

accidentally makes scientific discoveries, like a paper biplane, that are crushed)—all these are only inadequate artificial respiration for a corpse that just lies there. The interlude on the ship carrying R&G and Hamlet to England, in which they are attacked by pirates and R&G unknowingly take on the fate intended for Hamlet, looks like a feeble imitation of Monty Python.

It all begins when R&G are summoned to Elsinore by King Claudius, per Shakespeare, but Stoppard lets us meet them before they arrive, when they encounter the traveling players who are also en route to the castle. The story—much too full a term—centers on R&G and the First Player, as they move into and through and around Shakespeare, as they demonstrate that foreboding is not the exclusive property of a play's major characters.

But from the start the film muddles the play's sense of unequipped midgets taking center stage, of Eliot's "I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be; / Am an attendant lord." It's just leaden gab, decked with prankishness. Nor is the casting of much help. Tim Roth, who recently was abysmal as van Gogh in Robert Altman's *Vincent and Theo*, is even worse as Guildenstern—a two-dimensional cutout of an actor with a pinched face and voice. His performance is a drag on Gary Oldman, the Rosencrantz, a sometimes successful actor who might have been better with a better partner. Only Richard Dreyfuss (again!), as the First Player, comes off with distinction. He has flourish.

As for Stoppard's directing, opinion ought to wait until he gets a better script.

Hidden Agenda (Hemdale) has one of the worst titles in recent memory but is a decently made thriller, directed by Ken Loach, about the troubles in Northern Ireland. Brian Cox, a versatile and resourceful actor whom I've seen on the London and New York stage, plays an English detective who is sent to Belfast to investigate two killings. Allegedly done by the IRA, they turn out to be otherwise connected. Cox's inquiry runs into obstructions by British and pro-British authorities.

The screenplay by Jim Allen has one very strange aspect. I can believe that the authorities break the law in aid of what they think are higher ends. But the film proceeds as if Northern Ireland were occupied completely against its will by a foreign force. I can't recall one syllable in the film about the fact that the majority of the people in Northern Ireland are unionist, loyal to Britain. This fact is hardly incidental since it makes the region's agony more complex and more acute. ●

The new musical correctness and its mistakes.

Roll Over Beethoven

BY EDWARD ROTHSTEIN

I.

Art music has led a relatively sheltered existence during recent years. While proposals abound to eliminate Western civilization as a fundamental area of study in universities and high schools, in music such renovations have generally occurred far outside the mainstream. The Western compositional tradition, European in origin, seems fairly intact in concert halls as well as conservatories; and it has also been heartily adopted in China, Japan, Korea, India, and nearly every country that has come in contact with the West, that has had an elite and an educated class able to attend to the Western musical tradition's demands. Western notation and analysis have become central even in the teaching and the preservation of other cultures' musics.

But the political pressures on music have been mounting of late, inspired not least by an awareness that the Western musical tradition is in a condition of crisis. Mainstream performance has settled into a soporific routine of recitation and repetition, with novelty and technique replacing insight and inspiration. Contemporary composition remains the domain of the devoted few, with most of the concert repertoire selected from about a hundred years of music. The state-funded avant-gardish events still draw listeners, but stances of opposition have turned into mannered gestures. Musical literacy and serious amateurism are more boasted about and less prevalent than they ever were.

Even where the audiences exist, moreover, they have become peculiarly stratified. Classical musical culture is a culture of specialized interests. More strikingly in a city like New York, it is largely a racially stratified culture as well: there are almost no black or immigrant faces (aside from Asians) to be seen in concert halls. This is not a matter of ticket prices or accessibility. My neighborhood arts organization, like many others around the country, has been unsuccessful in marketing Western art music to the new racial and international communities in the area, so it has been supplementing

such traditional events with evenings presenting the folk musics of immigrant and black cultures. Addressing the same issue in Detroit, the Michigan state legislators took another approach: they threatened to withhold funds from the Detroit Symphony unless the orchestra suspended its audition procedures and hired a black musician, a move that would presumably bring in black listeners. But given that the public education system has abdicated its role in teaching the arts, such methods have generally had no noticeable impact on making Western art music any more appealing to a cross section of the national population.

