

nation of rugged individualists could so rapidly be transformed into a nation of whiners and dependents. At one point, they draw upon the analysis of Boston College political-science professor Alan Wolfe, who notes that Americans have always lacked a “tragic sense of life” and that their historically easy optimism has rendered them helpless against the morally dubious claims of the “nonjudgmentalism” that is a cornerstone of therapism. Considering that the lone section of the country that *does* preserve a tragic sense of life, the South, has also been at least marginally more resistant to the therapeutic culture, there may be something to Wolfe’s reflections. Sommers and Sattel imply that the growth of secularism may also be a factor in explaining why Americans from every socioeconomic background have embraced therapism, especially as secularism erodes the capacity for moral judgment and responsibility and undermines the traditional understanding that the endurance of suffering and pain can lead to spiritual and moral maturity. This explanation is no doubt true enough as far as it goes. However, it fails to answer some questions.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that the authors are resident scholars at the American Enterprise Institute, for, in typically neoconservative fashion, they studiously overlook some important political and economic factors in explaining this unfortunate transformation of the American character. If the moral resistance of Americans to the blandishments of the therapeutic society has been dangerously eroded, it may be in large part because Americans are increasingly atomized, uprooted from traditional communities based on networks of kinship and economic interdependence. Americans may once have been a nation of rugged individualists, but they were individualists whose self-reliance grew out of self-reliant and self-sustaining communities. The destruction of those communities began as early as the Civil War but proceeded apace with the creation of the vast state-sponsored bureaucracies of the Roosevelt era. By the 1970’s, the collusion of an ever-expanding central state and a corporate capitalism intent upon reducing us all to the status of passive consumers had produced a nation of individuals ripe for therapeutic “intervention.” The rise of therapism is simply the latest phase in the evolution of the consumerist society—*i.e.*, a quasitotalitarian society of vacuous “selves” incapable of

self-government and, therefore, no longer any threat to the Moloch state that has devoured them. As the late Robert Nisbet notes in his much-neglected book *The Quest for Community*, “Totalitarianism is . . . made possible only through the obliteration of all the intermediate layers of value and association that commonly nourish personality and serve to protect it from external power.” It is unfortunate, but not surprising, that, while the authors of *One Nation Under Therapy* brilliantly trace the growth of therapism in the psychiatric profession and in the culture at large, they are virtually silent about the role played in that development by agencies of the “compassionate” state such as Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (handmaid of the Department of Health and Human Services), whose motto is “a life in the community for everyone.”

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Roll On, Beethoven

by James O. Tate

Beethoven: The Universal Composer

by Edmund Morris

New York: HarperCollins Publishers;
256 pp., \$21.95



The fate of the famous in this post-modern and even campy time is problematical. The multicultural agenda is not considerate of the distinguished or of distinctions, and “diversity” imposes quotas on what we may be permitted to admire, to enjoy, or even to know. What’s more, “the melting of forms” characteristic of the 20th century can hardly play to the benefit of one who was so formally obsessed as Ludwig van Beethoven was. These are only some of the reasons why a topic seemingly so obvious as Beethoven is not so obvious, after all.

And there *are* other reasons. The trivialization of greatness through overfamiliarity and through the mass production that creates a mass culture leads not only to condescension but to contempt and resentment. Charles Schulz’s comic-strip character Schroeder, who idolized Beethoven and played him on a toy piano, was a figure not so much of hopeless

admiration as of befuddlement before the heroic and embarrassment before the sublime. Words such as *universal* and even *composer* are today contested sites. A cultured lady trained in ballet, and whose sister is a violinist, told me the other day that she listens to hip-hop, because classical music is strictly for elevators. Yes, dignity is hard to maintain when your image adorns sweatshirts.

Dignity is also hard to maintain when everyone thinks, thanks to potted history, that he knows your life story. Bad Beethoven! You yelled at your servants; you didn’t pick up after yourself; you cheated your publishers; you left the reeking chamber pot under your piano; you didn’t get the girls; you freaked out about your nephew Karl; and generally you were just *bad*—a model for sulky teenagers who all think they are inspired and full of feelings.

On the other hand, this bad Beethoven was dealt some bad cards: nearly a lifetime of ill health, topped off by a stroke of fated cruelty—deafness. The legend of Beethoven is not strictly musical, for his struggle to accept and overcome his deafness is a great story of human courage and creativity, and yet that story is subsumed in the even greater story of musical courage and creativity. And we would have to agree with Edmund Morris that the musical story is the most imposing one we know. Beethoven is the greatest of composers, and has not rolled over, Chuck Berry’s admonition notwithstanding.

