

# Crossing Out The Emperor – A Novel

## Synopsis

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The title of the novel comes from the fact of Beethoven crossing out his dedication to Napoleon on the cover of his 3<sup>rd</sup> Symphony when Napoleon declared himself Emperor of the French in 1803. As far as Beethoven was concerned, Napoleon at this point had changed into exactly the kind of autocratic tyrant that the French Revolution, of which he was a youthful supporter, had been intent on getting rid of. The above is discussed in detail towards the novel's end, *once the relevant stories have been told*.

The bulk of the novel itself tells the parallel stories of Beethoven and Napoleon's differing dénouements. Beethoven's is a dénouement of love, focussing on his *Letter To The Immortal Beloved*, an impassioned love letter Beethoven wrote, but no one knows who to – in the chapters *Telling Stories No.1* and *Telling Stories No.2* the novel tells several different stories surrounding several different women Beethoven knew who scholars have suggested might be the woman concerned. But since the *real* subject is the existence of *love* itself, rather than whom the recipient of that love was at any given point, the scholars aren't taken too seriously.

Napoleon's dénouement is the dénouement of his March on Russia, with all its triumphalism of intent and ignominy of defeat, and his secret undercover escape from the Tsar's clutches described in the chapter *Incognito*.

Beethoven's emotional tumult and generosity of spirit in love, and Napoleon's increasingly rapid decline into despotic desperation are contrasted throughout, partly through the differing natures of their eroticism, and partly through the testimony of Joséphine (whom Napoleon divorced in 1810), which starts the novel.

How people – in this case Beethoven and Napoleon - cope with triumph and disaster, personal tragedy and loss, is the novel's real subject. Beethoven's personal triumph over deafness (analysed for cause and effect in the chapter *Heiligenstadt*), that he managed to compose despite everything, is contrasted with Napoleon's political megalomania, which, through constant over reaching, actually destroys any military or political triumphs he ever achieved.

Chapters focussing on Napoleon and Beethoven alternate throughout. What is achieved, quite apart from a detailed character analysis of both men in adversity, and the telling of many a tale both romantic and military, is an engaging intermingling of both personal and political histories focussing around the year 1812, the year of Napoleon's March on Russia itself. Implicit is the question, *which matters most?*

The ultimate triumph is Beethoven's. Rather than accept that Beethoven wrote his *Letter To The Immortal Beloved* to any one woman, the novel ends by listing all the possible candidates, and concludes he loved them all.