Musical culture as a whole is ethnically divided. Islands of folk musics float in isolation, and even the classical art-music tradition is treated as the representation of ethnic interests—just another archipelago in a crowded sea. It is no surprise, therefore, that "multiculturalist" arguments, which demand a diminished place for Western culture, have begun to flourish in musical life. On January 6, for example, *The Boston Globe* ran seven pages surveying the Boston art scene under the rubric, "The Fine Arts: A World Without Color," polemically arguing the case for multiculturalism. Article after article asserted that there were intrinsically racist origins to such forms as ballet and continuing racist traditions in such institutions as the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The *Globe* called for a new "representation" in the arts, on both sides of the proscenium, though it was unclear precisely how such a social and artistic goal was to be accomplished, or what role the Western tradition was to play in the multiculturalist future.

More carefully argued was a 1989 report by a "National Task Force on Presenting and Touring the Performing Arts." Funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, and the National Endowment for the Arts, the task force issued a report written after a series of meetings across the country involving 167 arts presenters. The report is a genteel yet passionate mandate for the transformation of arts presentation in this country. At its foundation is a synthesis of the various

arguments and attitudes currently in vogue in our cultural and intellectual life. Since the appearance of the report, multiculturalist attacks on schools and institutions have, if anything, vigorously increased.

Presenters of art have surely had to face unusual problems in recent years. Staffs and budgets that flourished during the past few decades now face financial strictures. Organizations have to find ways to justify their annual applications for funds, and also have to find ways to show audience growth and development. For the Task Force, however, the main subject for discussion was "community," which means ethnicity. The report called for "urgent activism" by presenters of performing arts in order to establish the "broadest artistic, social, cultural, and structural contexts" for their presentations.

Contexts, of course, are always to be desired. The context of this report, however, is a call for "cultural equity." One statement, cited approvingly by the authors, asserts that "all the arts and their cultures must be talked about in equal terms." This equality means that few other distinctions are to be made. "Both good and mediocre artists are valuable assets to a community and should both be nourished," said Edwin Romain, a pianist who served on the steering committee of the Task Force. Judgments of the "good," in fact, are to be minimized.

The aim is to eliminate any distinction between or within musics other than on grounds of their origins. Each culture has its music; and so each culture has an equal right to attention and money for the presentation of its music. "Many artists, artforms, and traditions," the report declares, "are still denied adequate recognition, support, and access to stages on which to perform." This means changing the "white male paradigm of an American" and rewriting "the present economic, political, and cultural stories" that constitute our country's culture and its history. Not even the traditional halls are suitable for such rewriting, since "some theaters that were long closed to African Americans remain uncomfortable places for them to attend performances because of that history, even if the artists performing are themselves of African descent."

The prestige once held by the classical musical tradition, in this view, is just a manifestation of the inequitable dominance of a particular culture. The report attributes this dominance to European immigrations from the 1920s to the early 1950s, and to the immigrants' demand for "European-style performing arts events." Such events and institutions

were founded, moreover, not because of anything intrinsic to the art itself, but simply as a matter of cultural identity: "European immigrant communities knew that these institutions signaled the presence of their cultures."

It wouldn't matter to the authors of this report that in fact "European-style" musical events began in this country 150 years before they think, and it would certainly not matter to them that such events have some interest beyond mere cultural affirmation. Despite the Task Force's genuflections toward "art," its effect is to redefine the function of the presenter: the urgency is not to reveal something about music itself, not to mount exhibitions and performances on behalf of an artistic vision, not to encourage people to hear things they've never heard before and to engage in acts of musical imagination. The objective is, first and foremost, to achieve "equity" by serving individual "communities" without distinction. "Cultural equity," the report concludes, "acknowledges that every culture has worth, and that its worth must be recognized, expressed, presented, and supported." In the view of the "multiculturalists," music is fundamentally "folk" in character. It functions as a reinforcement of group identity.

II.

There is something attractive about the variety promised by multiculturalism. The largest immigration since the early decades of this century is now occurring in this country, with most arrivals coming from non-European countries, so it is perfectly reasonable to assume that there will be a greater diversity of musics demanded and a greater diversity of musics appreciated. It is also not surprising that this movement should arise in the United States, which has a far less entrenched musical tradition of any kind, and already hosts an extraordinarily diverse assemblage of commercial, folk, and artistic musical cultures.