Edmund Morris has not rolled over, either, but what else would you expect from the biographer of Teddy Roosevelt? Synthesizing the work of Alexander Wheelock Thayer in the 19th century and Maynard Solomon in the 20th, as well as much other recent biographical and musical scholarship, Morris has produced an economical work that covers all the ground, including the ground of Beethoven’s greatness, and he has done so stylishly and dramatically: Beethoven’s life bristles with the tension between art and mere existence. He never flinches from the bad Beethoven of paranoid fits, challenged ethics, and crazed obsessions, as with his nephew. He insists that there is no evidence of improprieties having occurred between Ludwig and Karl (a consideration necessitated by the imperium that requires a sodomitic sanction for cultural achievement). He insists on the importance of the early works as well as those of the middle period, and these overplayed works he rescues from routine. He in-

sists on the visionary and transcendental qualities of Beethoven's late works and reminds us that the composer was not a romantic, even though we hear through the romantic reception that enshrined the legend. The Beethoven who wrote the last five piano sonatas, the *Diabelli Variations*, the late quartets, the *Missa Solemnis*, and the Ninth Symphony wrote for the future, and even for the 20th century. Late in that century, in a post-modern *tour de force*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, Thomas Pynchon rebuked Beethoven for lacking both a sense of humor and the freedom of jazz that was supposed to liberate us from systems but failed to get the job done, after all. In fact, the allegation that Beethoven had no humor is an absurd charge indicating ignorance of many texts, while boogie-woogie, and even rock music, are implied at the end of the *Appassionata* Sonata. Beethoven has no more been forgiven for being the first great modern artist than he has been forgiven for knowing his own worth. He claimed the *Quartet in C sharp minor*, Op. 131, to be his most perfect composition, and he ought to have known. But he refused an opus number to the *Thirty-two Variations in C minor* because he resented the success of his own piece—he had out-Beethovened even himself! We must therefore rejoice that he wrote the meretricious *Wellington's Victory*, for, in such an exposure of fallibility, he did us and himself a favor.

The only modern musician I recall Morris citing is the late Carlos Kleiber, for his recording of the Fifth Symphony with the Wiener Philharmoniker, an admirable piece of work. Yet I do wish that Morris had said something on the subject of access to Beethoven for those who are not themselves musicians. Ordinary performances of Beethoven are better than none at all, I suppose, but we now have a century of recorded Beethoven to consider, during which revolutions in performance practice have occurred. There are examples of 19th-century standards on record from pianists, violinists, and conductors who grew up in the atmosphere that created what we call "Beethoven," as well as a plethora of performances from modern times.

And that matters, for Beethoven is not finished with us, because we are not finished with him. The most vital reason we still listen to him, in spite of all post-modern resentments, is that he has something that we need: a human achievement, and a musical one, and both of

them are grand. I hear a lot said today about "creativity" and "culture," but I see and hear precious little embodiment of those abstractions. When we encounter Beethoven, however, there is no lack. No wonder the postmodern mentality can only regard him as a reproach. And no wonder that, in masterpieces of the modern era, such as Forster's *Howards End*, Eliot's *Four Quartets*, and Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, Beethoven is the image of the redemptive power of art.

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Tremendous Twaddle

by Derek Turner

Political Correctness and the Theoretical Struggle

by Frank Ellis

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86 pp., NZ\$19.95



There was a time, not long ago, when Britons just laughed at political correctness, seeing it as a Californian cult that no one with any common sense could ever take seriously. Even now, one comes across Conservative politicians who will say that such and such a news story is evidence of "political correctness gone mad"—as if it had ever been anything else. With such half-humorous, half-exasperated responses, they promptly forget about the subject and concentrate on more immediate matters—only to wheel out the same superannuated, complacent phraseology the next time the matter arises.

What such politicians do not realize is that, while they have been concentrating on their various budget deficits, school-financing schemes, the opening and closing of local hospitals, cuts in defense spending, streetlights in the constituency, why the shape of bananas has to conform to E.U. "guidelines," and whether they will be promoted in the next reshuffle, the civilization they take so much for granted is being eaten away from under their feet. Britain is being rapidly de-Britainized, and they have scarcely no-

ticed. While they have pontificated on the peripheral and plotted their progress up the career ladder, semantic termites have been gnawing away at the West's linguistic and cultural assumptions, to the extent that the West is in danger of fragmenting entirely under the combined assault of myriad voracious jaws. While we were all chuckling at "personholes" and "waitrons," pale-eyed zealots tightened their grip on the town halls of Islington and Sheffield and Glasgow and grasped the machinery of state.

All of our countries, to a greater or lesser extent, are now submerged under a tsunami of increasingly loaded language that, as Ellis puts it, is "not primarily used to communicate ideas but rather to signal the speaker's willingness to submit to the politically correct register." This flood of foolishness is lent impetus by a dualistic mentality that, in effect, insists that "you are with us or against us— and if against us, you are evil and must be crushed."

As a result, expressing any idea about any subject is increasingly fraught with danger—danger of signaling that the speaker is "insensitive" or actually inhuman; danger of "offending" one or another multifarious minority; danger of social ostracism; danger of professional repercussions; danger, even, of legal penalties. "Correct thinking," Ellis points out, eventually means "no thinking at all." This "anti-thought" is certainly no laughing matter and allows nothing for British (or American) conservatives to feel superior about; if anything, political correctness is further advanced in our countries than elsewhere in the West. We now scarcely even notice as autocue readers utter such inanities as "firefighters" or "fishers," as politicians demand sex- or race-specific quotas, or as we are corporately denounced for our "racism," "sexism," and "homophobia." Anyone who cleaves to unfashionable views, or unthinkingly accepts the "wisdom of the ages," is becoming a dissident by default.

This is the great drawback of that "pragmatism" of which conservative Britons are so bootlessly proud, and of taking no interest in ideology. Faced with an ideological assault, it is not enough to rely on healthy instinct or bluff refusal to engage. Healthy instinct can easily become diseased reflex, while isolated redoubts can easily be bypassed for later slighting. A global vision must be matched by a rival global vision, an ideology by a counter-ideology, a disciplined foe by a dis-