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“Bringing me to where I am”: Jazz Autobiography in Context

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Thesis submitted for the award of Ph.D at Middlesex University

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Julia and Dennis Farrington, and to Martin, without whom I would never have got this far.

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Abstract

Jazz autobiography is an area largely unexplored in current academic discourse: a scattering of articles and chapters in textbooks on jazz or African-American autobiography is all we have. Yet jazz and the literature of jazz, whether fiction, biography or autobiography, play a crucial role in American twentieth-century culture. Historically, the roots of jazz and of African-American music-making and performance culture are vitally important to American studies. This thesis draws together text and music, jazz autobiography and jazz performance, to suggest the impossibility of reading one without the other. In doing so, it draws on almost four hundred years of musical history in the Americas, and on more than thirty autobiographies by American jazz musicians.

The primary focus of the first two chapters is the history of jazz in North America. This is discussed from a socio-cultural perspective. Specific musical traits are considered in terms of the development of a distinctive musical persona, which might or might not then transmute onto the autobiographical self in jazz writing. The next three chapters consider this autobiographical self as found primarily in African-American jazz autobiography, and there is a focus here on African-American cultural and literary criticism. Following on from this, the thesis moves to its concluding chapter, a bringing together of jazz music and jazz text (both autobiographical and fictional) to finalise the place of jazz in American history, literature, music and culture.

Introduction

A 'jazz autobiography' is considered within the terms of this thesis to be an autobiography written by, or with some involvement from, a jazz musician. A crucial aspect of jazz autobiography is the consideration of the jazz autobiography as a hybrid text: one in which multiple selves (for example, ghostwriter, protagonist and editor) may be revealed.¹ Jazz autobiography will be approached from an American Studies perspective. This is an interdisciplinary approach which places equal emphasis on literature, music and history. As such, the thesis will highlight the importance of recognising the diverse strands which form the jazz autobiography: music and the history of jazz, African-American literary tradition, autobiographical constructs and narrative theory. The word 'jazz' will be used generically to refer to the field of music which is characterised by syncopation, polyrhythms, and chromaticism, and is of black American origin. Jazz is normally instrumental, without the presence of a vocal line, and utilises instruments such as the trumpet, piano and double bass. 'Blues', characterised in the mid to late twentieth century by an emphasis on vocal rather than instrumental lines, will be used when it is necessary to refer to particular musicians generally thought of as 'blues' singers, such as Billie Holiday, whose autobiography will be discussed later. In chapter one, there will be some further discussion of both the differences and parallel developments between jazz and blues. In recent years, the distinction between the two has become somewhat blurred, and as such the word 'jazz' can be assumed, within the

¹ Questions surrounding the authorship of the jazz autobiography, including the presence of the ghostwriter, will be examined in chapter three

boundaries of the subject of this thesis, to refer to both jazz and blues.

Why jazz autobiography?

There are three main reasons for this study: to counter speculation, to rescue the jazz autobiography from obscurity, and to place the genre securely in context, both theoretical and historical. As David W. Megill and Paul O.W. Tanner claim in their study *Jazz Issues: A Critical History*, '[t]rying to recreate the actual blend of musical cultures from which jazz emerged leads to a great deal of speculation.'² This 'speculation' results in the need to establish a revised theory of jazz history, which informs understanding of jazz autobiography. This is achieved in a number of ways, including a reading of jazz history as a music derived from a blend of African and European sources and quintessentially African-American in character, the negotiation of various theories of jazz history and the importance of the sociological approach, as outlined by LeRoi Jones.³

As this thesis concentrates primarily on texts by African-American musicians, the racial authenticity of jazz autobiographies is also investigated, with the suggestion that racial belonging both informs and structures these texts. The presence of both a hybrid authorship and what is termed the 'jazz fraternity' are acknowledged, and an examination of narrative type and style is undertaken. Autobiographies by Billie Holiday, Nina Simone, Miles Davis and Charles Mingus are discussed in terms of gender, and an examination of the presence of racism within the jazz world, and the impact of this on the content and style of the texts, is also assessed.

² Megill and Tanner, 7

³ Jones, LeRoi, *Blues People* (1963; Edinburgh: Payback, 1995)

Jazz autobiography has been hitherto neglected, evident for example in the fact that the genre is mentioned in only a small number of articles or chapters in books. Where these references do exist, however, they have proved invaluable. In particular, Kathy Ogren's "'Jazz Isn't Just Me': Jazz Autobiographies as Performance Personas"⁴ and Christopher Harlos' 'The Jazz Life-Text: Autobiography and Biography in Jazz Art'⁵ have been useful. A particularly helpful recent source of information was Ajay Heble's *Landing on the Wrong Note: Jazz, Dissonance, and Critical Practice*⁶ which contains a useful chapter on jazz autobiography. The relationship of this thesis to previous work in the field is crucial to an appreciation of the need for such an investigation. As has been previously stated, there is a clear need for a full-length study of jazz autobiography. Three strands are combined here to attempt to fill this space: music, literary criticism and autobiographical criticism (all with an African-American bias). Seminal texts in these areas also discuss issues of gender, editing and self identity, and as such the writing of this thesis was an interdisciplinary project.

Until Hazel Carby's *Race Men* (1998)⁷, which dedicates part of a chapter to *Miles*, the autobiography by Miles Davis, there had been little work in the field of African-American jazz autobiography, aside from the two chapters mentioned previously. Despite various general theories of African-American autobiography such as Kenneth Mostern's *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics* (1999) and Crispin Sartwell's *Act Like You Know: African-American Autobiography and White Identity*

⁴ in Buckner, R.T., and Weiland, S. (eds.), *Jazz In Mind: Essays on the History and Meanings of Jazz* (Detroit: Wayne State U P, 1991), pp.112-127

⁵ in Gabbard, Krin, *Representing Jazz* (Durham: Duke U P, 1995) pp.134-161

⁶ Heble, Ajay, *Landing on the Wrong Note: Jazz, Dissonance, and Critical Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2000)

⁷ Carby, Hazel, *Race Men* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1998)

(1998)⁸, there are still no specific theories of jazz autobiography. African-American literature may be a well-established field, but these jazz autobiographies form a vital part of that field, and this is a fact that is often neglected.

There are problems of availability with some of the texts, as they are out of print, but a resurgence of interest is indicated by the fact that Sidney Bechet's 1961 autobiography *Treat It Gentle* was republished in April 2002, in a new edition. Renewed interest is also indicated by the publication of Louis Armstrong's previously unpublished autobiographical writings.⁹ This new interest in jazz autobiography probably stems from the fact that it is a source not only of African-American history, but also of culture, language and musical tradition. It is clear that consideration of African-American literary traditions, particularly autobiographical, and of musical histories, must include some reference to these texts. Sadly, biographers of jazz musicians have long taken one of two paths: either completely dismissing the jazz autobiography as factually unsound and the sole product of a ghostwriter, or relying on it totally for their own source material.¹⁰ Neither of these approaches results in a useful biography: to ignore autobiographical material simply because it is the result of a collaboration fails to highlight the intriguing relationship between the authors, and to rely solely on what is may be construed as fictional or fantasy material is clearly erroneous. These autobiographies are not a substitute for biographies, nor are they a basis for them: they are texts written in specific situations for specific readerships by specific collaborators,

⁸ Mostern, Kenneth, *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 1999) and Sartwell, Crispin, *Act Like You Know: African American Autobiography and White Identity* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998)

⁹ *Louis Armstrong. In His Own Words: Selected Writings* (edited and with an introduction and appendix by Thomas Brothers) (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999)

and should be treated as such.

A range of methods were employed during the researching and writing of this study of jazz autobiography. Important primary sources including slave narratives, travel journals of white Americans and music manuscripts were located in the British Library. Sound recordings and oral history interviews such as those conducted by Alan Lomax¹¹ were also accessed at the National Sound Archive of the British Library. These investigations were complemented by visits to two main archives: the *National Theatre Museum* at Covent Garden, which aided in the section on minstrelsy, and the *National Jazz Foundation Archive* at Loughton Library, Essex, which holds a large stock of jazz journals and fanzines. Whilst many of the ghostwriters and/ or editors involved in the publications of these jazz autobiographies are deceased, it was possible to interview Alyn Shipton¹², who provided source material, including transcripts of interviews with Danny Barker and Doc Cheatham.

This thesis consists of six chapters, with an accompanying cassette. The first two

¹⁰ The former approach is taken by Stuart Nicholson, who claims of *Lady Sings the Blues* that 'it is a book that lacks humanity' (Nicholson, 207) and the latter by John White, who contends that it is 'every bit as revealing as Malcolm X's life story' (White, 11)

¹¹ *The Library of Congress Recordings* (vols. one, two and three) (British Library: National Sound Archive, 1LP0070028, 1LP0070029, 1LP0070030)

chapters include a historical examination of African-American music in North America. from the earliest recorded presence of music amongst the slaves of the New World in the 18th century, to the beginnings of jazz in the early twentieth century and the emergence of Buddy Bolden, 'the most powerful trumpet player...ever heard'.¹³

Chapter one proposes various definitions for the terms to be used in the thesis, including an assessment of the racial terminology 'African-American', 'black' and 'white'. Norman Mailer's 'white Negro' or 'hipster' figure, plays an important role here. Other theorists including LeRoi Jones, Henry Louis Gates, Samuel A. Floyd, and Ben Sidran are also discussed. Of particular importance here are Jones and Floyd, the former opting for a sociological and the latter for an aesthetic focus in their own histories of jazz. The structure of the first two chapters is largely chronological, the first spanning from the beginnings of black music in America to worksong, and the second dealing with the spirituals, blues and jazz. Sociological aspects of history which directly influence the direction the music has taken are of great importance: in particular, the relationship between Christianity and slavery is examined in detail.

Following this, chapters three and four begin the discussion and analysis of jazz autobiography, based on the terms defined in the previous chapter. The chronological boundaries of this discussion are Louis Armstrong's *Swing That Music* (1936) and Teddy Wilson's *Teddy Wilson Talks Jazz* (1996). These chapters constitute an investigation into the complexities of the genre. The concept of 'jazz autobiography' is the first definition achieved, followed by an investigation into 'blackness' and

¹² Shipton is the editor of Danny Barker's *A Life in Jazz* (London: Macmillan, 1986) and Adolphus 'Doc' Cheatham's *I Guess I'll Get the Papers and Go Home: The Life of Doc Cheatham* (London: Cassell, 1995)

¹³ Jelly Roll Morton, Library of Congress Recordings, 1938 (1LP0070029)

'whiteness' within these texts. Definitions of race lead to the construction of what is termed a 'hybrid text', based on Donna Haraway's seminal 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' (1980).¹⁴ Comparison of jazz autobiography by white and black musicians raises further questions of identity and definition; these include the construction of racial polarities by white authors, and the subsequent difficulties involved in reading objectively. Narrative theory is also important to this discussion, focusing on David Danow's three constructs of epic, labyrinth and mythic autobiography.¹⁵

Chapter five examines the jazz autobiography the perspective of gender. The relationship between jazz and sexuality is examined through analysis of four autobiographies, those by Miles Davis, Billie Holiday, Charles Mingus and Nina Simone. Alongside feminist criticism by established writers such as Joanne Braxton and Angela Davis¹⁶, sociological criticism of the black male by Kenneth Clatterbaugh and Jewelle Taylor Gibbs is also evaluated.¹⁷ This latter area represents a fairly new area of research and has proven invaluable in reading male jazz autobiography, which often deals very frankly with sexual imagery and dominance.

Chapter six considers the relationship between jazz music and jazz text, stemming from the 'jazzy prose' theory of Alan Rice's 1994 article 'Jazzing it up a Storm' (Rice, 1994) and applying this to jazz autobiography itself. Theories of improvisation are studied in addition to this, in an attempt to evaluate these links

¹⁴ Haraway, Donna J., 'A Manifesto For Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', in Gail Kirkup, Linda James, Kathryn Woodward and Fiona Hovenden, eds., *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), 50-57

¹⁵ Danow, David K., *Models of Narrative: Theory and Practice* (London: Macmillan, 1997)

¹⁶ Braxton, Joanne, *Black Women Writing Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1989); Davis, Angela Y., *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday* (New York: Vintage, 1998)

between music and text. The autobiographical writings of Louis Armstrong form a case study of the relationship between audience, music and text. Finally, the expectations of the audiences for these autobiographies is considered, alongside their eventual reactions to them. The conclusion considers the place of the jazz autobiography within jazz history, African-American literature and North American society.

To sum up, this thesis will argue that the long-neglected genre of jazz autobiography is in fact a rich and fascinating source of musical, literary and cultural life in Twentieth Century North America. It will reveal the links between jazz and prose, and propose an updated reading of the jazz text. In addition, it seeks to demythologise the life of the African-American jazz musician, and, to paraphrase Sidney Bechet, bring us to where they are.

¹⁷ Clatterbaugh, Kenneth, 'African American Men: The Challenge of Racism', in Cohen, Theodore F. ed., *Men and Masculinity: A Text Reader* (California: Wadsworth, 2001), 409-21; Gibbs, Jewelle Taylor, ed.,

Chapter One: Jazz History in Context From Beginnings to the Worksong

An introduction to the problems posed by contextualising jazz

What terms can be used for analysing jazz? *The Concise Oxford History of Music* describes 'jazz' as 'a word for which too many origins have been found for any of them to be credible' (Abraham, 245) and after any investigation it quickly becomes clear that it is not only the linguistic history which is impossible to locate. The word 'jazz' itself may have come from the French 'jaser', whose translation is 'clatter', but this is only guesswork. It may well have had a rather different, more sexual meaning. Further, jazz is a music inextricably linked with African-American literature, culture and nature. It is a polyrhythmic music often complicated rather than simplified by criticism; and most of all it is a music whose relationship with text has created the need for new terminology. Following definitions of this new terminology, the structure of the following two chapters on the origins of jazz music will be primarily chronological, based on stages of development located within the evolution of jazz and blues. Alongside this chronology, currently available criticism will form the basis for discussion, which will include a thorough evaluation of the two main strands of jazz history criticism (namely sociological and aesthetic).

In locating definitions, racial terminology is, as may be expected, the most problematic. It is therefore worthwhile defining the terms which will be used to refer to racial distinctions. The use of 'African-American' as opposed to other commonly used terms such as 'Afro-American' throughout this text is a choice based on the understanding that most readers will be familiar with it in that form. It is also directly

Young, Black and Male in America: An Endangered Species (Massachusetts: Auburn House, 1988)

influenced by and based upon the sociologist Charles Keil's definition of the word 'Negro', which can be seen as the forerunner to 'African-American'. Keil uses this term 'in connection with a way of life, a culture, and in no other sense.' (Keil, 4) . The term 'African-American' will thus be used here to refer to a person of African descent living in North America, distinct from other racial groups simply through cultural difference: it has, as Peter Kolchin's *American Slavery* suggests, 'a cultural connotation'. (Kolchin, xiii) The terms 'black' and 'white' will be used solely to refer to *physical* racial difference, as the former is now becoming an acceptable term in academic discourse to refer to persons of non-Caucasian descent.

There is of course the issue of the 'white Negro', the Caucasian who assumes the cultural characteristics of the black American. Keil makes some reference to this, which may well be a response to Norman Mailer's famous 1957 essay 'The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster'. Written partly as a result of the confusion shown towards a short newspaper article he had written earlier that year for 'The Independent', in which he claimed that white fear of the supposed 'sexual supremacy' of the Negro was the main barrier to racial equality in the South, Mailer focused on the position of whites who embrace black culture. (Mailer, 278) The essay was also partially motivated by Mezz Mezzrow, a white jazz musician who claimed to have become a 'voluntary Negro' (Wald, 119) and had written his autobiography detailing this achievement in 1946. Both the case of Mezzrow and Mailer's resultant essay allow us to consider the hipster model in more detail, with particular reference to jazz and jazz autobiography.