The polemics have heated up, in fact, at precisely the moment when hardly any polemic is needed. Never have so many different cultures' musics been available for listening. In New York it is possible to hear remarkable performances of African griot music, Indian ragas, Pakistani qawwali, Irish fiddling, Jewish klezmer, chants of Tibetan monasteries, and Andean folk music. These varied musics are proliferating on recordings as well. Once a project undertaken by ethnomusicologists, the recording of other cultures' musics is now supporting a series of record labels. Folkways first offered such music commercially, then came the

Nonesuch "Explorer" series, both now available at remainder outlets. Peter Gabriel has presided over a remarkable new series of ethnomusicological recordings called Real World Music. And recent releases by such foreign companies as Ocora (distributed here by Harmonia Mundi) continue the tradition.

These are not, generally, musical curiosities. The diversity and the complexity of the musics are astonishing. There are Tibetan monks who chant their scriptures by sounding three tones at once; deep rumbling bass notes are colored by distinct high overtones, controlled by the mouth's shape, creating eerie harmonies. There are African musicians who travel around the countryside, their calabash gourd drums doubling as cooking utensils; heard in concert, their sounds seem signs of a passing world. There are flutes in Japan that sound as if the wind were blowing over sticks of bamboo, creating subtle microtonal sighs. There is the xylophonic patter of Balinese gamelan groups. There is Swedish folk singing, Swiss yodeling. The more one hears of human musics, the more extraordinary the musical enterprise becomes. Each society has its own instruments, its own musical systems, its own functions for musical activity, its own social organization to support musical activity. In the midst of such variety, novelty, and energy, there hardly seems a reason to oppose the multiculturalists. There also hardly seems a reason for them to be so exercised.

The availability of these musics, however, is not quite what the multiculturalists have in mind. Their argument is really aimed at a particular kind of "equity" that, as in other multiculturalist arguments, is an attack on schooling and funding. Why, the multiculturalists ask, should Western music be studied in schools? Why should it have all the prestige, the funding of corporations, the institutional support of Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, or a score of other arts centers? Why should there be any priority given to European-oriented arts in the midst of ethnic variety?

The multiculturalist argument about music has three basic steps: (1) No judgment can be made between musics on the basis of intrinsic value because there is no hierarchy in the arts. (2) The tradition of Western music has no essential claim on our attention, particularly as our population becomes less and less European in origin and outlook. (3) Our political democracy should be a host to democracy in education and taste as well. Let a hundred flowers bloom, and let none be given more water than another.

The problem is that distinctions and

differences are rampant when we look more closely at the world's musics, and so are hierarchical classifications. Consider briefly the cultures studied in three recent monographs, published as part of the Cambridge Studies in Ethnomusicology. These specialized volumes—books remarkable for their relative lack of cant and academic posing—are based on field research and musical analysis, and deal respectively with Cantonese opera (by Bell Young), music of India and Pakistan (by Regula Burckhardt Qureshi), and the songs of the Amazonian Suyá Indians (by Anthony Seeger), and they all come with cassette recordings.

Suya Indian songs are chants, accompaniments to rituals and festivals. They are close to what used to be called “folk” music: they have no single author, but are the work of an extensive tradition of performance and ritual. The music serves a communal and tribal function, and it is inseparable from the daily life of the Amazonian Indians. This approach to music may be the most common in world musics. On one Nonesuch record, for example, a song is sung off the island of Tonga while fishing for octopus. Accompanying a modal chant, the canoe is rhythmically struck; the water is heard rippling around a camouflaged stone that is lowered into the ocean as bait. Such music can often be intricate and expressive, with technique closely related to the music's function. The instruments themselves—barely modified natural objects—reflect the premodern activities of the society.

