

In a way, contends Doherty, a professor of American studies at Brandeis University, Spiegelman was turning the Nazis' own view of art against them.

Nazism was not only a force in history but an aesthetic stance, critics such as Hans-Jurgen Syberberg have maintained. The Nazis condemned abstract impressionism and other "degenerate art," and insisted that art should celebrate perfection in form. This vision was expressed most vividly in such films as *Triumph of the Will* (1935), a documentary of the 1934 Nazi Party Congress at Nuremberg, in which filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl "worshipfully frames the haloed faces of beatific *Hitlerjugend* and fanatic Labor Service workers."

The Nazis regularly consigned the Jews to the "lower" visual medium of the cartoon, which they regarded as a valuable propaganda tool. "The pivotal inspiration for Spiegelman's cat and mouse gamble," Doherty writes, "was the visual stereotypes of Third Reich symbology, the hackwork from the

mephistoes at [Joseph] Goebbels's Reichsministry and Julius Streicher's venomous weekly *Der Stürmer*—the anti-Semitic broadsheets and editorial cartoons depicting Jews as hook-nosed, beady-eyed *Untermenschen*, creatures whose ferret faces and rodent snouts marked them as human vermin." Spiegelman's anthropomorphized mice carry traces of *Der Stürmer*'s anti-Semitic Jew-as-rat cartoons, the artist himself has said, "but by being particularized they are invested with personhood; they stand upright and affirm their humanity."

Against the vivid newsreel footage of the Nazi death camps, with their emaciated survivors, heaps of corpses, and children with serial numbers tattooed on their arms, it is all but impossible for the visual artist to compete, Doherty notes. One way is to resurrect "the impressionist techniques censored by the Nazis" and use them to show Nazism's horrors. "Working from a lowbrow rung of the ladder of art," that is what Spiegelman successfully did.

## *A Friend Speaks. . .*

"What do you think of the *New Yorker* now?" Martha Davis Beck, associate editor of *Hungry Mind Review* (Spring 1996), asked novelist and long-time *New Yorker* contributor John Updike.

*I think the New Yorker is worth trying to save, and clearly any magazine changes; the New Yorker itself changed quite a lot in the course of its pre-Tina [Brown] years. Maybe she is more like Harold Ross, and it is now more like Ross's magazine than the long [William] Shawn interim. Under Shawn it was a literary publication that nevertheless attracted advertisers and had a fair amount of revenue to disperse to writers, who indeed created and supported it—a whole stable of writers. . . .*

*[Whatever] else it is at this point, it's not a magazine that's offering itself as a seedbed for literature. It will print writers who have a name, and it will bring on a few splashy younger ones, but the old one was so nurturing. I mean, they ran so much fiction—they ran at least two and sometimes three stories an issue. And you felt it was a real trade, an honest trade. You made a thing which you could sell. And that's not a bad way to be a writer. There has to be some connection to the market. You have to make a living, you have to feed your children. So I'm sorry to see that particular cultural slot go.*

## *Nocturne for the Duke*

"The Duke's Blues" by Stanley Crouch, in *The New Yorker* (Apr. 29 and May 6, 1996), 20 W. 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

Duke Ellington (1899–1974) maintained an orchestra for nearly a half-century—

longer than any other Western composer. (The orchestra that Prince Esterházy of

Austria provided in the 18th century for Franz Joseph Haydn lasted only 29 years.) But critics have often said that after Ellington's "greatest period," 1940–42, there was a falling off, that he exceeded the limits of his talent in his later, more extended compositions. Crouch, a New York writer and critic, begs to differ.

Ellington wrote and recorded hundreds of compositions and arrangements between 1924 and 1973, and, Crouch argues, they "make the case for their creator as the most protean of American geniuses," whose achievements in music rival those, in other media, of Herman Melville, Ernest Hemingway, Fred Astaire, and Frank Lloyd Wright.

Like Bach and Handel, Crouch says, Ellington "was an inveterate recycler." He extended earlier brief melodies, written in the 78-rpm era, into 15-minute masterpieces such as "Tattooed Bride" (1948). His earlier "tonal portraits" of uptown New York—including "Echoes of Harlem," "Harmony in Harlem," and "Harlem Speaks"—evolved into the 14-minute "Harlem" (1950), which was his favorite longer work. "It is one of Ellington's most thorough and masterly explorations of blues harmony," Crouch says.

"It is true," the author admits, "that the early '40s were a kind of golden period for the Ellington Orchestra. In 1939, Ellington had brought the marvelous composing talent of Billy Strayhorn into the organization and was soon rewarded with Strayhorn's 'Take the A Train.'" About the same time, bassist Jimmy

Blanton and tenor saxophonist Ben Webster joined the Ellington organization and were prominently featured in such classics as "Jack the Bear" and "Cotton Tail."

But Ellington's sensibility was always the determining one—"which is why the music maintained its identity through so many changes in the players, no matter how strong their individual personalities," Crouch points out. The Afro-Hispanic and exotic rhythms from around the world that Ellington explored in such Blanton-Webster classics as "Conga Brava" and "The Flaming Sword" were "the basis for such greater works in the '60s and '70s as "Afro-Bossa," "The Far East Suite," and "The Togo Brava Suite." Ellington also brought "new authority and depth" in his later years to his arrangement of popular songs, Crouch says.

The finest European concert musicians are expected to get better with middle age, Crouch says, but jazz musicians are supposed to decline after they leave youth behind. "In fact," he maintains, "Ellington's greatest band existed not in the '40s but between 1956 and 1968. . . . Beginning in the middle '50s, what he got from Johnny Hodges, Paul Gonsalves, Harry Carney, Lawrence Brown, Ray Nance, Cootie Williams, Russell Procope, Jimmy Hamilton, and the others could only have been achieved by men who had lived beyond 40 or 50." By then, they had developed a matchless intimacy with their horns, and had experienced most of the joys and sorrows of life. "It's all in their playing," he says.

## OTHER NATIONS

### *China's Slaughter of Innocents*

*A Survey of Recent Articles*

*This baby girl . . . is now 100 days old. . . . She is in good health and has never suffered any illness. Due to the current political situation and heavy pressures that are too difficult to explain, we, who were her parents for these first days, cannot continue taking care of her. We can only hope that in this world there is a kind-hearted person who will care for her. Thank you. —In regret and shame, your father and mother.*

—A note left with an infant born in 1992 and abandoned in China's Hunan Province

In the past few years, the coercive and inhumane nature of China's population control policy has become impossible to

deny. The policy has met with widespread resistance in China, especially from peasant women, who, despite the threat of heavy