Marginality and essentialism flourished in American social criticism during the nineteen-fifties and sixties, nowhere more so than in jazz writing, where critical texts

focused specifically on either white or black jazz. These were seen to be two very different types of music, as evidenced by the diverse emphasis of two best-selling books of that period. Rex Harris' *Jazz* (1952) and LeRoi Jones' *Blues People* (1963). While Harris systematically divided white jazz into compartmentalised styles (Harris, 106, 'Chart Illustrating Origins and Development of Jazz'). Jones dealt with black jazz history on a purely sociological level with only two compartments, which the title of chapter five reveals to be 'slave and post-slave'. Mailer's essay can be seen as arising from the socio-cultural environment in which Harris, Jones and Mezzrow lived and wrote. 'The White Negro' also addresses a wider context of marginality and difference.

Mailer focused on the figure of the 'hipster', a white male appropriator of black culture to whom 'the Negro [has] brought the cultural dowry.' (Mailer, 285) The hipster longs to embrace those areas of black culture to which he has been hitherto denied access. In this existential 'wedding of white and black,' sexuality and criminality play a large role in his life. For example, the 'sexual potency of the Negro' which, according to Mailer's essay, the white man 'fears', becomes for the hipster an important emblem of his new sexuality, whereby he can assume sexual dominance over women. (ibid., 278) This dominance had previously been attributed only to black Americans: it was parodied, for example, by Richard Wright in his 1940 novel *Native Son* in the character of Bigger Thomas. In addition, conquest of the fear of sexual submission is mirrored in the hipster's attitude towards death, which Mailer suggests here is to 'live with death as immediate danger'. With this attitude, the criminality of the hipster reveals itself: living on the margins of society and without a fear of death, he 'encourages[s] the psychopath' in himself. (ibid., 283)

However, Mailer's hipster does not wholly misplace or misunderstand his white American origins. He is a 'white Negro': he flirts with black culture, yet finds it impossible to completely transcend the colour of his own skin. This was due, Mailer believed, to the impossibility of racial equality in America and thus to the difficulty on the part of the white man of accepting a subservient role. Around 1957, as we have seen, there was little recognition of racial similarities in jazz criticism. A study of other areas of American society would undoubtedly reveal a similar bias. Indeed, if the promised liberty and fraternity of the American dream was to occur, Mailer considered that the hipster would perish. He would no longer be able to live on the borderline between white and black, borrowing from black culture whilst maintaining the security of whiteness. If the black man was to become equal to the white man, marginality would take on a very different character, for it would be no longer racial. Indeed, Mailer argued that 'the Negro's equality would tear a profound shift into the psychology, the sexuality, and the moral imagination of every White alive'. (ibid., 300) The 'hipster' would become obsolete, as its dictionary definition now claims it as an 'outmoded word for hippie'¹⁸.

As we have seen, one of the most vivid characteristics of the hipster was his sexuality, and it is this aspect which relates most clearly to jazz. Living on the edge of society, the hipster was not afraid to express what he felt to be a potent, promiscuous, fertile sex life. Mailer himself represents the relationship between the hipster and jazz music in terms of sex: 'jazz is orgasm...[and] it spoke in no matter what laundered popular way of instantaneous existential states to which some whites could respond'. Examining one such white man's text, Jean Paul Sartre's 'Jazz in America' (1947), we

¹⁸*Collins English Dictionary*, 1992

can see the very existence of these 'instantaneous existential states' present in his experiences in a jazz club:

It is not the century-old chant of Negro slaves. Nor the sad little dream of Yankees crushed by the macherie. Nothing of the sort: there is a fat man who blows his lungs out to the weaving motion of the trumpet, there is a merciless pianist, a bass player who tortures the strings without listening to the others. They are speaking to the best part of you, the toughest, the freest, to the part which wants neither melody nor refrain, but the deafening climax of the moment. They will take hold of you, they do not lull you. Connecting rod, shaft, spinning top. They beat you, they turn, they crash, the rhythm grips you and shakes you. You bounce in your seat, faster and faster, and your girl with you, in a hellish round.' (from a 1947 article in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, quoted in Gottlieb, 711)

Sartre's experience of jazz is not an isolated example: it is quintessentially hipsteresque. He focuses on the sexual nature of the musical build-up - the 'deafening climax' after a build up of music, 'faster and faster', which is both 'merciless' and 'hellish' in its torture. His emphasis is on the present: the music does not allow Sartre to consider the past, because the past (here represented by 'Negro slaves') is coincidental to his flirtation with the black man's experiences. This merger of white and black raises some intriguing questions of definition, and of the realisation that one type of jazz history may be in complete contrast to another. The hipster's attempt to assimilate jazz without its complex history is indicative of a wider issue: the difficulty we have in assigning a racial history to jazz. If recent critics, both black and white, have found difficulty in establishing the margins on which the hipster and black jazz musician co-exist, this would explain why jazz history is so often polarised by racial oppositions. Sartre, for example, can only assimilate jazz without its history, viewing it in a totality which substitutes sexual for racial tension.

This complexity of definition is of course not unique to jazz: many other art forms also suffer from essentialist readings. But the use of Mailer's hipster model does reveal that jazz history is a particular victim, and that if we are to theorise a new history of jazz, it cannot be polarised into compartments representing physical racial difference.

Although Mailer appears suspicious of the popularisation of jazz for whites as a purely sexual and lifestyle-based choice, he does concur that definitions of race, particularly within the context of music, must by necessity deal with cultural rather than purely physical distinctions. The terms 'black' and 'white' do not translate from physical skin colour to musical prowess on the saxophone. While during the period of slavery race was defined within the basic terms of dominance (white) and subservience (black), and any concept of the latter's racial culture was underdeveloped, we can no longer deal in those terms. With the gradual emancipation of the slave during the nineteenth century, African-Americans became entitled both to an individual identity and to a participation in wider society. They were still living on the margins, but the margins were slowly encroaching on the inner circle of society, on the towns and cities of the American South. Mailer's prediction of a 'profound shift' should equality occur had in fact already begun, and the margins were more difficult to define as essentially black or white. In this way, if jazz is seen as a black music, which may be appropriated by the hipster and can become marginal, it can also be seen as a music which encapsulates the annulment of those margins.

Some studies from the period reveal the innate difficulty that the blurring of marginality held for white Americans. Indeed, the same year as Mailer's essay was published, the sociologist W.D. Weatherford proposed that 'we often treat Negroes with less respect than slaves'. (Weatherford, 17) The lines between black and white, once so clearly defined by law, had been severed. More recent sociological theories of race offer some reasoning behind this difficulty. The musicologist Brian Longhurst, for example, points out that during slavery 'blackness varied according to legal definition between

different states in the United States' (thus, for example, in Louisiana the classification for being black was 1/16 Negro heritage; in Indiana it was 1/8.) (Longhurst. 128) These once clear rules whose application defined approach to and treatment of fellow Americans were no longer valid, and physical difference between people could no longer be used as a basis for judgement. Longhurst thus opts for a sociological focus in his study of popular music because a purely aesthetic foundation is unreliable: even before emancipation, differences in state law were fairly confusing.

For the white hipster, then, it is preferable that jazz exists on the margins: there it can be flirted with and briefly experienced by whites, but it cannot straddle the boundary of racial difference. For us, however, attempting the maintenance of racial equality, jazz must reclaim its position as a cultural product rather than one which results specifically from a particular physically different racial group. Resulting from this complex model, two questions should be kept in mind which this chapter will attempt to answer. Firstly, how important is jazz's cultural history to a more meaningful understanding of jazz? And secondly, if it is in fact crucial, is there a way of reading this history which allows us to explore jazz in non-essentialist terms and contexts?

The two main theories of jazz: sociological and aesthetic: an evaluation

Jazz criticism, particularly that of a historical nature, has been highly influenced by a small number of powerful books, and the differences and divisions between these texts will be defined here. Resulting from this examination, primary sources will be utilised to establish musicological and sociological trends and events which either aid or

hamper their bias. The two areas of criticism will be termed 'sociological' and 'aesthetic'. These are flagged by two seminal texts - respectively LeRoi Jones' *Blues People* (1963) and Samuel A. Floyd's *The Power of Black Music* (1995). The former, although first published some forty years ago, is still in print, and remains an essential and comprehensive text on the social history of jazz. The endurance of Jones' argument is undoubtedly due to the constant academic interest in a sociological, mainly racial slant on African-American music, which, as has been shown above, has resulted in certain problems of essentialism. Jones' views are however still crucial to the debate. A sweeping glance over the bibliography of any jazz history text, including this one, will reveal a plethora of titles with the words 'black' and 'race' contained within. The historian Valerie Wilmer, for example, claims,

In the case of African-American music, the fact that the creators are the colonised in a colonialist society has a vital bearing on the way the music has evolved, how it is regarded by the world at large, and the way in which the artists are treated. To ignore the realities and continue to listen to the music is, to my mind, not only insulting but ignorant. (Wilmer, 1992, 14)

Wilmer's bias towards a racial perception of African-American music is fairly common: it suggests not only the importance of history (colonialism) to this perception, but also the necessity of some reference to socio-economic issues. Jones' expansion of these socio-economic issues surrounding slavery is particularly enlightening, and reveals the background to much of his work.

He suggests, firstly, that Africans lost their humanity as slaves, and, regaining their citizenship during Reconstruction, emerged as American, not as African. Their traditional African music such as drumming, which he traces as it becomes assimilated into American culture, is thus impossible to maintain. Secondly, Jones' belief in the emotional and cultural transmutation of African to American leads him to conclude that 'blues [and by implication jazz] could not exist if the African captives had not become

American captives.’ (Jones, 1963, 17) Thus Jones sets up African-American music, from worksong to jazz, as a product of slavery and of the unique situations existent in African-American society.

It must be admitted that Jones’ conclusions possess a compelling authority. For example, he declares: ‘[i]t seems possible to me that some kind of graph could be set up using samplings of Negro music proper to whatever moment of the Negro’s social history was selected, and that in each grouping of songs a certain frequency of reference could pretty well determine his social, economic, and psychological states at that particular period.’ (ibid., 65) This theory, based on fact and graph, allows for few difficulties. ‘[S]ocial history’ is easily translated into sound, and even ‘psychological states’ become evident from these samplings. A further reason why this text has maintained its hold on academia is probably that Jones’ theory requires little amplification for the unfamiliar reader: for Jones, African-American music is a direct result of social constructions. In sociological criticism such as this, history is constructed from certainties which logically react to each other. Little is uncertain or tenuous, and this makes it more attractive for the reader. In addition, Jones deals with the sociological impact of slavery up to and including late twentieth-century America, where other jazz commentators, such as Rudi Blesh, propose that the Civil War represented ‘the end of slavery’. (Blesh, 48) By allowing that the impact of slavery is still to be heard and felt in African-American music today, Jones suggests that as readers we are not isolated completely from historical events, but are connected with them securely through time. His authoritative and compelling style, combined with the presence of historical facts, has given him a hold over jazz history which is difficult to challenge. However, it

ignores any issues of essentialism which may arise from a purely racial reduction of music history. In contrast, the second strand of jazz history criticism which will be detailed involves an element of uncertainty, the aesthetic, and is as such rather less popular.

The most clear representation of this theory occurs in Samuel A. Floyd's *The Power of Black Music* (1995), whose basis is an examination of physical troping and mimicry between African and American music, as such with a primarily aesthetic focus. Floyd champions Henry Louis Gates' literary theory of the 'signifyin' monkey', and expresses the view that signifying (here transformed from Gates' wordplay to musical troping) can account exhaustively for the evolution of African-American music. Floyd's book is best read in conjunction with his essay 'African Roots of Jazz' which, also an aesthetically-based exercise, contains outlines of detailed similarities, primarily rhythmic, between African and African-American music, and in many ways updates his earlier text. The existence of an aesthetic relationship is founded on a communication between cultures: the discourse between old and new worlds. Thus, according to Floyd, specific musical tropes translate from African ritual to the jazz stage. Floyd discusses the African 'time-line concept', whereby pieces of music are composed of two or more differing rhythms, each consistent with itself throughout the performance. A consistent polyrhythmic effect is often achieved, which is in contrast to much Western 'classical' music, in which one rhythm (monorhythm) is often featured in every instrument at the same time. Floyd suggests that these polyrhythms and the 'time-line concept' 'virtually defines the rhythmic basis of African-American vernacular music and jazz.' (Floyd, 2000, 10) One example of these asymmetrical polyrhythms is the 'hemiola' effect,

whereby a part in triple time (based on a three-beat bar) is superimposed upon a part in duple (double) time (based on a two-beat bar). Although this is also found in Western 'classical' music, it is unusual for it to occur for any length of time; in African and African-American music, Floyd is claiming, this effect structures the entire piece.

The intense focus on specific African-Negro musical relationships allows Floyd to apply his theory to more diverse forms of communication. He notes, for example, that in Yoruba culture (a tribe of West African derivation), 'judgement [of performance] is consensual, shared throughout the community.' (ibid., 15) In this way he suggests a critical power common to audience and performer alike, and therefore the presence of a discourse between the two. If the power to change is to be equally distributed among performer and listener (or author and reader), the music (text) becomes a vehicle for communal expression and possession. This can be seen to directly relate to jazz performances, which are often seen by commentators as directly involving their audiences (this subject is examined in more detail in chapter six). The African performance traditions of 'indirection, argument, and opposition' (ibid., 9) which Floyd traces through to jazz also feed into this compound of power relations. While all these terms indicate struggle, the concept is of willing struggle, of banter or role-play. In this way the jumpy discourse of rhythmic asymmetry runs parallel to the perfection of a complete musical performance, and opposition, indirection and argument are self-evident. This idea certainly translates as well into musical as into literary terms. Metaphor and figure of speech in written or spoken English, which can convey double meaning and indirection, suggest the same power struggle between writer and reader as between performer and listener at a jazz concert.

While non-musicians may find some of Floyd's arguments difficult to understand, the basic concept of direct aesthetic transmission between Africa and America is clear. The basic understanding here, then, is not that American society produced African-American music, but that aesthetic aspects of the African tradition can be found in the latter today, having been transmitted orally rather than on paper. Other texts may be read in conjunction with this, such as William H. Youngren's 'European Roots of Jazz'. This concept of orality is an important factor in discussion of the evolution of jazz, and reference to a jazz text's bibliography will reveal titles including the words 'talking' and 'oral', although these will be less in number than those which are sociologically or racially motivated. The popularity of Jones' theory over Floyd's, however, does not merely stem from the *present* difficulties involved in understanding musical terminology. Examination of primary texts from slavery times will reveal that there is little reference to actual musical styles or evidence for direct aesthetic transmission, and, as such, jazz writers with less knowledge or ability than LeRoi Jones are often forced to resort to essentialist generalisations.

Problems with aesthetic theory

The musicologist O.M. Walton argues that jazz and blues 'cannot be reduced to a reaction against what white people do and have done: rather they would be more accurately conceived of as a positive form that affirms and preserves Afro-American culture.' (Walton, 34) This suggests that if we are to conceive of African-American music in non-essentialist terms, we must isolate it from racism and slavery itself. Indeed the positivity of Floyd's argument is partly to do with his lack of emphasis on the

problems of society, which Jones proposes to be so important. However, aside from this, it is important to assess whether or not we can truly assimilate African-American music without reference to slavery, and to question the validity of direct transmission not only between two countries, but also between two human conditions. Here, problems will be suggested which arise from a purely aesthetic focus on the development of African-American music, but also underline the danger in reverting to a solely sociologically-based criticism. It will be shown that both strands are necessary parts of a historical whole, yet both require constant challenges in order to prevent stagnant essentialist conclusions. Reference will be made both to slave narratives and white travellers' documents in order to glean contemporaneous opinion on the subject.