Sufi music of Pakistan, by contrast, is primarily devotional. (It can be heard on a recording of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan on Ocura and a recital by the Sabri Brothers on Real World.) It is far more intricate in its beginning material and far more elaborate in the transformations that it works upon it. Its purpose is to bring an audience to a state of ecstatic involvement with the words being sung, but this is not a transformation dependent on a ritual or a ceremony, as is partly true of the music of the Suyá Indians. The invocations of Allah build on each other, so an evening of this music is like a planned induction into a state of mind. And yet this is a music of improvisation. These are not performances meant to be contemplated, or even listened to analytically, apart from the specific event they mark. They are meant, rather, to intoxicate. Their repetitions and variations lead, according to many reports, to a transport of religious ecstasy.

Cantonese opera, to take yet another example, is the closest to what in the West is known as a “high” art. These

operas incorporate elaborate scripts, melodically intoned speech, full-scale song, mime, and acrobatics. The stage props are limited, dramatic “types” are constantly invoked along with pre-existing tunes, and the action is highly formalized. The most nearly analogous Western form may be the theater of the Renaissance. Other Chinese music, such as the repertoire of the pipa—a stringed lute that found its niche in the banquets and ceremonies of the aristocracy—is less formal and more pictorial. Its music often recalls the combination of folk rhythms, imagistic writing, and rhythmic poise found in the courtly music of Europe in the seventeenth century.

In any society, the various categories usually invoked to describe these musics (“folk,” “religious,” “courtly,” and “aesthetic”) penetrate each other and change their relationships with each other over time. Categories are permeable, but they are also important. They allow us to understand not just what a music succeeds at creating, but what it is attempting to create; they combine social function and stylistic description.

Thus the distinguished ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl has argued that only some civilizations have developed a “high” musical culture. Such a culture, he suggests, is a reflection of the extent to

which musical teaching is institutionalized, of the degree of systematization in the music, and of the self-consciousness of its methods of analysis. A high art is also partly characterized by a long performing tradition and a widely varying repertoire. Aside from the Western high music tradition, Nettl points out that the notion of “elite” composition is also evident in the “high civilizations of Asia.”

In the “high” musics of India, Iran, Japan, and Java, music is treated as almost a form of objective inquiry, easily separable from custom and culture even in its teaching. “I do not suggest,” Nettl writes,

that other societies, such as American Indians [which Nettl has studied extensively] or Australian aboriginals, lacked ways of teaching their music. But these were rarely distinct formal activities and could not as readily be separated from the ceremonial, religious, social, or enculturative functions of the music.

Moreover, he continues, nearly every culture—whether or not it has a “high” tradition—“tends to have some kind of hierarchy in its musical system, a continuum from some kind of elite to popular.” This hierarchy is a matter of complexity and sophistication; it involves subtlety of expression, demands on musical literacy, and intricacy of meaning.

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It is not necessary to be convinced of the universality of such distinctions to see what a peculiar movement multiculturalism is, with its doctrinaire rejection of all such categories. Multiculturalism condescends to the very cultures for which it demands "equity," because it refuses even their own distinctions. Precisely which music a group plays, and the aesthetic or social meaning of that music, are largely matters of indifference to the multiculturalists, who are fixated single-mindedly and coarsely on the music's provenance. In most other cultures, multiculturalist notions would be dismissed as an expression of patronizing ignorance. The puzzle is why they should be taken so seriously here in the West.

III.

The more closely we look at the relationship between multiculturalism and its host culture, the more peculiar it becomes. Multiculturalism is not just about the equivalence of world cultures; it is also about their equivalences within Western culture. The tremendous energy of multiculturalism, which now reigns in universities, on public television stations, and in arts organizations, comes not from its noisy enthusiasm for other cultures, but from a frightened response to, and an animus against, the West.

The argument behind the attack has become familiar. Since there is no distinction between high and low in culture, the high prestige of Western culture is owed simply to the West's political power. A defining characteristic of Western culture, moreover, has been an opposition to the "Other." The "Other" is any representative of non-Western culture, any "minority" person or idea. In this reading of Western history, fear and repression of the Other become virtually the dominant theme of our civilization. And the multiculturalists see the same thing happening in the concert halls and arts institutions. The call for "equity," in sum, is a form of domestic anti-imperialism.

