

damentally conservative position . . . toward the political, social, and artistic movements of the 1960s," he argues, acknowledging

them in such a way as to place them in time and history and lay them—prematurely, he believes—to rest.

Mr. Lowell's Universe

"Robert Lowell's Poems and Other People's Prose" by Michael Milburn, in *New England Review* (Fall 1995), Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vt. 05753.

The poet Robert Lowell (1917–77) disdained the earnest critics "sleuthing down my plagiarisms," but the fact is that, to a very unusual extent, he persistently appropriated the prose of others for his own purposes. Throughout his career, writes Milburn, a poet who teaches in Connecticut, Lowell "would incorporate not only his own prose and that of his friends and family, but the words of writers as diverse as [Jonathan] Edwards, Herman Melville, Henry David Thoreau, William Cobbett, and Lord Kenneth Clark, into original poems by Robert Lowell."

In "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" (published in *Lord Weary's Castle* [1947])—Lowell's "first fully realized and perhaps most enduring achievement as an artist"—the poet not only drew his setting and much of his imagery from Melville's *Moby Dick* but freely incorporated a shipwreck scene from Thoreau's 1865 travel book, *Cape Cod*. Thoreau wrote:

The brig St. John, from Galway, Ireland, laden with emigrants, was wrecked on Sunday morning; it was now Tuesday morning and the sea was still breaking violently on the rocks. . . . I saw many marble feet and matted heads . . . [and] the coiled up wreck of a human hulk, gashed by the rocks or fishes, so that the bone and muscle were exposed, but quite bloodless—merely red and white—with wide-open and staring eyes, yet lusterless, deadlights; or like the cabin windows of a stranded vessel, filled with sand.

Lowell wrote:

A brackish reach of shoal off Madaket,—
The sea was still breaking violently and night
Had steamed into our North Atlantic Fleet,
When the drowned sailor clutched the drag-net. Light
Flashed from his matted head and marble feet,
He grappled at the net
With the coiled, hurdling muscles of his thighs:
The corpse was bloodless, a botch of reds and whites,
Its open, staring eyes
Were lusterless dead-lights
Or cabin windows on a stranded hulk
Heavy with sand.

"No poet since [T. S.] Eliot has so successfully turned a taste for literature into literature," Milburn says. "For Lowell, reading, particularly the reading of history and the classics, was experience"—and as such, just "as worthy of mining for poetry as his own life." Lowell, whose mental health was precarious, seemed to need prose "to enable him to give full expression to his temperament. Prose released the visionary in him."

His prose appropriations "invigorated both the story and structure of Lowell's early poems." Alas, Milburn says, the technique crippled his later poetry, in such works as *For the Union Dead* (1964) and *Day by Day* (1977), "with inappropriate subjects, unmusical language, and an overabundance of factual data."

Deifying the Duke

"(Over)praising Duke Ellington" by Terry Teachout, in *Commentary* (Sept. 1996), 165 E. 56th St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

No one questions the greatness of Duke Ellington (1899–1974), but the nature of his greatness is now at the center of a debate that also touches on issues of race and culture in America.

On one side is a small band of critics, including essayist Stanley Crouch, who have challenged the critical consensus on the

composer and bandleader. The standard view is that Ellington's post-World War II output was much less successful than the music he produced during the late 1930s and early '40s, and that he was not at his best in extended compositions. Crouch argues that Ellington and his orchestra were at their peak in the 1950s and '60s, when he was chiefly

‘Dirty Harry’ Surrenders

Frank Lentricchia, who teaches literature at Duke University and was once called the “Dirty Harry of literary theory” because of his assaults on convention, tells in *Lingua Franca* (Sept.–Oct. 1996) why he’s turned in his gun.

I once managed to live for a long time, and with no apparent stress, a secret life with literature. Publicly, in the books I’d written and in the classroom, I worked as an historian and polemicist of literary theory, who could speak with passion, and without noticeable impediment, about literature as a political instrument. I once wrote that the literary word was like a knife, a hammer, a gun. I became a known and somewhat colorfully controversial figure, regularly excoriated in neo-conservative laments about the academy.

The secret me was me-the-reader, in the act of reading: an experience in which the words of someone else filled me up and made it irrelevant to talk about my reading; an experience that I’d had for as long as I can remember being a reader. . . .

Over the last 10 years, I’ve pretty much stopped reading literary criticism, because most of it isn’t literary. But criticism it is of a sort—the sort that stems from the sense that one is morally superior to the writers that one is supposedly describing. This posture of superiority is assumed when those writers represent the major islands of Western literary tradition, the central cultural engine—so it goes—of racism, poverty, sexism, homophobia, and imperialism: a cesspool that literary critics would expose for mankind’s benefit. Just what it would avail us to learn that Flaubert was a sexist is not clear. It is impossible, this much is clear, to exaggerate the heroic self-inflation of academic literary criticism.