The progression from human to slave, and from slave to human, which the African-American underwent from slavery to freedom, must have altered his or her sense of performance. As slaves, men and women only had the chance to 'perform' as workers, whereas as post-emancipation musicians, audiences may well have been involved. It seems unlikely that we can simply dismiss the intervening years of slavery between African and African-American as having no effect on performance style. A brief example serves to illustrate the problem. The slave narrative of Solomon Northrup, 'Twelve Years a Slave' (1853) does refer to a performance, but a compulsory one: dancing and singing to entertain the (often drunk) owner. In a similar manner to their work during the day, full obedience is enforced: 'there must be no halting or delay, no slow or languid movement' as 'Mr Epps carried his whip in his hand.' (Northrup, quoted in Forkner, 234-5) If performance is structured by obedience then the performer becomes almost obsolete, responding only to the whim of the audience. There is a

complete lack of communication: a performance in freedom, with the knowledge of a timed beginning and a certain end, with intercourse between listener and speaker, would be very different to this. It seems unlikely that after such stressful, enforced performances, ex-slaves would be able to revert to the African sense of communality with his or her audience that Floyd describes.

While parallels may be drawn between working musicians of all ages, whose performance is structured by the need for financial gain, the majority of African slaves were never paid to work.¹⁹ For their owners, the slaves' existence as property justified their right to control and define musical performance. The white traveller William Attmore, writing in 1787, briefly comments 'I dined with Andrew Grier. After dinner saw a dance of Negroes to the Banjo in his Yard.' (Attmore, 43) This music is obviously strictly for the entertainment of the white master and his friends, and becomes a passing utterance after the lengthy description of the recipe for Egg Nog which precedes it. A further reference to this occurs in Grace King's *New Orleans: The Place and the People*, which contends that 'it was a favourite after-dinner entertainment to have the slaves come in and sing, rewarding them with glasses of wine and silver pieces.' (King, 340) King's rather self-righteous attitude is motivated here by the presence of control; this is maintained throughout her book, particularly in her suggestion that Negroes 'improvised their songs as they went along, as children do'. (ibid., 339) It is interesting to note here, as an aside, that the emphasis on improvisational composition present here, is actually similar to our twenty-first century view of the compositional technique associated with

¹⁹There was, of course, the practice of 'hiring out', whereby slaves who were trusted were able to use free time in which to work for other overseers, and were allowed to keep a small percentage of the wage. However, Peter Kolchin notes that 'because of the independence it allowed slaves, [it] was illegal in most of the South.' (Kolchin, 110)

black music, and presents a further problem with direct aesthetic transmission of musical elements from African society. William Youngren deals with this subject in his essay 'European Roots of Jazz', contending that jazz is a 'hybrid' music, formed under multiple influences, including English classical/ concert music, and thus essentially detached from its usual presentation by jazz historians as the 'inevitable expression of a particular *volkgeist* [folk spirit]'. (Youngren, 26) Youngren explains the formation of the latter view as stemming from the idea that 'collective improvisation expressed the spontaneity and communal spirit that distinguished blacks from whites' (ibid., 26); such texts as King's no doubt reinforce this, whether the analysis is factual or not. If such music is improvised at source, how can it be passed on? Clear aesthetic transmission, then, is problematic. Surely slavery will at best have dampened that 'spontaneity' which many jazz critics assert to distinguish it from white music. It is clear, then, that some reliance on slavery as influential on the development of African-American music is unavoidable. We turn back to LeRoi Jones, whose suggestion of functional transmission will now be examined.

Issues surrounding sociological theory

From an evaluation of the aesthetics of the performer and his music, it seems we are compelled to agree with Jones that the sociological *function* of that music must have altered during the turmoil of slavery and emancipation. Admittance that the function of music changed between Africa and America adds to the need for an amalgamated theory of the sociological and the aesthetic. Before we can even examine this function and begin a chronological approach to its history, however, it must be recognised that the

term 'function' has inherent problems when applied to such an art form as music. It has always proved challenging to represent music in objective terms (this concept will be examined more fully in chapter six) and words which purport to express musical effect often sound trite and strained. Brian Longhurst, whose theories we have already had recourse to, suggests the difficulty of assigning particular functions to music in quoting Peter Gulranick, who claimed 'blues is little more than a feeling. And what could be more durable or more fleeting and ephemeral than just that?' (Longhurst, 136) Gulranick's words are charged with ambiguity and some suggestion of pretentiousness, and thus he illustrates the problem of relating function to effect without projecting a highly subjective response.

This problem applies not only to Gulranick's conclusions on the blues but also to more general comparisons which attempt to find a specific place or function for many musical art forms. It is highlighted, for example, by William Kenney in his essay 'Historical Context and the Definition of Jazz'. Kenney suggests that writing about the effect of music can not only be subjective, but can also be rejected by the very musicians being discussed. Thus he points out that 'some of the musical characteristics of jazz turn up on the records of groups that rejected, sometimes emphatically, the label itself.' (Kenney, 1995, 101) This occurs, for example, in Mingus' 1971 autobiography *Beneath the Underdog*, in which he claims that '[h]earing artists like this [The Julliard Quartet playing Bartok] reminds me of my original goal but a thing called "jazz" took me far off the path and I don't know if I'll ever get back.' (Mingus, 213) Here, Mingus is not only dismissive of the label assigned to his music, but also appears resentful of the ghettoisation of his musical career which has occurred.

If musicians themselves refuse definition of the function of their music, then conceivably critics have little right to assign it. For example, Jones' attempts to compare African-American folksongs with Western 'art' music (which latter term he applies to every European musician from Bach to Wagner), appear flawed purely in their subjective sweeping generality. The statement that in 'the West, only the artefact can be beautiful, mere expression cannot be thought to be' (Jones, 1963, 30) may well be applied to court musicians such as Bach and Handel who composed both sacred and secular music purely for the pleasure of their patrons, but its application to 'the whole European tradition' is misguided. Jones' attempt to find a concrete, easily identifiable function for different types of music fails. Some aesthetic appreciation is surely necessary.

The African-American writer Ralph Ellison's critique of Jones' theory in fact highlights this problem of function, suggesting that 'any viable theory of Negro American culture obligates [sic] us to fashion a more adequate theory of American culture as a whole.' (Ellison, 253) In a similar way, then, because comparisons are being suggested between two different kinds of music by Jones, without an 'adequate theory' of the European tradition within his work, it is difficult to directly attribute and reference his conclusions to specific pieces of music. In fact, the 'traditions' of European music are generally compartmentalised by title²⁰, which, if we take them at face value, reveal vast differences in perception and intent. Borrowing Kenney's argument briefly, it is unavoidable that, for example, the 'musical characteristics' of Baroque (seventeenth century) music should 'turn up' elsewhere, although they may be

²⁰ Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Twentieth Century (sometimes referred to as Modern)

rejected as such. Ellison's wide experience of music, documented in his essay 'Living with Music', suggests just this, that 'the step from the spirituality of the spirituals to that of the Beethoven of the symphonies or the Bach of the chorales is not as vast as it seems.' (Ellison, 197) Jones' ghettoisation of function is thus difficult to accept with any certainty, and his pigeonholing of Negro music into purely functional, and not aesthetic, terms is also questioned by Ellison, who suggests that 'any effective study of the blues would treat them first as poetry and as ritual.' (ibid., 256) Ellison, although he predates Floyd, in fact combines attributes of both theories here, suggesting that the functional elements of the blues which may have stemmed from Africa (implied by his use of the word 'ritual') must be combined with the aesthetic qualities of poetry present in their words.

Indeed, returning to the subject in question and looking through early slave narratives, we find some mention of music that does not appear strictly 'functional', but instead designed for entertainment purposes, albeit at a gathering of some sort. Olaudah Equiano's narrative, for example, suggests that after a marriage in 'Guinea' (now Nigeria), there were 'songs and music suited to the occasion'. (Equiano, 143) While these may well be specifically designed for a wedding-feast, what difference exists here between these and similarly-fashioned Western songs? In both, the cause of the song is celebration, and the expressions of love contained within surely, to quote Jones, 'beautiful'. But again, we return to the fact that the difficulty of quantifying this expresses the impossibility of articulating the spoken word in text.

Thus an examination of both Jones and Floyd illustrates that a theory about the origins of jazz cannot simply rest on either a sociocultural or an aesthetic perspective.

and that it is necessary to discuss specifics rather than generalities. The terming of African-American music as purely functional and as in complete opposition to that of Europe is just as unsuccessful as the suggestion that performance techniques were whole-heartedly carried over from pre to post slavery. There are, however, elements of each theory which are crucial and while it is Jones who possesses the most factual and easily-accessible account, Floyd compels us with the suggestion that not all music can be clearly ghettoised and graded. There is clearly a need for further study in both the aesthetic and sociological relationships between African and African-American music which will inform new readings of jazz and jazz literature.

The following history is therefore an attempt to combine an awareness of the sociological implications of slavery for African-American music leading up to jazz, with a sense of the musicological impact of new rhythms, styles and voices. While musicians and recordings will appear in roughly chronological order, they will also be referred to in more general terms. Primary sources will likewise appear in a roughly chronological order; these will include the reading of travel documents of white slave owners alongside black slave narratives, and collections of folksongs by white collectors such as Alan and John Lomax, and those of Newman Ivey White. Music in Africa, particularly West Africa, by necessity forms the beginning of my discussion: at the very start of transatlantic slavery.

The beginnings: transmission of instruments and song

Any discussion of the origins of African-American music requires a theory of inter-continental transmission, as in assessing the influence of African music on the

music of African-American slaves, it is important to reference the possibilities of this. As we have seen, these possibilities are both sociological and aesthetic. A simple method of locating parallel melodic and harmonic structures between Africa and America is unreliable; instead, both performance and compositional technique must be taken into consideration. Equally, some connections can be located through the existence of physical instruments, and also in the continuation of the oral tradition, and effect of this on sound, performance, and written reproduction (both notated and lyrical). It will be seen that reliable information regarding transmission between Africa and America is scarce, but that some conclusions can nevertheless be drawn.

It is without doubt easier to assume that the first form of black music present in the New World was in worksong, the slaves having no instruments, and only a limited frame of day to day experience (what Jones calls a 'distinct and complete transfer of reference'.) (Jones, 1963, 18) However Brogan's *Penguin History of the United States of America* claims that 'some slavers bought instruments on the coast for the cargo to play; in this way African music was carried to the New World. The songs were usually laments: the slaves did not much enjoy these occasions, nor was it meant that they should.' (Brogan, 103) The problem associated with any suggestion of music-making on board the slave ships, as Brogan himself suggests, is that conditions were hardly designed to benefit the slaves' creative impulses. The historian Basil Davidson notes some alarming statistics, including those of one ship which 'loaded 733 captives on the west African coast and disembarked in Havana, fifty-two days later, only 188; all the rest had died during the voyage'. (Davidson, 97) No visible evidence of the physical transportation of instruments has so far come to light, and while Brogan's source is

unclear, what *does* exist is evidence of instrumental creation in America by African slaves.

Alan Merriam, in his study *African Music in Perspective*, quotes several sources which suggest that instruments were fashioned by slaves in America and continued to be used throughout the nineteenth century. Merriam draws our attention to a rare holding of the British Museum, an 'Asante' drum collected by Sir Hans Sloane in 1730. The museum itself remains unsure of the geographical origin of the drum; the display notes suggest that it 'could have been made in Ghana, or Virginia where it was collected'.²¹ Evidence from other museums suggests that the latter is the most likely conclusion. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's 1913 *Catalogue of the Musical Instruments of Oceania and America* also has some fascinating examples, including one banjo (exhibit 3296) which Frances Morris, the editor of the catalogue, claims

was constructed by an old negro on a plantation in Georgia and is the form that was originally in use among plantation negroes. The body is made from a sieve; the hide was cured from a goat raised by the negro, and the wood of the neck from a tree of his own planting. (Morris, 185-6)

There are no specific dates attached to these items, but we can nevertheless draw some conclusions. Firstly, Morris' picture of self-sufficiency is not one commonly portrayed by writers on African-American music history: it rather problematically suggests that adaptation of available materials was a key part of the relationship between African and American music, and thus agrees with neither Jones' theory of complete change nor Floyd's theory of aesthetic transmission. Of course it is impossible to verify exactly who made the banjo; from the photograph it appears beautifully crafted, although now lacking strings. Another banjo, a fretless instrument with many decorative features, has a 'wooden frame with a neck of polished wood that terminates in a carved head of

²¹The drum is to be found in the Sainsbury Rooms, Exhibit SL1368

Negroid type'; the fact that it can clearly be distinguished as 'Negroid' suggests it may be the work of a white carver, with overstated physical characteristics. (Morris, exhibit 3547, p.187) Helen Hubbard Marr's updated catalogue notes on the same collection, dating from 1977, are particularly interesting, stating that

[a]ccording to Scott Odell (Smithsonian Institution), this banjo [3547] was probably made in England during the mid-19th century. The carved Negroid head on the pegbox is characteristic of the minstrel tradition in the USA which suggests the banjo is a copy of an American one.²²

It is thus unlikely that this banjo is the work of an African-American instrument-maker; it is almost certainly of white origin. White American portrayals of African-Americans up until the mid-twentieth century tended to exaggerate the physical features of the subject, probably in an attempt to magnify the difference between black and white. In fact, Freeman Murray's *Emancipation and the Freed in American Sculpture* (1972) suggests that in 1913, the date of the original exhibition of the collection, 'although fifty years had passed since 'Emancipation' was proclaimed, no adequate representation of it as an event...had yet appeared in sculpture, nor indeed in painting.' (Murray, 46) His statement is informed by examination of various interpretations of the emancipation proclamation, including the well-known 'Lincoln and A Kneeling Slave' by Thomas Ball (1865), in which the slave is submissive and silent, showing 'little if any conception of the dignity and power of his own personality and manhood, now first recognised and respected by others.' (ibid., 28) It is, then, almost impossible to conclude that these instruments were made by African-American slaves.

Morris also reveals the African-American adaptation of a 'fiddle'; the exhibit so-called (sadly not photographed) is 'made from a section of cornstalk: two strips of the fibre are separated from the main stalk and form strings on the same principle as that of

the marouwane of Africa.’ (Morris, 187) Laurence Libin’s study of the museum’s musical collections mentions this exhibit as being a ‘fragile toy [which] do[es] not last long but can be replaced on the spur of the moment.’ (Libin, 1994, 38) This suggests manufacture either by children, or, perhaps more likely, by those with little leisure time. The other ‘negro’ instrument which Morris catalogues is a pair of ‘clappers’, ‘[t]wo flat bones of cow-rib...naturally curved’. Morris claims that this instrument is ‘very popular among the negroes and is often made of wood. It is used to mark time in the ‘clog dance’, and in the hands of an expert the sound produced resembles that of the roll of a military drum.’ (Morris, 188; no photograph) The raw materials for these instruments would certainly be found on a plantation; the slave’s access to them, and to the tools used to fashion them, particularly the ‘clappers’, is more difficult to justify. Libin interestingly suggests a completely different source for this instrument. Picturing what we can assume to be the same exhibit, he claims they were ‘[i]ntroduced from Europe’ to be used by minstrels, ‘white performers in blackface makeup who mimicked southern black dialect and manners’. (Libin, 1994, 35)

This may well be the case for the ‘clappers’, but the existence of the ‘fiddle’ is suggestive of adaptation, an antagonist to direct transference. It is, then, safe to conclude that two types of instruments have been associated with African slaves in America in the eighteenth century. The first, here represented by the intricately carved banjo [3547] and the ‘clappers’, were most likely white imitations. The second, represented by the ‘fiddle’ and the first, more simplistic banjo [3296], are more elusive. They may well have been made by African slaves, and as such may reflect in some way the instruments of the

²²1977 museum catalogue notes by Helen Hubbard Marr, sent to me by J. Kenneth Moore, Dept of Musical Instruments.

slaves' native country. There is certainly evidence of bowed stringed instruments existing in Africa: a 1996 exhibition at *The Metropolitan Museum of Art* included a *Goge*, a one-string horsehair fiddle played with the bow.²³ As will be seen below, many slaves were forced into musical entertainment on the Western four-stringed violin, possibly adapting their African-based knowledge of one-string cornstalk 'fiddles'. It is in any case unlikely that slaves, captured by African traders and brought to the coast in chains by Europeans, would have had the opportunity to bring their instruments with them.