This polemic is not without tautological virtues. What culture, after all, does not define itself, at least partly, against the Other? Has any culture ever had an undistorted understanding of the Other? The multiculturalists are also correct, of course, in their conviction that one reason for the influence of Western music was the conquest and the colonization that marked the recent centuries of Western development. Nettl is one of the few ethnomusicologists with the knowledge to survey such a phenomenon. In *The Western Impact on World Music*, he ar-

gues that the first Western musics learned by non-Western cultures tended to be either military marches or church music. In Iran, for example, during the nineteenth century, students who became military officers were sent to Europe for their education. French military advisers in 1856 recommended the Westernization of military music; then came general Western musical education. Until the fall of the Shah, Western concert music remained a powerful force in Iran, dwelling side by side with native traditions, influencing them in the development of notation and the idea of repertory. And a more exotic example: in the 1850s the king of Madagascar was so enamored of Western music and its associated prestige that he sent a group of boys to Europe to be educated. They returned to play Rossini and Mozart in the jungles.

During this century, moreover, the Other has often been transformed by the encounter in a new way, as Western culture came to be associated, almost by definition, with the experience of modernity. This affected the underdeveloped regions of the West as well: when Bartók traveled through the villages of Hungary eighty years ago, he pleaded with the peasants to sing him the old songs, the songs sung by parents or grandparents, for he knew that they were fast disappearing, and he wanted to capture at least some using the wax cylinder recorder he carried on his back. In the same way, Pacific Island songs are becoming extremely rare, and in Japan there are organizations known as Hozonkai devoted to the preservation of folk songs.

The actual encounters with the West have produced strange, piquant hybrids. In Burkina Faso a repertory folk music has developed; traditional music that once accompanied seasonal ceremonies in the fields is now performed by urban groups for recreation, divorced from its agricultural context. The most arresting example of cross-fertilization, of course, is the influence of Western pop music on world musical cultures. As Christopher Alan Waterman shows in *JuJu: A Social History and Ethnography of an African Popular Music* (University of Chicago Press), Juju music of Western Africa involves an overlaying of Western pop music instruments on a preliterate folk tradition, the electric guitar mixing with descendants of ancient Near Eastern instruments to produce native songs set with simple Western harmony. Nearly every "folk" or tribal or religious tradition in the world has been touched by the commercial machinery of Western pop music, its repeated verse structures, its electronic instrumentation, and its triadic harmonies, simplifying and com-

mercializing music as cultural life is transformed.

An orthodox multiculturalist would seem to have reason to be horrified by the nearly imperial power that pop seems to have over the Other. Yet no such horror is evident. One reason may be that for generations the American pop-music industry has been intoxicated with "world music," with Caribbean, African, and Latin American rhythms and harmonies (many of which were themselves influenced by European cultures four and five centuries ago)—hardly evidence of a West dominated by fear of, and opposition to, the Other. If the American blues were inconceivable without their African roots, much contemporary American pop music is no less conceivable without Jamaican or Nigerian or South African influences. In the West, moreover, these traces of the Other sell millions of records.

The truth is that the impact of popular culture, which dwarfs the impact of its high cousin, is of no concern whatsoever to many multiculturalists. They are primarily concerned with the prestige and the power claimed by Western classical music: the high culture of the West is their nemesis. The trouble is that the multiculturalist account of Western high culture has it backward. Despite the disintegrating folk traditions and the impact of colonialism on world musics, a survey of the expanse of the Western musical tradition—the music of the medieval church, the love songs of the troubadours, the dances of the village square, the baroque fugue, the classical sonata, the Romantic symphony, the twentieth-century exploration of systems and sound—fails to reveal a constant opposition to the Other. It gives evidence, instead, of a constant curiosity about, and fascination with, the Other.

The early Christian church used the figures of the Jewish synagogue in its chants. The rhythms and the phrasings of folk dances (the music of the internal Other) made their way into the courts and into the Baroque suite. Contact with Eastern cultures yielded dozens of classical operas with Eastern (Turkish, Indian, Chinese) characters and dance rhythms. (Donizetti became director of music in the Turkish court.) This cannot be dismissed as "Orientalism" in music; the folk musics of the Slavic countries, the rhythms of Spain and Gypsy cultures flourished on the opera stage and in the concert hall as well. And in this century Japanese music influenced the development of Impressionism, jazz and blues became part of the musical vocabulary of European and American music of the 1920s, Indian ragas and African rhythms

found their way into compositions of the 1960s.

