No monographs on his activities as a publisher are extant. With so much yet to be done in Pleyel studies, the Pleyel materials at The University of Iowa promise to be an important resource for

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<sup>21</sup>Margaret Cramner, "Pleyel (II)," *New Grove*, XV, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup>The concert series is the object of extensive discussion in H.C. Robbins Landon, *Haydn in England, 1791-1795*, vol. III of *Haydn: Chronicle and Works*, 5 vol. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

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