To be certified as an academic literary critic, you need to believe, and be willing to assert, that Ezra Pound’s Cantos, a work twice the length of Paradise Lost, and which 99 percent of all serious students of literature find too difficult to read, actually forwards the cause of worldwide anti-Semitism. You need to tell your students that, despite what almost a century’s worth of smart readers have concluded, Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness is a subtle celebration of the desolations of imperialism. My objection is not that literary study has been politicized, but that it proceeds in happy indifference to, often in unconscionable innocence of, the protocols of literary competence.

occupied with the multimovement suites critics deemed inferior. (See WQ, Summer ’96, pp. 134–135.) On the other side are those, such as Teachout, *Commentary*’s music critic and a former professional jazz musician, who defend the consensus view. He believes that Crouch and his allies are exaggerating Ellington’s greatness, in part out of a misguided impulse toward racial mythologizing and in part out of musical ignorance.

Aside from piano lessons for a few months when he was seven years old, Ellington had no formal schooling in music, Teachout says. But within a few years of his emergence as a bandleader in the 1920s, the full extent of his talent became strikingly evident. Composing directly “on” his band, using it as a laboratory in which he taught himself to orchestrate, Ellington produced and recorded many scores of remarkable originality, including “Black

and Tan Fantasy” (1927) and “The Mooche” (1928). “By the mid-’30s, the Ellington band was consistently producing some of the finest music in jazz, and from 1940 to 1942, Ellington turned out a steady stream of compositions, among them ‘Ko-Ko,’ ‘Concerto for Cootie,’ ‘Harlem Air Shaft,’ and ‘Warm Valley’ (all from 1940), which were justly hailed as masterpieces,” Teachout notes.

By then, however, he argues, Ellington’s “fertile musical imagination had in certain ways outstripped his homemade technique” of orchestration. As his scores became more complex, he started to use assistants who “‘extracted’ instrumental parts from his rough sketches. This practice continued in varying degrees throughout Ellington’s life . . . as did his reliance on collaborators, both acknowledged and anonymous.”

Billy Strayhorn, with whom Ellington

worked closely starting in 1939, had extensive formal training in music. Strayhorn got full composing credit for some of the Ellington band's best-known recordings, including "Take the 'A' Train" and "Chelsea Bridge" (both 1941), and collaborated on many other works—"a fact Ellington himself admitted far more readily than did many of his admirers," says Teachout. Crouch, he adds, has given Ellington sole credit for several joint Ellington-Strayhorn compositions.

"Part of what led Ellington to employ better-trained musical collaborators," Teachout says, "was his own lack of technical assurance—the same thing that led him, in gen-

eral, to shun longer forms." Most of Ellington's so-called extended works, the author maintains, "are actually suites whose purported structural unity is more a matter of clever titling (*The Perfume Suite*, *A Drum Is a Woman*) than anything else, and which are extremely uneven in musical quality."

While all of Ellington's long pieces "contain passages of great beauty and originality, none—with the possible exceptions of *Reminiscing in Tempo* and *The Tattooed Bride*—can be said to 'work' structurally," Teachout argues. To refuse to acknowledge Ellington's limitations, he concludes, is only to diminish his true achievements.

OTHER NATIONS

Is Pakistan Coming Apart?

A Survey of Recent Articles

Nearly a half-century after it emerged from the Partition of 1947 as a new nation, Pakistan may be in danger of becoming another Bosnia. The government in Islamabad, writes Christopher O. Hurst, a researcher at California State University at San Bernardino, "must now contend with peoples who feel far greater allegiance to their ethnic homeland than to the concept of a greater Pakistan."

When the Indian subcontinent was partitioned, and the Muslim-majority areas were combined to form Pakistan, the hope of M. A. Jinnah (1876–1948) and the other founding fathers was that, though the government was not to be a theocracy, the common Muslim identity would hold the country together. "Islam is a powerful force in Pakistan," Hurst writes in *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (Apr.–June 1996), "but pleas for Islamic unity have done little to prevent . . . ethnic and sectarian conflict." Such pleas certainly didn't prevent East Pakistan, geographically separated by India from the rest of Pakistan, from breaking away in 1971 to become Bangladesh. Indeed, that successful secession inspired other separatist movements in Pakistan—and steeled Islamabad's resolve to suppress them.

Pakistan's population of 128 million includes five major ethnic groups: the Punjabis (62 million) in the northeast, the Pashtuns (17

million) in the northwest, the Baluchs (three million) in the southwest, the Sindhis (17 million) in the southeast, and the Muhajirs, an "umbrella" group made up primarily of immigrants from India and their descendants, most of whom live in the Sindh region.

Ironically, in light of some Western observers' fears of Islamic "fundamentalism," religious political parties have never had much success with the Pakistani electorate. In the October 1993 election, the religious parties obtained only three seats in the 237-member National Assembly.

That same 1993 election returned Benazir Bhutto and her Pakistan People's Party to power after three years in opposition. Last November, however, President Farooq Leghari dismissed Prime Minister Bhutto and dissolved the National Assembly, accusing her government of corruption, financial mismanagement, and involvement in political violence. New elections are to be held in February.

Ethnic conflict, though not the cause of Bhutto's downfall, is at the root of many of Pakistan's political troubles today, and the worst trouble spot is the southeast industrial city of Karachi and the surrounding Sindh region. There, reports Ahmed Rashid, a correspondent for the *Far Eastern Economic Review* and London's *Daily Telegraph*, writing in *Current History* (Apr. 1996), Muhajirs