One reason for this cross-fertilization is that Western musical culture, far from condemning the Other to some netherworld of untouchable sound, has cultivated an impassioned interest in the music of different cultures. It has done so in order to gain a new perspective on its own music, and in order to explore the possibilities and the powers of music itself. Contemplating the meaning of music in the eighteenth century, Rousseau turned to Chinese and Persian musics to speculate about the analogies between music and language. The non-Western has been as much a part of the phenomenon of music for many Western composers and writers as native works.

These preoccupations are not incidental to Western musical culture. One of its highest ambitions is to come to knowledge about music itself. Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier," Beethoven's symphonies, Wagner's operas, Debussy's piano works, Webern's serial compositions: these expressive compositions are also encyclopedic projects, attempts to articulate the dimensions and the possibilities of the musical universe. And this kind of project, this analytic ambition, is one of the characteristics of Western art music that has made it a model for aspiring composers across the globe. Nettl points out that one of the appeals of Western music has been the conviction it presented of "universal validity," that it could be learned by anyone, that it is not reserved for a particular caste. Western music, particularly in more recent centuries, often aspired to autonomy—the freedom that each work possesses to establish its own premises and projects independent of patron and occasion—and it is an aspiration that few other cultures have cultivated.

During the last few decades this notion of autonomous art in the West has come under attack, mostly by Marxist critics, arguing that "l'art pour l'art" is bourgeois ideology, an attempt to undermine the subversive message of art by pretending that it has nothing whatever to do with the world. Yet subversive messages come with other ambitions as well. Western art music participated in the same cultural energies as other Western enterprises such as science and philosophy, in which the individual perspective is always taken seriously, yet is then generalized, leading in some cases to a transcendental vision. This is as true of Beethoven as it is of Kant. In its developing logic, Beethoven's music is at once introverted and ruthlessly objective.

This does not mean that Western art

music has discovered some universal truth, or is in exclusive possession of it. It does mean that the will to universal truth is often one of its inspirations. Western art music is far from monolithic or uniform in its expression of this will; it is astonishing how many seemingly incompatible styles and views are represented in the history of Western music, how many folk and religious and courtly and aesthetic traditions coincide. But this impulse to universality helps explain why the West has been so open to the possibilities of other cultures. Though almost all cultures have some interest in the Other, no other culture or tradition, as far as I know, has ever invented some-

thing resembling the Western attempt to comprehend the Other through anthropology or ethnomusicology, or has asserted the transcendental perspective through a political vision like Western liberalism or a rational project like Western science.

Multiculturalism has no use for the heritage of liberalism, however, or for the energies of modernity. It is, at bottom, folkish Romanticism gone bad. Its calls for equity derive not from recognized unity, but from enforced difference. It takes other cultures seriously only as representations of the merely particular. Multiculturalism fails to see the Other within us, or us within the Other.

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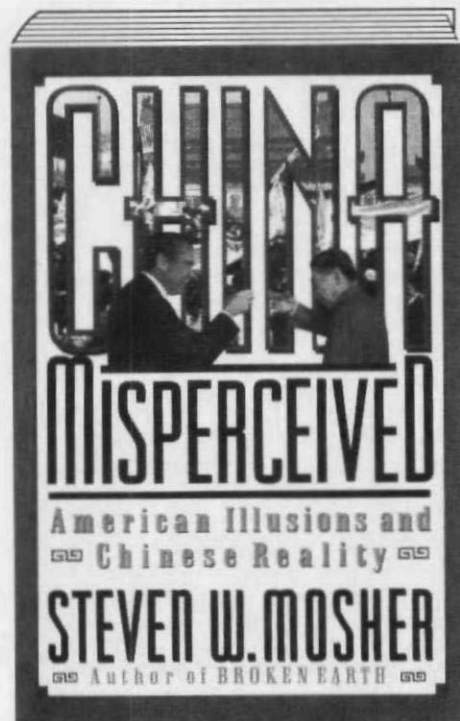
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er. As a result, it undoes the very notion of Western culture.