Conclusions which can be drawn from this

The disparity between Jones' dismissal of any connection between African and African-American instruments and the physical evidence presented in these examples highlights a further problem with a purely sociologically based theory. While it is likely to be due in part to lack of historical documentation in the 1960s when Jones' research was conducted (and the general ambiguity surrounding the origin of pieces even if they were available), it is also due to his insistence on the creation of a new race, of 'Negroes' as opposed to Africans. A 'complete transfer of reference' allows Jones a solely sociological perspective, and precludes him from having to examine aesthetic similarities between African and African-American music. Jones thus considers the cross-Atlantic movement of instruments to be of little importance.

Purely aesthetic theories are however just as flawed. The introduction of non-western instruments into the Western world is well documented by, for example, Merriam, but to uphold that such structural devices as 'antiphonal singing technique'

²³ *Enduring Rhythms: African Musical Instruments and the Americas* (1996-7, American Wing)

and ‘vocal interpretation’ were purely African transplantations, without reference to specifics, is at best confusing. Examples of antiphonal technique abound in English sacred music of the sixteenth century and the call and response pattern with leader and workforce takes shape in traditional Scottish ‘waulking songs’, around the mid-nineteenth century. Obviously the differences between these types of music are vast: Walton, for example, notes that ‘[i]n European music syncopation was not a natural result of its structure, as was the case in African music, but was developed as a product of the “rest”.’ (Walton, 12) African composers were, at the time of the time of the first Atlantic crossings, unbound by Christian doctrine, and thus English antiphony developed under different rules. However, commentators have often noticed similarities in the general ‘sound’ of African and both English and Scottish music. The musicologist Craig Cockburn suggests that the ‘waulking songs’ of the latter possess ‘a musical form unknown elsewhere in Western Europe and often sound African.’²⁴ This suggestion is likely to stem from the importance of rhythm to the song’s structure: as will be seen, in the slave worksong, the rhythm is dictated by the noise of the work-tool or instrument. While the term ‘waulking’ was traditionally applied to tweed-making, it is also present in other contexts: Cockburn suggests that both Scottish and African song ‘evolved to create a rhythm to assist repetitive manual work.’

While it is difficult to quantify any transmission between European and African-American song, it is not impossible that some influences may have occurred, particularly in New Orleans, which was a major site of African-American music during slavery times. Some texts suggest the influence of European, and specifically British, music on the music of slavery, due to the presence of British, French and Spanish

²⁴Personal e-mail correspondence, 24/4/01; Cockburn’s article is available at www.siliconglen.com

nationals in New Orleans, and to French-speaking Creole slaves. Sidran, for example, suggests that the presence of the Creole community actually aided the status of the African-American, allowing 'the black culture to address itself with more confidence to the monolithic Anglo-conformity of Western culture.' (Sidran. 45) This, he suggests, is achieved through the introduction of a freer attitude towards music and musical performance, not only evident in rhythmic development but also in ideas of self versus community. In more general terms, the diversity of culture in New Orleans gave the African-American musician a larger framework from which to perform and compose. The multi-cultural environment of the city was a fact remarked on by many commentators, but perhaps most thoroughly by R. Emmet Kennedy, as a 'distinctive city of cosmopolitan and indigenous nationalities - descendants of Spanish Dons, French noblemen, Acadian refugees, Creole aristocrats, Choctaw Indians, Irish and German fortune-hunters, Manila and Negro cross-breeds.' (Kennedy, 19) It seems important to conclude here that while there is no factual evidence for cross-Atlantic transmission of musical instruments, the direct *influences* of West African musical tradition are more apparent. These influences may be sociologically or aesthetically based. A further relationship, outside the confines of New Orleans, may well be through the emigration of the Irish to America: some similarities can be seen between Irish sea shanties and the worksong of African-American slaves, and this will be discussed below.

Worksong: musical expression in slavery

The earliest recorded expressions of the slave in music are found in the worksong, which, sung in unison, accompanied compulsory labour. The importance of the worksong can perhaps be gleaned from this account by John Wesley Work, a folklorist writing in the early twentieth century:

The Reverend Israel Golphin tells of his employment with a gang laying railroad tracks in Arkansas because he was a good singer. He had just asked the 'boss-man' for work and had been refused. He watched the gang work for a while and noticed that they were in difficulty because the singer, or 'caller' as he is sometimes termed, was inexperienced and was timing them wrongly. The men were grumbling. Golphin offered to 'call' for them. The gang so appreciated him that they went to the 'boss-man' and requested that he be hired - and he was. (Work, 28)

Both 'boss' and worker realise the importance of music: it enables them to keep time, and therefore maintain a steady rhythmic working pace. While in Golphin's case, the workers were privileged with a choice of 'caller', obviously slaves would have had to nominate a man already present. Nevertheless, this story reveals the innate presence of song and the value attached to ability with music. As the evolution of worksong is examined, the importance of this communal appreciation of individuality will become clear.

An early reference to worksong occurs in William Bartram's *Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida* (1791), in which he visits a plantation near the Savannah River and sees slaves chopping logs. He comments both on the rhythmic nature of their song, and on their apparent happiness: 'the regular heavy strokes of their gleaming axes re-echoed in the deep forests; at the same time, contented and joyful, the sooty sons of Africa, forgetting their bondage, in chorus sung the virtues and beneficence of their master in songs of their own composition.' (Bartram, 310) It is of course very probable that this song was satire, if indeed the language therein was understood by Bartram or the overseer. The important detail is in the use of the rhythm, directly derived from that specific working task, on which to base the song. Other

elements of the song are also founded in necessity: the slaves have no instruments at their disposal. The logs thus take the place of the drum, or other rhythmic instrument, and the axe pounds out the rhythm. The voice must be conditioned to express only certain sentiments, and probably limited to an acceptable and pleasing range. Each man must work within these constraints, thus creating the ‘contented and joyful’ sound that Bartram hears.²⁵

However, this communality must by necessity contain individuality: these are men, not merely instruments, and the songs develop along with the musicians to express personalities. The presence of personality is a key issue for anyone attempting to trace the history of African-American music, highlighting the relationship between communal and individual performance. Personality can be located in rhythm, which could easily be varied during the working day by particular individuals. In fact, individual ability to change rhythm (allowing for agreement or dominance/ submission within the working group), is present in these tool-extensions of the body. While they do not represent individual rhythmic freedom, they suggest communal choice and change *effected* by an individual. R. Emmet Kennedy’s description of a railway worksong upholds the importance of rhythm and the dialogue between task and song. One of the few detailed first-hand accounts of worksong (‘of men “tamping” cinders under the crossties after that have been secured in place under the rails’), it raises several important points:

The men all work in unison, each one with a long iron “tamp”, a kind of crowbar with a spatulated nose. With the first line of the chant, “by an’ by,” they all lift their tamps together, letting them fall on the last word, giving two falls to the beat and raising them again on the “by an’ by” of the second line, continuing with unvarying rhythm to let the tamps fall on the right accent, the accented words on the third line being “lay”, “won’t” and “tall”. (Kennedy, 19)

²⁵An example of worksong may be heard in Excerpt One of the accompanying cassette (see appendix three for details).

Note that every action is in ‘unison’: the men lift, fall, and pause together. No-one appears to lead; there is an unspoken agreement of speed, strength, and, most importantly, beat. Kennedy suggests a very exact beat, even during the fall of the tarp, whose weight must have been difficult to control so precisely. Although he does not mention a change of pace or rhythm, throughout the day there must have been periods of sluggishness, and no doubt the pace would have changed, perhaps imperceptibly to a non-worker, but nevertheless with the tacit agreement of the whole group.

The musicologist Ben Sidran adds to this by suggesting that the presence of both a communal and individual importance of these songs lies in the ‘vocalised tone [which] was as important to the black revolution as were the double entendres.’ (Sidran, 13) By slaves joining together as individuals, rather than simply as a homogenous whole, music facilitated defiance and opposition. This appears to posit the beginnings of the individual blues ‘shout’ in worksong, and the existence of free will and determination through black music. While it is far easier to locate difference in lyric, this is quite possibly a product of our Western inability to recognise oral culture as valid. As the concept of an oral culture is vital to understanding any aspect of black literature or music, it is worth defining here in basic terms.

In his study *Black Talk*, Sidran places oral culture in direct opposition to literate culture. While he attempts to locate this difference first in biological terms (citing scientific experiments on feline preference for aurally-received impulse), his most successful location is in sociology. Sidran claims music as ‘one of the more legitimate outlets for black actionality’ and suggests that ‘the oral man stores information through physical assimilation’ (Sidran, 6). For literate man, then, his physicality manifests itself

in text. Marshall McLuhan interprets this manifestation as fragmentation. 'the power to act without reacting', to distance oneself physically and emotionally from one's own creation. (McLuhan, 4) The literate power to create another self on the page almost excludes the need for emotional involvement, and McLuhan seems to suggest that this irrevocably complicates the written work of art, which 'spells out in sequence what is quick and implicit in the spoken word.' (ibid., 79) Free, unfettered expression, then, can only occur in cultures where the lack of literacy means that creation is unbounded by concepts of time and individual responsibility and reaction. It seems clear that the rhythmic expression of the worksong is one manifestation of this: the tools beat out a collective impulse, a continuous, seemingly never-ending action without reaction.

Sidran also associates the expression of freedom with rhythm, citing 'the re-emergence of the black ego' in tandem with physical and rhythmic emancipation. (Sidran, 11) In this way, oral/aural man represents the only true embodiment of the individual *within* the community. His nature is simultaneously associated both with self-emancipation and communal/ racial freedom. The 'galvanisation of meaning and pitch into a single vocalisation' that Sidran suggests represents this freedom of expression is not unfamiliar to Western literate culture (word-painting is our term for this), but it is the lack of distinction between self and society which creates a great difficulty in locating the difference between the two in song. There is of course the problem that Sidran's text is part of the literate culture, not the oral culture, both in terms of his definitions and the problems he encounters, and freely admits: '[t]he black approach to rhythm...is more difficult to define in writing.' (ibid., 7)

Without the presence of recordings of authentic worksong (i.e. that performed whilst working), it thus appears quite difficult to define an individual element in a group song by using a purely physical scale (i.e. the examination of melodic and rhythmic difference). It is therefore more useful to examine compositional styles, and to see whether an individual element can be gleaned from these. Indeed, the compositional style of these worksongs suggests that they are the product of both practicality *and* particularity. John and Alan Lomax, in their study *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (1994) reveal a firsthand experience of composition technique: ‘Only this summer a Negro on a large cotton plantation we visited, misunderstanding our request for “made-up” songs, composed a satire on the overseer. This song, “Po’ Farmer”, was greeted with shouts of approval when the author sang it that night at the plantation schoolhouse.’ (Lomax, 1994, xxvii) This method of composition is similar to that remarked on by J. Miller McKim, whose July 9, 1862 address in Samson Hall, Philadelphia includes an interview with a black slave whose friends, feeling sorry for his punishment from the master, ‘[w]hen dey come to de praise-meeting dat night dey sing about it.’ (Allen et. al., xviii) Each originally composed and sung by one slave, then, the songs grew amongst the working group, then were passed on to other geographical areas. Allen et. al. comment on the ‘slowness with which these songs travel’ (Allen et. al., xi) but their example of a song travelling five miles between Winter and Spring does not serve to illustrate their point particularly well. Without transport or leisure time, the transmission of a song must have relied on infrequent events, such as a sale, or marriage between plantations. It would almost certainly have taken a few weeks to travel a few miles. Indeed, performance and composition may have been rare, in accordance with the

slaves' lack of leisure time. In his autobiography Solomon Northrup claims the majority of the music within a plantation to have been performed at Christmas, when the slaves were permitted three days off. Then, 'the dancing continues until broad daylight' (Northrup, quoted in Forkner, 249)

Some songs, as previously suggested, may have travelled across the sea. The 'hundreds of coloured men in our ships, both naval and mercantile' who are on record as having served in the Navy (Whall, viii) undoubtedly participated in the development of the shanty. Aside from clear similarities between worksong and sea shanty to be found in the caller and chorus scenario, there are other, more intriguing parallels. Research undertaken into the sea shanty reveals that they were originally sung for similar purposes to the African slave's worksong: Stan Hugill's study suggests that '[t]hey were dedicated to special jobs, and were not, for example, sung during shipboard leisure, nor ashore.' (Hugill, 2-3) The common picture of the drunken sailor singing shanties as he wanders home from an all-night drinking session is thus seemingly false: most likely a product of twentieth-century imagination. One of the earliest published collection of sea shanties, that of Captain B. Whall (1910) suggests that most shanties were composed before the American Civil War: 'No-one who started sea life after 1875,' he claims, 'heard shantying in its prime.' (Whall, viii) Whall's assertion suggests that shanties were irrevocably linked with challenging physical labour, the call for which would have disappeared with the advent of the Industrial Revolution.

There are also further links between shanties and worksong, indeed between shanties and African-American music in general. Shanties were sung by all nationalities of sailors, but Hugill claims that those of one type, the 'stamp n'go song or runaway

chorus' were specifically 'of Negro origin'. (Hugill, 128) The structure of these 'Negro' shanties is remarkably similar to that of most worksong: a repetitive verse, usually sung by a soloist, and a responsive chorus sung by the rest of the workers. Added to this, Whall proposes an etymological connection between slave and sea culture, suggesting that 'many of these songs came from the shanties, as the negro huts on Southern plantations were called.' (Whall, viii) These collocations are immediately recognised as having some truth when even a brief comparison of the lyrics of shanties and African-American music is undertaken. A popular refrain, quoted in both Hugill and Whall, 'I thought I heard the old man say' surely echoes that famous jazz lyric attributed to Jelly Roll Morton: 'I thought I heard Buddy Bolden say...'

