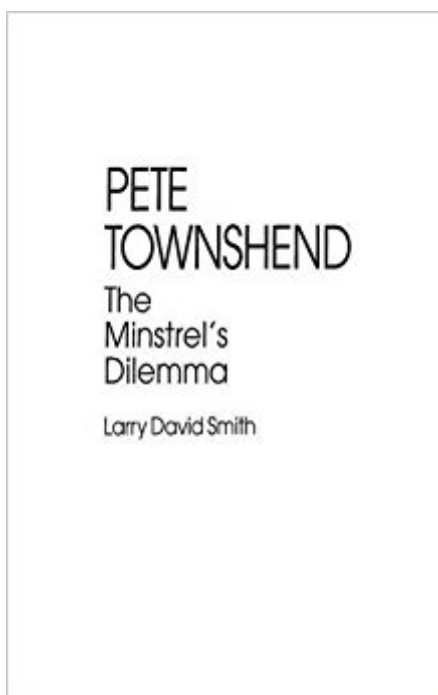


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# Pete Townshend: A Minstrel's Dilemma



## Synopsis

Smith explores Pete Townshend's artistic struggle between his own creative impulses and those of the commercial public. Faced with a modern version of the minstrel's dilemma, Townshend, early in his career, ignored his creative instincts to satisfy commercial agendas. After his success, he slowly withdrew to resolve his conflict between creativity and commercialism. Townshend's creative vision unfolds against the conflicts and compromises battled with the entertainment industry. A common theme, that of the seeker, weaves throughout the various phases of Townshend's career and highlights his own quest for complete artistic expression free from compromise. In *The Minstrel's Dilemma*, Townshend is shown as a musician confronting the same battles begun by early minstrels and later fought by composers such as Beethoven and Mozart. He is referred to as a rock auteur, creating music that reflects his personal experiences and creative views. He is called a seeker, in search of artistic freedom toward personal expression. And at the end of his thirty-year struggle he is a true artist, able to live up to audience expectation while attending to his own artistic impulses.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this critical biography of Pete Townshend, Smith (Purdue Univ.) explores a struggle between the artist and the commercial public he refers to as the "minstrel's dilemma." Early in his career as songwriter and leader of The Who, Townshend was forced by his management and the media to choose between his creative instincts and selling millions of records to the music consumers of the mid-1960s. Using anecdotes from Townshend's life, interviews with his subject and others, as well as extensive analysis of Townshend's song lyrics, short stories, and autobiography, Smith

meticulously traces Townshend's career, personal development, and the effect of the minstrel's dilemma on him. Smith divides the book into three sections, covering Townshend's professional problems, his early days with The Who as a songwriter and then as a creator of the rock opera, and his solo work as a recording artist, musical theater composer, and short story writer. Recommended for fans and for academic libraries with popular culture and music collections. ALisa N. Johnston, Sweet Briar Coll. Lib., VA Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"Larry David Smith's new book recognizes Pete Townshend as a 'rock auteur.' It is an excellent and extensive academic study of Mr. Townshend's personal artist's dilemma....The book...leaves us with a warm and healthy understanding of Pete Townshend, his work and career, and an honest desire to follow the artist's future projects in multimedia musical theater."-Text and Performance Quarterly  
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Okay - if you're a major Pete Townshend fan, you're gonna' want this book. But be prepared - it reads like a decent dissertation topic larded with heavy dollops of pop psych and repetition to get it up to acceptable book-length. (One example: Smith questions throughout why Daltrey kept singing Townshend's increasingly-personal and introspective songs. As if Daltrey had any real choice - a point Smith himself makes near the end of the book when he quotes Daltrey expressing his gratitude to Townshend, without whom he would have been "a factory worker.") Townshend is a genius who has spoken so eloquently for himself, to God and to anyone else who cared to listen, for more than 30 years. Sadly, though Smith relates lots of incidents and quotes tons of lyrics, it's as if he can't get a bead on the the music ... or the man.

It's great to finally see such a balanced view of Pete Townshend's career as a songwriter. This book certainly isn't for everyone, but for anyone interested in post-war popular music, and definitely for Who/Townshend fans, it's worth taking a look at. Smith's academic presentation may be a bit cumbersome at times, but generally his adherence to a narrative structure and even-handed

presentation of Pete's oeuvre wins the day. "No other artist in history of popular music has achieved the artistic scope of Pete Townshend's career," Mr. Smith concludes. Amen to that.

A brilliant exploration of Townshend's ideas and longings. This book is entirely refreshing--neither a pop bio nor an academic treatise, but something better. Gives us real insights into a serious songwriter's vision. A balanced view of the business and the art behind one man's maneuverings. Required reading for those who take rock seriously.

What a thoroughly enlightening enticing read! I'd never realized the utter depth, magnitude and complexity of the foremost songwriter/poet of our times. THIS IS A MUST READ for any fans of rock music as well as any fans of the infamous WHO. THANK YOU PETE TOWNSHEND FOR YOUR GUITAR AND YOUR PEN!!!!!!

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