IV.

This is not an assault from outside. It is disintegration from within. We need only consider the evolution of ethnomusicology to comprehend the transformation. Between 1890 and 1920, the study of other musics focused primarily on "collecting"—on preserving examples of the songs and chants and instrumental performances of other lands. Early ethnomusicologists tended to recognize the similarities between other cultures and emphasize their differences from the West. Then, until after the Second World War, anthropological research was dominant—the study of how music fit into differing cultures, what the musical practices were, how they were taught, and what functions music served.

The intellectual impulse that inspired these attempts at collection and comprehension, however, gradually expanded into the notion that the only way truly to comprehend the Other was to become the Other. Objectification gave way to identification. Beginning in 1960 or so, there seems to have been substantial interest by researchers in becoming adepts of other musics, absorbing them as fully as possible from the inside.

To be sure, this allowed for more intricate understanding of the way in which a culture schooled its musicians, what attitudes were held and what function they played. But it also required a submission to the systems of judgment employed by the culture being studied. At about the same time anthropologists began to debate the problem of "rationality," that is, whether or not there is a legitimate way to understand another culture according to our own standards. Was the conviction that the world was full of spirits and witches and spells any less rational than the assertion that a universal constant appears in the formula for gravitational attraction between two bodies? Neither, the reasoning might go, is fully explained. Lévi-Strauss took Rousseau's fascination with "natural" man a step further, asserting that in fact there was, in primitive societies, as much logic and organization of the world as in the most sophisticated rationalist theories of the West. By the 1960s these views were joined with countercultural romanticism, in which Western rationality was deemed inferior in many respects to the structural universes being revealed in myth and ritual. The words "primitive" and "advanced" began to appear in quotation marks.

At its best, this change in perspective led to a new respect for other cultures, and to new perspectives on our own. Af-

ter all, the West, too, has its rituals and folk practices, its potlaches and its initiation ceremonies. But the result was also the elimination of distinctions between cultures. For how can cultures be compared once a standpoint outside them all is rejected? The quest of the West for a transcendental perspective backfired; it, too, came to be considered just another cultural bias. Such doubts, when mixed with political energies born of resentment and alienation, have grown to almost antinomian dimensions. And so the achievements of Western transcendentalism have been taken as mere imperialism; the knowledge of the Other as a form of intellectual cannibalism, the extraordinary European traditions of philosophy, literature, law, science, and the arts, as mere ethnic arrogance.

Multiculturalism's obsession with diversity of representation is perverse. It

should be obsessed instead with the education of our diverse populations, beginning with a grounding in the tradition that—despite its sometimes grievous failings—is one of the most authentically diverse and ambitiously transcendent we have. But the prospects do not look good.

Multiculturalism is a twisted version of Western teachings, flourishing in the hothouse of a democracy that renders all distinctions suspect and all learning elitist. The multiculturalist is a Western liberal with so large a power of empathy that liberalism itself is dissolved, a rationalist with so transcendental a perspective that reason itself is discarded. The multiculturalist is a universalist without universalism, an artist without a vision of art; a monster child of Western culture; a baleful, unwitting tribute to the tradition he hungers to depose. •

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edited and with an introduction by John Hollander

(Henry R. Schwab, 496 pp., \$39.95, \$19.95 paper)

Harold Bloom will appreciate better than anyone the fate of being misread. Having devoted the better part of his career as a literary critic to explicating the necessity of misreading as a prerequisite for what he calls "strong" poetry, it seems poetically just that Bloom's own writing—*The Book of J* in particular, his most recent and best book—should be misinterpreted by nearly everybody, misconstrued as a work of literary criticism about the Bible when in fact it is an audacious if flawed attempt at theology.

Bloom, who emerged in the late '50s and early '60s as one of several young critics instrumental in restoring the Romantic poets to the literary canon, has earned for himself surely the most prodigious and provocative reputation of any American critic of his generation. He first won wider fame with the publication of *The Anxiety of Influence* in 1973. Subtitled "A Theory of Poetry," it recast the history of post-Enlightenment English poetry into the image of a Freudian family romance, "the story of how poets as poets have suffered from other poets."

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