A later example of African-American secular worksong is to be found in the fire service. One interesting example of a song by the African-American firemen of Savannah was given to the editors by Mr Kane O'Donnel, whose undated letter to the Philadelphia Press suggests that '[e]ach company [of fire-fighters] has its own set of tunes, its own leader, and doubtless in the growth of time, necessity and invention, its own composer.' (Allen et. al., 61) The lyrics of the firemen's song, whether composed by an appointed musician or by various men in the company, contain a sense of both communal work ('Heave away!') and individual expression ('I'd rather court a yellow gal than work for Henry Clay'). We can surmise that the presence of music within fire brigades of this time was a largely African-American enterprise: white firemen's texts of this time such as McRobie's *Fighting the Flames* (1881) claim no evidence of music-making in white American troops. At the turn of the twentieth century twice as many African-Americans as white Americans were employed by the fire service, a fact

probably related to the fact that, unlike many other occupations, their wages were equal. (Pinchbeck, 87)

In conclusion, then, this chapter has traced the development of African-American music through the worksong. It has suggested ways in which to read and interpret the history of jazz, and has defined the terminology which will be used in this thesis as a whole. In addition, the need for an inclusive theory of jazz has been revealed, based on analysis of current criticism and recognition of the myriad of issues involved in the history of jazz. To continue, the beginnings of free expression and desire for freedom from the slave is marked by the transition from worksong to spiritual. Although there is some overlapping and the two types are existent together in some collections, it should be noted that Allen et al. write in their introduction that while they 'had hoped to obtain enough secular songs to make a division by themselves' they discovered 'so few' that it became unfeasible. By the second half of the nineteenth century, any songs which related directly to a desire for freedom were sung under the guise of the spiritual, and from this, a distinctly Christian spiritual developed. During the years leading up to the Civil War, a new kind of music developed, in which Southern slaves sang of their desire for, and Northern free blacks of their journey towards, freedom. The demise of the worksong was aided by the fact that Negro Christians now found it problematic: Alan and John Lomax note that a prisoner in Nashville whom they interviewed 'resolutely refused to sing an entirely innocuous levee camp work song since...his church regarded such melodies as "Devil's songs" or "sinful songs"'. (Lomax, 1994, xxxi) This quotation highlights the complex relationship that black churches enjoyed with Christianity. The

rise of the religion among black slaves, paralleled historically by the fight for abolition, and the subsequent passing of the worksong, will be the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter Two: From the Spiritual to Jazz

‘Negroes, black as Cain/ May be refin’d, and join th’angelic train’ (Wheatley, ‘On Being Brought from Africa to America’)

‘It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.’ (Galatians 5:1)

The term ‘Negro spiritual’ is often applied to any religious music which has a black (in the broadest sense of this word) origin. Indeed, it is difficult to locate an exact definition of the name, possibly because the word ‘spiritual’ is of more use as an adjective than a noun. Negro spirituals are commonly associated with evangelical Christianity, and are often held to represent the highest levels of spirituality and passion; they also suggest communal worship. The development of worksong into spiritual represents a movement from improvisation and communal participation to a personal style and goal, and a move to a definitive Christian subject. The evolution of the spiritual, the next important form of African-American music to be recorded in North America, will now be explored. This exploration, alongside musical examples, will consider both contemporaneous and more recent perceptions of the assimilation of Christian religion into African-American culture.

There are various theories existent explaining the first absorption of Christianity by African-American slaves. Familiarly, LeRoi Jones explores the socio-cultural reasons, which he perceives to be two-fold. Firstly, he suggests that ‘the African has always had a traditional respect for his conqueror’s gods’. While this situation may have

been true in the slave's homeland, in terms of the 'conquer[ing]' of neighbouring tribes, it must have been very difficult for him to associate the second 'conqueror', the white man, with the 'traditional respect' that the hierarchies of African tribal society demanded. Respect, then, may have given way to a desire to imitate: Jones' second suggestion is that 'Christianity was attractive simply because it was something the white man did that the black man could do also.' (Jones, 1963, 33)

A similar argument, based on imitation and coercion by the white man, is to be found in John Wesley Work's evaluation of Newman Ivey White's *American Negro Folksongs*. White, according to Work, 'makes the assertion that spirituals are the result of exploitation by slave-holders who had found that the slaves worked better under the influence of songs of a certain type, and who therefore fashioned, in many instances, the songs they wished the slaves to sing.' (Work, 12) It will be suggested, however, that the historical ambiguity of the relationship between white and black religion does not permit any such simple transition or coercion. Both Jones and Work suggest here that enslaved people were coerced into Christian religious practice, and into spiritual singing. In fact, the initiative and self-motivation shown by African-American slaves in embracing Christianity is the main reason for disputing this argument.

For the first generation of slaves, whose belief system was based around African gods, the transition to Christianity and to Christian material within their songs would have been a difficult experience, and one which cannot be dismissed purely as a result of imitation or simple respect. From being surrounded by friends and family whose belief system was identical to their own, the African chattel slave found himself in an alien world, where he was believed to be at best sub-human. The first Christian slave owners

were firmly committed to the maintenance of this belief and avoided any kind of protest, religious or otherwise. As Jones claims, 'it was thought by white Christians that if the Africans were given Christianity, there could be no real justification for enslaving them, since they would no longer be heathens or savages.' (Jones, 1963. 36) This desire to maintain religious control over the slave population was expressed to some extent in the forced marriages and baptisms that are discussed below, and in the paternalistic and sometimes confusing statements of white Christian slave owners. White Christianity was presented and exploited as a controlling, exclusive religion.

Attempts at religious control and suppression of Christianity among the enslaved were largely in vain. Although the white owner had no desire to dress his slave in human garments of any sort, cultural, social or religious, black assimilation of white Christianity began without him. The reasons for this are likely to have begun with a desire for some semblance of humanity to be restored to slaves' lives, and the results are indicative of both the power of slavery and the response of enslaved peoples to their situation.

An important reason for adoption of Christianity may have been the application of Biblical stories and parables to the slaves' situation. There are countless Biblical references to slavery, and although their intended meaning is undoubtedly the celebration of the freedom of the spirit when one has converted to Christianity, their adoption into Negro spirituals shows another obvious interpretation of the verses: freedom from slavery. These Biblical images would also have provided the African-American slave with new and exciting material for his lyric; complete with ready-made heroes such as Daniel and David, the Bible presents a legendary source of drama.

While there are relatively few accounts of the spread of black Christianity in North America, it is clear that those who did turn to the Christian church for solace embraced missionary status fairly quickly, although of course many writers and musicians may have been under the strict influence of their owners. The majority of slave narratives from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are written by Christians. Early poetry by Phillis Wheatley (c.1753-1784) suggests two classes of slave: those who believed in Christ and those who remained 'pagans'. In a 1773 poem entitled 'On Being Brought from Africa to America' she writes that 'Negroes, black as Cain/ May be refin'd, and join th'angelic train.' (in Gates (ed.), 1997, 171) Here there is an obvious suggestion that Negroes under control (refin'd) may achieve what those who defy authority and hierarchy (such as Cain did) will not. Wheatley's poetry appears to suggest a necessary dependence not only on Christian faith, but also on faith in whites, those who help to 'refine' Negroes.²⁶ The importance of this ambiguous reaction to Christianity, both positive and seemingly submissive, to the development of Negro Christian spirituals, is vast. Both abolitionists and anti-abolitionists, slaves and freemen, were claiming to worship the same God.

The advantages of Christian teaching to white slave owners

By the late eighteenth century, religious figures were appearing in countless songs: songs about the desire to return to Africa, songs about obedience to one's master, songs about freedom. Sidran contends that this development occurred in part because

²⁶While Wheatley's poetry has suffered from criticism in recent years, a lecture by Henry Louis Gates in March 2002 suggested that '[i]f Phillis Wheatley stood for anything, it was the creed that culture was, could be, the equal possession of all humanity.' (Gates, 31st annual Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities, 25/03/02)

‘the black culture, being an oral culture, required an outlet for emotional expression, and all secular outlets had been blocked or denied.’ (Sidran, 19) While this suggestion does not take into account the continuity of enforced work (and therefore the ability of slaves to express themselves in secular worksong), it is undoubtedly true that entertainment was strictly controlled: another reason why the vibrant imagery of the Bible must have seemed so appealing.

Over time it appears that most plantation owners realised that the not only was the spread of Christianity amongst slaves beyond their control, but also that the Bible could be used to their advantage. This began around the 1840s, as slave owners in the South began to take a fatherly view of their property. In this way, owners of enslaved people could regain control, by manipulating the meaning of Christian texts, and thus influencing those who had chosen to become Christians. As Peter Kolchin explains, ‘Antebellum slave relations were marked by a dualism inherent in slavery: slaves were at the same time both objects and subjects, human property held for the purpose of enriching the masters and individuals with lives of their own.’ (Kolchin, 111) Thus Christianity in mid-nineteenth century American slavery came to be part of a paternalistic tradition, rather than, as it had previously been, wholly segregational.

It is clear from an examination of testimonies and sermons from this time that slave owners used the Bible to justify a kind of fatherly dominance over their slaves. For example, an anonymous document published under the pseudonym of ‘Amor Patriae’ entitled ‘A Comparison of Slavery with Abolitionism’ of 1848 cites numerous Biblical verses from both the old and new Testaments, and concludes that the author has satisfied ‘the most sceptical that slavery is a DIVINE INSTITUTION, recognised and established

by God's own order.' (Anon, 7) His method is to note extracts whereby disobedience to God is punished, usually by death or by some kind of physical brand, and apply them to the existence of a human master/ slave relationship. This anonymous document suggests that Christian slave owners may well have positively encouraged slaves to participate in Bible readings, and to learn obedience from them, whilst avoiding the message of freedom which so often appears.

The sermons of the Rev. Thomas Bacon (1859), of which two exist in the British Library, implicitly reveal the problems associated with preaching God's word to those in chains. While in one passage he extols the virtues of a God who 'values no Man for his Riches and Power, neither does he despise or overlook any one for his rags and poverty' (Bacon, 11), in another he advises complete obedience: 'your bodies, you know, are not your own, they are at the Disposal of those you belong to'. (ibid., 18) Bacon also compares the stealing of property to the disobedience of a servant, asking 'what is the Difference to me, when my Substance is gone, whether a Thief took it away from me, or whether I am robbed of it by my Servants Negligence?' (ibid., 36) In this sermon, 'substance' (property) is almost indistinguishable from the slave, also having a dual responsibility to serve and to protect. Despite these unappealing warnings from white preachers, many slaves converted to Christianity before emancipation of the Southern states: 'on the eve of the Civil War,' Kolchin notes, 'half a million slaves were officially church members, and most of the remainder received at least some exposure to Christian worship.' (Kolchin, 116)

Further examination of white American texts reveals that one of the primary ways to introduce the slave population to Christianity was through marriage. In 1824 the

Rev George Wilson Bridges, an anti-abolitionist resident of Manchester, Jamaica, claims to have married 'one hundred and eighty-seven couples of Negro slaves...within the last two years, all of whom were encouraged by their owners to marry'. (Bridges, 22) Whether or not these marriages were entered into with the consent of both parties is another matter: there is certainly some suggestion in the proud recording of exact numbers by those such as Bridges that they were merely a front to enable the plantation owners to feel that their Christian duty had been achieved.

Frederick Law Olmsted's *Journeys and Explorations in the Cotton Kingdom* (1861) details a conversation with a plantation overseer who, having revealed the number of marriages on the plantation that year, 'laughed heartily at the idea [of fidelity] and described a disgusting state of things.' (Olmstead, 209) This 'disgusting state' may well have involved master-slave sexual relationships, but the implication is of course that the infidelity was entirely on the part of the slaves. Olmsted's conversations with various overseers also show one of the reasons why they were reluctant to allow unsupervised religious observance, for it apparently 'excited the Negroes so much as to greatly interfere with the subordination which were necessary...[they] would be singing and dancing every night in their cabins, till dawn of day, and utterly unfit themselves for work.' (ibid., 213) The abhorrence of music when associated with free expression here is interesting; the overseers are keen to achieve not only subordination of tiredness but also of enjoyment. Christianity, then, was to be associated with discipline and routine: black adoption of these beliefs, as we will see, completely reversed and externalised them in vocal expression.

Olmstead himself concluded that ‘so much caution, reservation, and restriction is felt to be necessary in their [religious] instruction, that the result in the majority of cases has been merely to furnish a delusive clothing of Christian forms and phrases to the original vague superstition of the African savage.’ (ibid., 215) He notes in particular ‘the readiness with which they engage in what are deemed religious exercises, and fall into religious ecstasies’. (ibid., 220-1) This sense of disapproval at ‘religious ecstasies’ is also present in attitudes to slave baptism, which represents another method of conversion: Rev. Bridges quotes the ‘slave laws’ of a ‘Mr Lunan, of Spanish Town’, which decrees ‘slaves [are] to be fitted for baptism’. (Bridges, 26) Bridges claims that

though their progress certainly does not keep pace with our anxious wishes to see them in that state which would make it safe to confide ourselves to their estimation of a Christian oath....yet the promises of Christianity, are so far understood, and its preliminary rites so ardently desired by them. (ibid., 27)

Both Olmstead and Bridges suggest that slave religion is thus inferior to white Christianity, particularly in its lack of depth and understanding. It is worth considering Bridges’ use of the word ‘rites’. The desire for these ‘rites’ (presumably baptism and confirmation) by the slaves may well have been accompanied by, or expressed through, song, although the fact that Bridges makes no mention of music during his response suggests that he prefers to ignore this aspect of their spiritual devotion. Indeed, Olmsted quotes a letter ‘from the white pastor of a town church’ (presumably somewhere near Richmond, Virginia) to the editor of the *Richmond Religious Herald*, who states that Negro candidates for baptism, ‘when they talk of visions, dreams sounds...in every such case...should be rejected.’ (Olmstead, 223)

The bias of white accounts of religious plantation life, highlighted by the texts above, is shown by a focus on materiality and figures, and by the pervading attitude of righteousness. It is difficult to merge the accounts of Olmsted and Bridges with those of

actual black slaves, particularly with regard to the songs, which often communicate deep emotional understanding of scripture. The functionality of the work song was no longer enough: the slaves required new material and new techniques to express the religious joy felt at meetings.²⁷ Examination of these songs will reveal the level of participation and passion which they encouraged. Post-emancipation in the Southern states, the sense of responsibility noted by Rev. Bacon in the sermons examined earlier appears transposed onto white Americans, yet it still retains a dominant/ submissive hierarchical structure. White Christians were now urged to become guardians of black Christians, ensuring that some level of paternalistic control was maintained. For example, an 1880 foreword by the then president of Fisk University E. M. Cravath proposes that '[t]o the millions of recently emancipated colored people of the South *must* be given a Christian education, or the nation must suffer far more in the future than in the past from the curse of slavery.' Cravath's belief that 'colored people' must be educated into Christianity reveals his fear of difference: although he regards slavery as a 'curse', his polemic is nevertheless motivated by a need to maintain power. (quoted in Marsh, foreword)

A closer look at the spirituals

There are clearly two kinds of spirituals, those which lift characters and quote directly from the Bible, and those which base their lyric on a simple concept or phrase. It appears obvious that the latter type developed first, dealing with universal ideas of, for example, 'freedom' (seen in the titles 'Oh Freedom!', and 'Freedom in the Air').

²⁷An example of the spiritual can be found in Excerpt Two of the accompanying cassette (see appendix three for details).

Howard Thurman's short collection of spirituals, *Deep River*, is invaluable in revealing some of the more central themes of this type. Interestingly, many present a personal sense of despair, rather than the communal focus so often suggested by other authors. (for example, 'It's not my brother, but it's me, O Lord,/ Standing in the need of prayer', p.27) When we come to a discussion of how blues developed from these spirituals it will be useful to consider the apparent existence of both a collective *and* individual persona in the earlier lyric.

The other type of spiritual, with a more direct reference to Biblical events, could not have appeared without access to the Bible, introduced to the slave population by the Quakers, who sent their ministers on conversion missions, and by the forcing of marriage and baptism upon plantation populations. As we have seen, these events appear to have begun in the early part of the nineteenth century, judging from the accounts available today. They were not without their African-American supporters. Indeed, as early as 1829, David Walker, son of a slave, published his 'Appeal', which ended with a note urging 'justice done at home, before we go to convert the Heathens' (in Gates (ed.), 1997, 190), and in the same year, George Moses Horton's poems spoke of the importance of 'proselyte[s]' (newly converted Christians). (ibid., 192)

There is, therefore, both an African and a European influence on the spiritual. It is often difficult to distinguish whether the song was a black invention, or was based solely on a white text. This difficulty is augmented by the need for secrecy that many lyrics were subject to. Many spirituals were sung as signals to escaping slaves, the most famous being 'Steal Away', which informed them that the Underground Railroad was ready to take them. Thus the progression from vaguely religious texts to those solely

influenced by Christianity is blurred. Added to this, music was often based on white hymnals such as the *Wesleyan Hymnal* (probably used in slave marriage ceremonies), and this further confused the distinction between music of black and white origin, and between the true meaning of the lyric: supporting or condemning slavery. The original Methodist Wesleyan Hymnal was written by Charles Wesley (1707-88), brother of John (1703-91), who edited the collection; it contained 'nothing to gratify a carnal taste: nothing to encourage pride, self-esteem, love of worldly honour and applause'. (quoted in Burgess, 6) In these characteristics alone it seems most suitable for white slave-owners, and such hymns as 'A heart resign'd, submissive, meek' (Hymn 343) undoubtedly reinforce their purpose.

William Burgess' companion to the hymn book, *Wesleyan Hymnology* (1846), applies the hymn-texts contained within it directly to the slavery issue, suggesting that if the songs were used by slave owners, 'servants would be led to act faithfully and conscientiously in all the duties they owe to their masters'. (Burgess, 272) This surely leads to a dilemma for the Christian slave: whether to believe in submission or to fight for freedom. Interestingly, in 1903 W.E.B. DuBois remarked on this dilemma, denouncing the 'new and cant phrases of a dimly understood theology [which] have displaced the older sentiment.' (DuBois, 53) Taking 'theology' to be white Christianity, we must assume that 'the older sentiment' was a desire for equality, possibly a sense of freedom which was equated with a return to Africa. This view is echoed by Zora Neale Hurston, who claims in her 1934 essay 'Characteristics of Negro Expression':

The Negro is not a Christian really. The primitive gods are not deities of too subtle inner reflection; they are hard-working bodies who serve their devotees just as laboriously as the suppliant serves them. (in Gates (ed.), 1997, 1024)

There are few collections of slave songs dating from this period. The most famous is undoubtedly Allen, Ware and Garrison's collection of slave music (*Slave Songs of the United States*, 1867), which contains most of the spirituals existent from that time, and which was assembled during an 'educational mission' to Port Royal, where they claimed to have 'taken down [the music]...from the lips of the colored people themselves'. (Allen et. al., iii) Notating an oral tradition proved to be a complex task: while the editors remark on 'irregularities in the time' and the 'peculiar quality' of the Negro voice (ibid., vi), all the songs have been coerced into Western rhythms and time signatures. The need to Westernise any Africanisms is exemplified in their suggestion that songs 'of an intrinsically barbaric nature...may very well be purely African in origin' (ibid., vi-vii). Allen et al.'s collection specifically avoids publishing any songs they consider to be mere reproduction of Methodist Wesleyan hymn-tunes, calling such music 'spurious' and 'suspicious'. (ibid., vi) In terms of lyric, however, they admit that '[t]he words are, of course, in a large measure taken from Scripture, and from the hymns heard at church'. (ibid., ix)

Their search for a non 'suspicious' music thus reveals that the distinction between white and black Christianity was seen as vital in the transcription of these songs. While the borrowing of lyrics appears to have been allowed, the *interpretation* of these lyrics through music must be able to be claimed as 'difference'. This view is supported by John Wesley Work, a folklorist and collector of spirituals, who claims the 'inviolability of the rhythmic pattern in the spiritual [which] illustrates the interesting fundamental principle of the importance of note over word.' (Work, 20) For if it is the notes and rhythmic qualities which create the 'difference', then white hymnists cannot

be held responsible for anything that may happen to their lyrics upon transmission. Work clarifies this difference by comparing spirituals (read: white lyricists, black interpretation) to the blues (read: black lyricist, black interpretation): while ‘the exalted verse of many spirituals could be read appropriately from the most dignified pulpit...most of the verse of the blues is unprintable.’ (ibid., 28) Here, dignity is only present in lyrics: they are read, not sung, and Work appears to maintain that their essential and lasting qualities are to be found only in their white origins. The difficulty involved in further study is establishing the particular African-American qualities to be evaluated.

The peculiarities of the African-American spiritual

A useful perspective is provided by Howard Thurman, who notes that in the spirituals ‘we are dealing not with a conceptual approach to religion but with an intensely practical one based on the tragedy of great need.’ (Thurman, 14) Thus the particular situation of the slave would demand a particular response, without recourse to correct (or ‘white’) procedure. Various practicalities likewise produced a certain lyric, although this element of the song was subtly under the control of the white minister. Thurman reveals, from the direct experience of his enslaved grandmother, that slaves were not told about the birth of Christ in great detail, primarily because it may have inspired feelings of freedom: ‘she told me that during the days of slavery, the minister (white) on the plantation was always preaching from the Pauline letters [letters of Paul]- “Slaves, be obedient to your masters,” etc.’ (ibid., 17) It is interesting to note that in Allen’s collection many spirituals are based around the same event: the deliverance of

Daniel, for example ('Didn't My Lord deliver Daniel?' is a popular line from many songs), or the death of Jesus ('Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?')

Certain symbols, like the River (often the Jordan) also occur frequently: Thurman suggests that this may in part be due to the physical presence of the river between Northern and Southern states, and between America and Canada: 'the last and most formidable barrier to freedom'. (ibid., 66) Thurman's sense of a great practicality surrounding the composition of spirituals admits the presence of simple, rather than double meaning, for many lyrics. It suggests that the spirituals were written in more controlled conditions than the work-song, even if the accompanying melody could eventually be more expressive. The musicologist John Lovell, writing in 1972, suggests that 'the Bible of the spiritual writer...is a Bible with some names and events recurring quite often, others mentioned but rarely and still others of alleged importance never mentioned. It is a sourcebook, not a textbook or a book of rules.' (Lovell, 262-3) This concept is in contrast to Work's insistence on the importance of the lyric: there is no true text, only a source which can be manipulated to suit the composer.

A further aspect of the spiritual is the tendency to avoid total emphasis on the self. There is a casual interchange between 'member', 'believer' and 'seeker', terms which these songs use to represent Heavenly longing. There seems to be a sense of joint responsibility for spiritual welfare which is based on continual reference to family members, whether real or imaginary. In many songs, a communal atmosphere is indicated by the song's address to 'my brudder' (brother). For example, 'The Lonesome Valley' (Allen et. al., 5) asks 'My brudder, want to get religion?' Here the singer appears not only to be talking to the wider non-religious community, but also shifting

the onus of 'get[ting] religion' away from him and on to his 'brudder'. In other songs, the 'brudder' figure can seemingly encompass both responsibility and ideology, representing both communal spirit and (more importantly) spiritual control. The song-lyrics 'my brudder build a house in Paradise' (ibid., 29) and 'Brudder, why can't you pray for me?' (ibid., 32) involve a familial figure who performs real tasks like house-building (a desirable task for recently emancipated slaves) in the context of an unreal, or spiritual, world. The 'brudder' figure appears to represent desirability, desire which stems from the individual but which he or she would rather translate onto a communal persona. In yet another use of the word, brother, father and sister are all assigned to an important religious figure ('sister Mary', 'fader Mosey' and 'brudder Daniel' are all recurring figures). This can be seen as a development of the communal figure to encompass the totality of the human race, living and dead. It is also undoubtedly a mean of avoiding individual attention from slave owners. For there can surely be no accusation of insurrection directed at the singer if he sings solely about others.

Narratives and accounts of spirituals

Slave narratives from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries offer little help to this ambiguity so often present in the spiritual. The front cover of *The Life of Lewis Charlton, A Poor Old Slave* (which probably dates from around the time of the Civil War) claims anonymously that 'Mr Charlton has now come out among the Christian People to solicit aid to build up his people out of the horrors and tortures of suffering, and it is hoped the Christian people will not fail to buy these books from the Poor Old Slave to help him do the whole will of God.' This strange mixture of attitudes perfectly

epitomises the confusion felt by the majority of white Americans towards ex-slaves. While 'Christian People' were assumed to be merciful and, by now, abolitionist in thought, there remains a prejudice that results in Charlton not being considered as a Christian. He has merely 'come out among' them to ask for help. However Charlton's own faith appears strong, and without confusion: 'to this day I am looking up to Him as my only hope and support while battling with the stern realities of life.' (Charlton, 13) The 'stern realities of life' included the fact that, as Charlton notes that in Westminster, 'neither are the colored people permitted to enter the churches'. (ibid., 16) Thus he reveals that slaves were allowed into organised plantation religion, but amongst free black communities religion was banned, suggesting a continuance, even post-emancipation, of the paternalistic white desire to control its spread and interpretation.

Charlton recalls slaves being marched out of the city, singing 'Don't talk about suffering here below/ But talk about love like Jesus', and a slave named Larry Porter who 'was a devout Christian and insisted on attending Methodist meetings on Sunday where he led the singing.' (Charlton, 22-23) Charlton claims that Porter composed and sang an early version of 'How long, how long, how long/ Good Lord shall I suffer here', before being sold for insubordination. Examination of these lyrics²⁸ reveals that in both these spirituals the emphasis is on suffering and the release of the body to death, but while the first repeatedly contrasts 'here below' with the 'mountain top', using Biblical imagery to form its verse, the focus of the second is on earth, 'the ship...sailing from earth home to glory'. There is, then a difference in focus between the spirituals Charlton mentions: one is surely more evocative of a desire to return to Africa, one to death and Heaven. This suggests that the latter has a stronger Christian focus.

A similarly ambiguous attitude to black Christian spirituals is found in Elizabeth Botume's account of her *First Days Amongst the Contrabands* as a white English teacher sent to educate those slaves freed as a consequence of the American Civil War. Here, during an annual festival, the men sing a traditional spiritual, 'I can't stay behind, my Lord'. The tone of this song is undoubtedly suffering on earth, and a desire to return to Christ, the last line pointedly looking forward to the time 'When the bridegroom comes', a reference to the Biblical book of Revelation, death of the body, and the preparation for Christ's second coming. However Botume appears to ignore the lyric, noting only that '[n]ever did hostesses have merrier guests', and congratulating herself on 'the upward progress they were making.' (Botume. 256) Botume's suggestion that the slaves were 'merrier' is surely misinterpreted; if they were indeed physically smiling, it seems evocative of a deep desire for change. Was religious song composed to give slaves Christian hope or a hope of return to Africa; a freedom into life or death? Is 'spiritual' an adjective with only partial reference to Christianity? An examination of the development of post-emancipation spirituals will reveal the answers to these questions.

The spirituals, the Fisk Jubilee Singers and beyond

Here brief reference to the phenomenon of the Fisk Jubilee Singers is undoubtedly necessary, as they encapsulate many of the issues surrounding African-American spirituals. After starting out as a school choir under the direction of a classically-trained white music teacher, George L. White (whom Work claims 'strove for an art presentation, not a caricature of atmosphere'(Work, 17)), during a performance one evening they spontaneously launched into 'Steal Away', to the delight of the largely

²⁸The lyrics, along with some further examples of songs, can be found in appendix two

white audience.²⁹ Opinion about their motivation and background, even within the same text, here J.B.T. Marsh's *Story of the Jubilee Singers*, varies wildly. Marsh proudly quotes a 'daily newspaper', whose reporter remarks on the 'sweetness of their voices, the accuracy of the execution, and the precision of the time'. (Marsh, 18) These concepts of beauty and perfection are undoubtedly based on Western, classical ideals, and are certainly in stark contrast to a later view from Theo F. Seward, in the same book. His 'preface to the music', a short introduction to a number of manuscript versions of spirituals and songs, claims rather that '[t]hey come from no musical cultivation whatever, but are the simple, ecstatic utterances of wholly untutored minds.' (ibid., 155)

Listening to a 1956 recording of 'Been in the Storm so Long'³⁰ compels agreement with Marsh's reporter. A highly rhythmic and well-structured chorus follows beautifully declaimed verses by a solo bass; there is no element of untutored ecstasy, only a slight rubato during the solo verse, which adds to the concert style of the piece. While it is unfortunate that earlier recordings are not available for comparison, the history and musical education of the singers does suggest that simplicity is only evident in the basis of their melodies in worksong, and in the pentatonic scale. Marsh's suggestion that this scale (based on the first, second, third, fifth and sixth notes) provides 'a simpler alphabet than the ordinary diatonic scale, in which the uncultivated mind finds the easiest expression' (ibid., 156) admits an unappealing relation between 'ordinary' and 'cultivation', which many twentieth-century composers sought to avoid, utilising both the pentatonic and the twelve-tone scale.

²⁹ According to Horace Boyer, the narrator of Channel 4's 'Too Close to Heaven' (3 part series, 1996)

³⁰ Track 2, Audio Companion to Gates (ed.), 1997

Another type of music, the famous 'ring shout', was developed solely within the walls of the church or 'praise-house', yet required groups of people to participate, with a similar structure of that of the worksong. The shout involves music and dancing, and is generally based on a hymn tune, with the worksong's responsorial structure functioning alongside this. The performance thus involves a leader in the centre of the cleared area, and others making a circle around him/ her. In this way, then, the shout echoes both the communality of the worksong and the subject of the spiritual. Toni Morrison, in an article written in 1985, comments that 'while the shouter is performing some rite that is extremely subjective, the other people are performing as a community in protecting that person. So you have a public and a private expression going on at the same time.' (Morrison, 1985, 339) The relationship of the ring-shout to African tradition is again a matter for debate: LeRoi Jones rather scathingly suggests that these performances were 'transformed from pure African religious dances to pseudo-Christian religious observance'. (Jones, 1963, 44) But while he uses 'pseudo' here in its opposition with 'pure', in fact the difference between the two methods of praise remains highly blurred. Art Rosenbaum's study *Shout Because You're Free: The African-American Ring Shout Tradition in Coastal Georgia* allows that 'the basic elements of the ring shout were brought from Africa' but suggests that 'it has almost never been a regular part of church worship service but takes place in churches only after the prayer meeting is over.' (Rosenbaum, 4)

In May 1867 the New York magazine *Nation* described a 'shout' which occurred 'when the formal meeting is over', and suggested that 'it is not considered blasphemous or improper if "de chillen" and "dem young girl" carry it on in the evening for

amusement's sake, and with no well-defined intention of praise.' (Allen et al., xiii) As Rosenbaum followed a group of 'shouters' well into the last years of the twentieth century, it is not too difficult to infer that while the lyric may have changed to one of Christian worship, the 'shout' has never been fully assimilated into Christian life. However, it did survive emancipation, possibly due to the very fact that those who sought to make changes in the black church service did not recognise the shout as part of it. Again, then, the 'shout' represents a further aspect of the ambiguous relationship enjoyed between African-American music and Christianity.

The effects of emancipation on African-American music

The effect of emancipation on black music can be seen clearly in the church. Sociological texts claim that changes were brought about by the condition of freedom, which created a new society of men and women composed of those who had previously been almost inexistent. Social division was therefore bound to occur, even if based simply on a hierarchy of pre-emancipation occupation. Peter Kolchin notes that '[t]he unifying feature of the freedpeople's behaviour during the post-war years was their determination to get as far as possible from slave dependence, to demonstrate to themselves and others that they were really free.' (Kolchin, 217) Ex-house servants had generally been accorded privileges to which field workers had been unaccustomed, and the lives of the former were often so entrenched in those of the white family they worked for that it was difficult to return to an independent life. Jones details this division which occurred post-emancipation amongst the black population, and

particularly the development of a black 'middle class', who abandoned 'the mores or customs they considered slave customs, or "too Negroid".' (Jones, 1963, 58)

For the middle classes, then, Negro music 'was the most impressive reminder for these people of slavery and of their less cultivated brothers'. (ibid., 59) This abandonment, Jones claims, filtered through to the music of black churches, and those frequented by the black middle class began to favour white composers such as Bach and Handel over traditional spirituals. Thus not only did the church represent something hitherto censured by the white man (slave participation in services and ceremonies having been strictly controlled), but presumably the demands of the Christian musical calendar, with specific psalms and anthems denoted for specific feast days, would have appealed to those who wanted to maintain some semblance of routine.

Abandonment of traditional music may also have been forced by the existence of strict and discouraging conditions. The difficulty of locating a place for oneself in society after having been a slave is highlighted by many narratives and critical texts, summarised in William Wells Brown's claim that 'liberty in the so-called Free States was more a name than a reality'. (in Gates (ed.), 1997, 276) The 'Free States' of Brown's claim are of course the pre-Civil War Northern States, in which free black communities attempted to survive a still oppressive social climate. Brown also highlights the fact that black participation in white church services was still heavily restricted: he points out the existence of a separate section of pews, 'grated in front like a hen-coop [with]... two doors; over one was B.M.- black men; over the other B.W.- black women.' (ibid., 276)

Despite these difficulties, which must have predicated the existence of many new black churches, each with their own style of music, it is interesting to note that Jones condemns spirituals post-emancipation as an appropriation of white music not under musically aesthetic terms but under those of social obligation, what he terms a 'hideous attitude [which accepts]...the idea of the superiority of the white man' (Jones, 1963. 59). But does this acceptance of white musical forms really represent displacement of the African tradition? Charles Keil criticises Jones' reluctance to view secular music as having an importance equal to that of sacred for the African-American thus:

although it is a fact that every contemporary blues singer, with perhaps a few exceptions, has received the bulk of his musical socialisation in the church and sees little or no conflict between the secular and sacred traditions, Jones seems to feel that gospel and blues are worlds apart.' (Keil, 40-1)

Jones' argument convinces those delving for a 'pure' black music. However, as a purely aesthetic exercise, there are problems with it. It in fact recalls the views of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote in 1867 that this new adoption of white music adversely affects their singing style, 'having in it about as little soul as most stereotyped religious forms of well instructed congregations.' (quoted in Allen et. al., xx)) Stowe's definition of 'soul' is obviously linked here to individuality, the antithesis of 'stereotyped', but she remains elusive as to her criteria. Although without any recordings it is impossible to judge the standard of performance, to suggest that musicians lose all their sense of self when confronted by music from a different racial background is controversial. It is certainly in great contrast to Uncle Tom, her most famous character, of whom Stowe suggests, concerning St Clare's singing of the Mozart *Requiem*, that 'the music and manner of singing appeared to affect him strongly'. (Stowe, 332) It is of course possible that because white churches only allowed black participation under strict guidelines, the black congregation's participation was severely affected. In any case, denoted merely by

their colour and sex and afforded none of the privileges of white churchgoers. the black congregations in the white church were generally anonymous entities. It is worthwhile noting that Stowe's main source for her novel, the slave narrative *The Life of Josiah Henson* (1851), makes no mention of black music, either before or after emancipation, suggesting that her inclusion of music was a personal choice.

Minstrelsy to blues: music for entertainment to music for the self

Post-emancipation, then, spirituals were still bound by racial ties and oppression, and thus focused primarily on the communal. In secular society, however, emancipation allowed the development of a new kind of music: blues. It is not too far-reaching to state that blues developed from spirituals and worksongs, and from the condition of freedom. It has already been illustrated that the movement from unnamed plantation slave to independent share-cropper meant irrevocable changes in each person's day-to-day life: this is also true for the development of their music. The fact that African-Americans now had responsibilities and (albeit restricted) rights, meant a new kind of song, and a new idea: difference. As Jones states, '[e]ach man had his own voice and his own way of shouting - his own life to sing about.' (Jones, 1963, 61) Changes existent during the transition between worksong and blues appear under three main areas: form, lyric and intent. These are worth illustrating in depth as they have some relevance to the evolution of more general cultural styles.

As we have seen, the form of most worksongs was constructed in a responsorial manner: one leader sang a phrase and the other workers responded with an answering call. This structure was reliant on the rhythm of the slaves' work: it was calculated.

methodical, and repetitive. Within the secular world, the cessation of enforced communal work resulted in the cessation of group responsorial singing, as responsories were structured by rhythmic and lyrical reply to specific work-based situations. The basic form of blues is still structured by response, but it is an individual response to the self: a short line of text is followed by an answering instrumental phrase. There is also a sense of resolution in the three-line structure of the text. Examine this stanza, taken from a popular blues text of the early twentieth century³¹:

Got up this morn': blues waitin' roun' my bed,
Got up this morn': blues waitin' roun' my bed,
I went to breakfast; blues all in my bread.

The rhythm of each line is answered on the recording by a similarly structured guitar-phrase, and the repetition of the first line increases the lyrical tension, ready for it to resolve in the final rhyme. Elements of the communal worksong thus continue into the personal blues song, but a difference is evident in the increased individuality of the lyric. Although similar work situations continued for ex-slaves (the struggle was now economical, and thus hard work remained essential to survival), the singer's independence allowed for his own individuality to present itself in music. The term 'worrying the line' (similar to the Western concept of 'rubato') came into use as individual blues singers began to gently pull the rhythm of their songs so that lines became shortened or lengthened. Varying the meter would of course have been impossible during worksong, for it relied on communal, continual rhythm.

The concept of the 'solo' creation is thus beginning to appear, suggesting that music remained one of the most important ways of expressing oneself during work. According to Jones, ex-slaves would have seen this expression as an integral part of life:

³¹Taken from Hudson, Theodore A., 'Technical Aspects of the Poetry of Langston Hughes', in *Black*

'[i]f someone had lived in this world into manhood, it was taken for granted that he had been given the content of his verses...music like any art was the result of natural inclination.' (Jones, 1963, 82) The importance of the solo worksong may also have been due to the natural association of music with work that followed the slave into freedom. As was suggested above during discussion of spirituals, it is interesting to assess the communal content of the songs. Evidence of an individual persona now present in blues points clearly to development to this from the communality of church-based spirituals (evident even in those performed by individuals).

The influence of minstrelsy on the blues

The idea of blues as an entertainment performance originates from the touring shows, including the now infamous 'minstrel show'³². The views and attitudes portrayed by white minstrels provide us with a sense of America's need at the time for the ghettoisation of black people into certain roles. On both sides of the Atlantic, groups such as 'The Midget Minstrels Orchestra'³³, who played at the Prince's Hall in Piccadilly, regularly 'blacked up', transforming the colour of their skin using burnt cork or grease paint. The reasons for the development of minstrelsy are detailed in Robert C. Toll's study of this phenomenon, *Blacking Up*, highlighting the separation of audiences by class and the final dominance of entertainers like Barnum (now immortalised in musical format), who created a bargain-price yet highly lucrative business. Toll attributes the success of black-face minstrelsy (white performers with blacked faces) to

World, Vol. 22 no. 11 (September 1973), p. 28. This song can also be heard in Excerpt Three of the accompanying cassette (see appendix three for details).

³²The relevance of the minstrel show to modern African-American culture is the subject of Spike Lee's film *Bamboozled* (2001)

this already-popular format: sketches about the common man, ‘focused on humble characters, and dominated by earthy, vital, song, dance and humor.’ (Toll, 27)³⁴

Minstrelsy is of course highly controversial. Opinions regarding it are continually subject to change. Its importance for the white community appears to focus on the ‘humor fodder’ (Boskin, 68) which could be gleaned from the black stereotypical character. This character was portrayed not only on stage, but also in china ornaments and household objects, part of what is now known collectively as ‘Black Americana’ (D’Arcy, 12). It is difficult to assess the response of African-Americans to their portrayal by white artists: according to David D’Arcy’s article on black Americana collections, ‘blacks now comprise between 70 and 80% of collectors.’ In Britain, the BBC’s ‘Black and White Minstrel Show’ enjoyed a revival at the Bristol Hippodrome as late as 1992, with ‘overwhelming audience reaction in favour’ of white cast members blacking up. (Guardian article, 4/9/92) The African-American anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston dismisses blackface with characteristic acerbity, writing in 1934 ‘I wonder why the black-face comedians *are* black-face; it is a puzzle - good comedians, but darn poor niggers.’ (in Gates (ed.), 1997, 1030)

Within *white* culture, then, the minstrel shows achieved little for the status of the black man’s intellect and instead sought to pacify the interest of those who wished to know more of his ‘peculiarities’ (from a program of 1824, quoted in Toll, 34). A theatre bill depicting the ‘Lantum Ethiopian Serenaders’, which dates from 1845 (accessible at the National Theatre Museum, Covent Garden), shows them falling off their chairs, unable to keep their balance due to what seems to be an excess of flailing,

³³The Midget Minstrels played Piccadilly in 1887 (source: National Theatre Museum)

³⁴For the lyrics of one such minstrel song, ‘Whistling Coon’, see Appendix two

uncontrollable limbs. Analysis of the songs of the popular 'Mohawk Moore and Burgess Minstrels', which date from the turn of the century, reveals that those songs which do feature blacks do so in similarly stereotypical fashion, as 'coons', 'mammys' or simply 'niggers'. 'A Dog's Love for a Nigger', one of the 'Jokelets' which comprise a 1901 publication, describes 'a lone grave on de other side of de creek/ Dat knows no Decoration Day,/ For him who over yonder sleeps/ Is only a nigger. dey say!' (Mohawk, 1901, 59-60) Their 'Book of Words', a similar collection probably dating from 1899, features an advert on the inside back cover from the publishers, detailing 'every requisite for a minstrel entertainment'. The merchandise on sale includes 'nigger black', 'plain nigger wigs, for sentimental singers', and, at a slightly more expensive price, 'eccentric nigger wigs, for corner men' (Mohawk, c.1899, inside back cover).

Even when African-Americans were allowed to participate, however, things did not change. 'Besides giving whites ludicrous caricatures of blacks,' claims Toll, 'minstrelsy...created an idealised world that had all the virtues that Northern society seemed to lack.' (Toll, 37) The assertion of Southern principles and ideologies within the minstrel show reveals a complex interplay between entertainment and society. Added to the white sense of superiority already present, the civil war played a large role in the necessity for idealisation and compartmentalisation of black music into specific areas of control. Joseph Boskin suggests a relationship between slave performances of secular music (for example, those which Solomon Northrup mentions, referenced in chapter one) and the development of minstrelsy in the North. The control evident over Northrup's performance could no longer be exercised over Northern African-Americans, so when black ex-slaves began to participate in minstrel shows, 'Northern whites, like

Southerners, could now watch *their* blacks perform.’ (Boskin, 78) Sidran expresses this idea in positive terms, suggesting that minstrelsy ‘established that there was a *need* in white culture for what the black culture had to offer.’ (Sidran, 32) But what does this mean for the state of black music? If the importance of minstrelsy to the evolution of African-American music only occurred when African-Americans themselves began participating in these shows after the Civil War, minstrelsy’s continuing appropriation by white musicians undoubtedly affects our perception of it. While the white entertainment industry had been subdivided into class groups, the black industry was only just beginning to form, and black entertainers to exist. How do we judge such a seemingly constrained industry?

The rise of the performer: what are we to make of minstrels?

This appears to be a difficulty for most commentators. While Jones notes that black minstrel shows popularised Negro music and ‘provided the first real employment for Negro entertainers’ (Jones, 1963, 86), Toll reminds us that ‘black minstrels in effect added credibility to these images [those of the white minstrel] by making it seem that Negroes actually behaved like minstrelsy’s black caricatures.’ (Toll, 196) So while becoming a minstrel was a passport to the stage, it also required that performers manipulated their status as African-Americans. When black minstrel shows began, many of the performers billed themselves as ‘ex-slaves’, and formed false musical and cultural connections with plantation life. It is of course possible that many supposedly authentic ‘plantation worksongs’ in fact stem from this period.

The effects of the American Civil War cannot easily be summarised, and due to the controversies surrounding abolition this period does not clearly represent change in African-American musical history. Sherrill Martin's essay 'Music of Black Americans during the war years 1861-1865' details the emancipation of blacks into the American army during the Civil War, and suggests that '[a] new classification of music, regimental battle songs, emerged with the formation of additional black regiments.' (Martin, 5) On paper, the wartime emancipation of blacks began with their music. as 'the first published spiritual', 'Go Down Moses', was transcribed by a visitor to the front-line, and published in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* December 14, 1861. (ibid., 3) And again, in October 1863, Sojourner Truth's 'The Valiant Soldiers' (which became known as the 'Battle-Hymn of the Republic') was composed for the 'First Michigan Colored Regiment'. (ibid., 7) But while this sense of freedom and equality exists on paper, in the public arena minstrelsy was presenting rather different pictures of the black soldier, as 'disorderly slapstick versions of military "know-nothings"'. (Toll, 120) During wartime, any form of entertainment would have been welcome, and minstrelsy was undoubtedly suitable for the atmosphere of the Civil War, forcing comedy out of a sensitive situation.

What may be far more important than the complexities surrounding minstrelsy and emancipation is the importance of the rise of the African-American performer in the community. Outside minstrelsy, and perhaps as a direct result of it, African-Americans were now accepted as performers. Jones claims that the creation of performance personas meant that 'now large groups of Negroes could sit quietly in a show and listen to a performer re-create certain serious areas of their lives.' (Jones, 1963, 87) Production

was no longer the only way of music-making for African-Americans: reproduction has also become possible. The heightened level of financial security provided flexibility for these groups; not only were they able to buy and listen to commercially produced records, but, more importantly, those they listened to were black, and were making money through this music. Sidran claims that this had a negative effect, in that 'the performer/ audience relationship was all the more reduced to economic terms' (Sidran, 66), but it is important to remember the empowerment represented by money to those who had previously been unable to possess it. There begins to be a sense of community, working together towards a valid cultural aim, rather than one created and nurtured by white ownership. This remarkable change, from a controlled and forced self to a creative and productive persona, marks the most important area of African-American music history. The evolution of the oral self into the persona of commercial records and literate autobiographies, represents in itself the key to understanding the latter. Persona is a crucial factor in all jazz autobiography, and its development began with blues.

Perhaps the most interesting example of a blues performer from this period is Blind Lemon Jefferson, whose *Squeeze my Lemon* recordings date from 1926-9. Jefferson represents the beginning of the time when the individual personas of black musicians began to impact on their perception by white audiences. The intensely personal nature of the songs shows a vast development from the communality of the work-song and spiritual, particularly in the obvious sense of personal and sexual freedom. In a March 1927 recording of 'Black Snake Moan',³⁵ he seems to be improvising, using long sustained cries ('weelllll', 'mmmmm' etc.) during which to compose the next lyric. His lyric is that of a wronged man: 'She told me late last night:

you don't need no mama no how' combined with the explicit sexual imagery of a 'black snake crawling in my room' and later on the urgency of: 'some pretty mama better come in, get this black snake soon'. Jefferson varies the call and response style of guitar playing, accompanying each vocal line with a basic arpeggio and expanding this to both mimic and answer the verbal phrases after each one. His instrumental phrases often exceed the usual number of beats, but he merely extends them accordingly.

Jefferson's individual style, apparent in both lyric and guitar technique, reveals that blues at this time had become an intensely personal genre in which the specific qualities of an individual musician were given the chance to shine. Ben Sidran suggests that Jefferson, and others like him, were in fact physically advantaged: 'blindness is potentially an advantage when dealing in so heavily an oral/ aural occupation as blues singing.' (Sidran, 83) By this he appears to be referring to the heightened sense of hearing that blind people often attest to: Jefferson's blindness undoubtedly improved not only his oral abilities but also his potential for earning white record executives large pay cheques. The fact of his blindness would have confined him largely to oral production, and this is often the sphere in which black performers are situated.

Jefferson represents a complete move away from the time when Negro slaves were considered to be non-human. His sexual persona reveals that African-American music has finally reached that stage at which the racial individual was more complex than the racial community. A musician such as him represents the model from which many of our perceptions of African-American musicians have evolved, and their 'blues' personas are essential to understanding those perceptions and personas found in jazz autobiography. What follows does not pretend to be a comprehensive study of the

³⁵This may be heard in Excerpt Four of the accompanying cassette (see appendix three for details).

evolution of Twentieth Century jazz, for that is available in countless studies already: it aims rather to complete the set up of the context for jazz autobiography.

The advent of jazz

Other elements surrounding blues were also developing into what would be perceived as a greater sense of freedom, especially a sexual freedom hitherto unexpressed in African-American music, which later became an integral part of the jazz musician's public persona. Around the early Twenties, music was thought of primarily as social entertainment, present at parties and jook joints. For example, Boogie Woogie developed around this time, a distinctive pianistic style which was frequently associated with all night parties. The introduction of instruments also marked an important stage in the evolution of African-American music and greatly affected performance technique. The presence, implied or actual, of the instrumental response reveals an assertive individual performer whose freedom is extended through the instrument. Some later recordings of a definitive twelve-bar blues are those of Huddie 'Leadbelly' Ledbetter, a convict employed (and thus freed) by the scholar John Lomax in order to accompany him on field trips. A classic example is found in Leadbelly's 1940 recording of 'Good Morning Blues', in which the singer accompanies himself on the guitar, varying only from the classic structure (a short vocal phrase, answered by the guitar) in order to create an anacrusis.³⁶ The integrity and wholeness of the piece is illustrated in the regular rhythmic drive of the voice and guitar. The lyrics are also altered by Leadbelly to suit his musical 'personality': 'A brownskin woman will make a moon-eyed man go blind' seems to have developed from the basic mention of the woman (or 'baby') whom

we find in Jimmy Rushing's original version, recorded in 1937. (lyrics in Gates (ed.), 1997, 33) Thus the early decades of the twentieth century were marked by the presence of *performers*. While the lyrics changed from spiritual yearnings to include more earthly desires, the intention behind the songs also began to develop. Although it is difficult to clarify the motivation behind the spirituals, it is fair to say that they did not represent individual performances to an audience. Blues represents the converse impulse: to perform as an individual.

Aesthetically, the musical characteristics of jazz music are thought to have been formed directly from the merger of European and African dance rhythms by Creole slaves, whose masters were French and Spanish.³⁷ The most famous site for this music was Congo Square in New Orleans, where Sunday celebrations took place from around 1817 up until its demolition in 1885. Buerkle and Barker's study *Bourbon Street Black* suggests that 'dances in Congo Square were encouraged by the whites to allow slaves to release tension'. (Buerkle, 13) After this, Sidran suggests, the 'great African drums of *vodun* [now commonly known as voodoo] ritual were replaced by the bass drums of the marching band'. (Sidran, 48) The presence of voodoo rituals in New Orleans appears to have suggested both power and overt sexuality; these elements of jazz have, interestingly, always been stressed by white commentators.

The attitudes of white writers of the time are perfectly summarised in the white historian Grace King's 1895 account of 'Voudou meetings in the West Indian Islands.' She writes of 'the king with his hand on the serpent, receiving from it the trembling of the body which he communicates to the queen, and which she passes on to all in the

³⁶See Excerpt Three on the accompanying cassette.

room'. (King, 343) The sexuality which King suggests here in using the image of the serpent is extremely powerful and almost violent; it clearly terrifies the writer and is intended to portray black voodoo as an unknown, fearful entity. Indeed, King's analysis suggests the vibrant and sensual existence of flesh and body, combined with an inherent terror at its possible power. In general, King's account of New Orleans life (*New Orleans: The Place and The People*) is a fascinating indictment of the terror experienced by white Americans at the existence of the free, and highly musical, black. This apprehension will be found consistently in reactions towards jazz personas and jazz autobiography in the twentieth century.

The evolution of voodoo drums in a slightly less terrifying mode is suggested by various critics, including Jones and Sidran, the latter quoting some sleeve notes by Bunk Johnson to a record entitled *New Orleans Parade* that claims people would 'follow the funeral [procession] to the cemetery just to get this ragtime music comin' back.' (Sidran, 50) Jones notes that marching bands were set up by ex-slaves, and 'used for all kinds of affairs; in addition to the famous funeral processions, they played for picnics, dances, boating trips, and the like.' (Jones, 1963, 73) These funeral processions were apparently

under the auspices of the lodges, clubs and societies. Everyone in New Orleans belonged to some secret order or society...on the way out to the graveyard, the band played in dead-march time, with muffled drums, soft and somber dirges, including *Free As a Bird*, *When the Saints Go Marching On*, *Nearer my God to Thee*, and real funeral marches...They came back playing *High Society* and *King Porter Stomp*'. (Ramsey and Smith., 27)

This appears to be a tradition which was also existent in slavery times: Nicholas Cresswell's journal of 1774 details a visit to the funeral of a slave, during which '[i]nstead of weeping and wailing, they dance and sing and appear to be the happiest mortals on earth.' (Cresswell, 40) Such rituals formed an important part of the early

³⁷An example of jazz may be found in Excerpt Five of the accompanying cassette (see appendix three for details).

lives of many famous jazz musicians, and references in their autobiographies will be seen to reflect this.

On a more social level, Douglas S. Enefer's *Jazz in Black and White* suggests that the term 'jazz' came into use only when professional New Orleans bands were hired for 'Chicago restaurants and night clubs,' thus marking a distinction between personal and public entertainment. (Enefer, 12) The social characteristics of jazz build up, and modify, those of blues. Freedom, sexuality and individuality were all exalted, and, at times, became problematic. The free African-American musician is to be found in a challenging and highly disturbing form in the case of Buddy Bolden. Bolden's story, of fast deterioration, deranged outburst and slow decline, is well-known and frequently cited, although no recordings and only one photograph of the artist exist. He forms part of the annals of jazz history, but much of his story is potentially fictional. Bolden thus forms a connection between jazz history and jazz autobiography: the first example of an African-American jazz persona, but about whom nothing factual can be ascertained. His story, most passionately told in Michael Ondaatje's 1993 fictional biography *Coming Through Slaughter*, reveals the dramatisation of jazz life that the autobiographers to be discussed in the following chapters had to contend with. Ondaatje enacts Bolden's life, creating a shadowy, uncertain persona, summarised in the suggestion that he 'walked into a parade one day...[but] never spoke of the past.' (Ondaatje, 40) The novel portrays a similarly spectral community, in which people leave and arrive without fuss: 'don't worry', his wife Nora is told by a friend as he disappears one day, 'he'll be back soon'. (ibid., 20)

By this time groups such as Bolden's, which now contained a variety of instruments, were playing for nightly entertainment rather than specific social occasions (Bolden was, according to the popular view, a barber by day). This sense of a double life, a different persona which only comes out at night, is reinforced by the third-person accounts of Bolden currently available. Ramsey and Smith's *Jazzmen* creates the usual picture of the black jazz musician: Bolden's dangerous and sexual nature are emphasised in lines such as '[a]t times, this joint [Nancy Hank's Saloon] got too rough for even the Bolden Band.' Bolden apparently had three women at a time, and '*all three* [were] *satisfied*.' (Ramsey and Smith, 14-15) Bolden's overt sexuality is always linked to his mental deterioration: Ramsey and Smith claim the attack he suffered during the famous Labour Day parade was 'a rampage...there are those who say that women killed Buddy Bolden'. (ibid., 18)

Jazz music from the Twenties and Thirties is also eternally linked in all jazz histories to sex, drugs and gambling, and the impact of these associations for jazz autobiography will also be assessed. Ben Sidran, for example, suggests that '[m]usic was not a full-time profession for more than a handful of black musicians in the early days of New Orleans, but it was part of the larger gaming industry of the city.' (Sidran, 44) Ramsey and Smith's *Jazzmen*, a more conversational text, proposes that the 'honky-tonks and barrel-houses' in Storyville, New Orleans' red light district, were 'jammed every night with river rowdies, card sharks, roughnecks, pimps, and all varieties of male parasites' along with 'hundreds of Negroes who could sit down and play and sing the low-down blues.' (Ramsey and Smith, 35) This mixture of legal and illegal (or acceptable and unacceptable) entertainment led to the demise of Storyville in the

Twenties, when the U.S. Navy began to clamp down on prostitution, and jazz began to move away from its roots. However the importance of jazz culture of which music was only a part, was great. Sidran argues that because black music came to represent deviancy, 'the underworld flavour of [the musician's] life became subject to social myth, and the spirit of resistance in his music became all the more relevant to whites.' (Sidran, 56) Here, we may take 'social myth' to equal drama: black music would always be dramatised, generally in a negative and destructive manner, as with the story of Bolden.

This element of drama does of course transfer well onto the written page. The 'social myth' of the black jazz musician has, and always will be, a popular subject within academic discourse. Yet this discourse has, until now, consistently failed to recognise the value of many first-person accounts of the twentieth-century African-American jazz life, to be found in at least forty jazz autobiographies written between 1936 and 1996. One reason why jazz autobiographies are rarely discussed is undoubtedly the vibrancy and honesty of so many of these texts, often producing shocking and profoundly disturbing real-life drama. They reflect all aspects of the history of African-American music which have been discussed here: sexuality, oppression, freedom, and, most importantly of all, the celebration of individuality. The next three chapters of this thesis will explore the jazz autobiography, suggesting that any study of African-American music history is incomplete without a strong awareness of its significance. It is these autobiographies which most squarely place jazz in its context.

Chapter Three: Narratives of History, Hagiography and Hierarchy

In this chapter, we move from the music to the texts. We will begin by summarising some of the issues faced by the critic when dealing with African-American jazz autobiography, the subject of the following three chapters. Three quotations, taken from the plethora of jazz writing, serve to illustrate these issues in miniature. The first comes from the celebrated jazz pianist and composer Duke Ellington, who suggests in his autobiography that his position as a 'Negro' is, because of his celebrity status, seen to be representative of the entire African-American population. 'When we went out into the world,' he claims, 'we would have the grave responsibility of being practically always on stage, for every time people saw a Negro they would go into a reappraisal of the race.' (Ellington, 17) This first quotation challenges our conception of the autobiographical self, for it suggests that Ellington's status as an individual is based solely on his constant performance. Ellington's words bring to mind the personas examined in the previous chapter which came into existence with the advent of blues and jazz.

For the critic of such musicians and their autobiographies, then, traditional autobiographical assumptions become void. Our second quotation comes from Susanna Egan's *Patterns of Experience in Autobiography* (1984), in which she suggests that '[i]t seems fair to assume that the autobiographer begins his work with a clear sense of himself to which he would like to be true...his individuality is his birthright and he will not sell it, unless he is incompetent, for a mess of facts.' (Egan, 14) This type of assumption is equally challenged by African-American jazz autobiography: the

‘birthright’ of the black autobiographer to understand his history is often denied: his life may well become ‘a mess of facts.’

William L. Andrews supplies a third perspective, suggesting that it is now difficult to discuss his subject, African-American autobiography, without reference to the mass of extra-literary research which has recently appeared. ‘What is most needed, and what is most to be anticipated, in future African-American autobiography criticism,’ claims Andrews, ‘are books that reconstruct the history of this genre and /or offer theories of analysis and criticism that bring into play the full panoply of cultural, social, and historical research that has been done in the last thirty years on African-Americans.’ (Andrews, 210) He suggests, then, that individual texts have little value unless placed in terms of the vibrant history of the African-American race: again, the personal is intricately merged with the communal and social.

Throughout these three chapters which focus specifically on the content of the autobiographies and the personas within them, these three issues will prove to be crucial to an understanding of the texts. The presence of individuality, an aspect of African-American autobiography both heightened and hampered, as Ellington suggests, by the celebrity status of texts such as those by jazz musicians, will bring together these issues into a major focus. One important aspect of this will involve the evaluation of a jazz hierarchy within the texts, with reference to theories of masculinity and inheritance. In addition, the racial portrayal of the autobiographer will begin an investigation into the textual identity politics of the texts. The presence of the ghostwriter or editor will therefore be taken into account, and the relationship between the ghostwriter and autobiographer evaluated. Style, orality and voice will also be considered, alongside

theories of signification and black speech. Concluding with an examination of the social role of jazz musicians, the connections between text and music which will be examined in the final chapter will be suggested.

In order to achieve these aims, some new terminology is required. Throughout these chapters, the presence of the autobiographer (i.e. the musician who is the focus of the autobiography) within the text will be termed the 'narrated protagonist'. Outside the text, when referred to as a writer, he or she will be termed the 'autobiographer'. The former term thus allows for the presence of the ghostwriter or editor, and also admits the presence of a persona, which may or may not be factually and historically accurate. The latter term, in contrast, refers to the factual existence of a text, and the historical presence of the African-American jazz musician as involved in the writing of an autobiography. If reference is being made to African-American autobiography in general, and not specifically to jazz autobiography, the latter term will be used.

In addition, a new term, 'jazz autobiography,' is introduced here. The concept of 'jazz autobiography' is complex, combining, for example, textual elements of oral and literate culture, but it should also be read more simplistically, as referring to an autobiographical text by a jazz musician. Further aspects of this term will be introduced as appropriate. Although some of the texts chosen for discussion either claim to be, or are by circumstantial evidence, biographies, and some are traditionally viewed as less authentic texts, the reading of some forty autobiographies, published between 1936 and 1996, reveals similarities that permit the general terminology. Terms of authenticity and authority will in fact form a major part of the discussion, as an attempt is made to situate

these texts within contemporary theories of the hybrid and virtual text. Discussion will span from Louis Armstrong's *Swing That Music* (1936) to Teddy Wilson's *Teddy Wilson Talks Jazz* (1996), and will include texts by Sidney Bechet, Count Basie, Charles Mingus and Miles Davis.

Definitions of race undertaken in the previous chapter should be recalled when considering the choice of texts discussed here. The term 'African-American' will continue to be used here, pertaining to cultural difference, as found in the previous chapters. This term is however complicated to a further extent by the personas found in jazz autobiography, and some use of 'black' and 'white' will be necessary. While many autobiographies by white jazz musicians do exist, and will be dealt with briefly in order to highlight oppositions, I have chosen to focus primarily on those by black musicians, both African-American and Creole. In order to explain why these choices have been made, and to focus the discussion on racial distinction and boundary, our focus now will be on Donna Haraway's essay 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' (1980). Haraway, as we will see, suggests solutions to problems of boundary and difference, which will move our focus away from issues of essentialism, and towards those of critical value. In discussing the 'border war[s]' that we undertake - although situating her argument in feminism, as women, placed against patriarchal domination, negotiate an unbordered identity - Haraway's positive theory of hybridity is easily applicable to a racial environment.

Haraway refuses the acceptance of polar terms (for her, 'male' and 'female': here, those such as 'blackness' and 'whiteness'), suggesting rather that '[t]he relationships for forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchical

domination, are at issue'. (Haraway, 51) In this definition, identity and critical value rest on parts, on constructions which do not necessarily form polar and recognisable wholes such as black and white. It becomes more appropriate, if we are to avoid defining identities in terms of opposites and 'Others', to examine these parts and to suggest their value, critical or otherwise, without reference to opposition and difference. Without falsely suggesting that racial issues are especially important or unimportant for the identity of the narrated protagonist, we can thus begin to discuss these texts critically.

Clearly recourse to hybridity consents that our identities, and the identities of those we discuss critically, are not bordered by definition and naming. There are some problems with this. If identities (as, for example, those of woman or black) are accepted as 'cyborg' (hybrid beings who consist of myriad parts not wholes), Haraway suggests that these borders can diffuse, allowing a self free from social and physical restrictions to emerge. While the difficulties inherent in defining 'race' purely in terms of difference are thereby vocalised, and a solution is offered which avoids critical value being associated with this difference, this may suggest to some the desire for the construction of utopias. In a white-controlled utopian society, a lack of definition would inhibit the acknowledgement and celebration of difference. A similar problem appears to occur if the control is relinquished, and some political writers have made reference to this. For example, the writer and activist Frantz Fanon, discussing colonisation, argues that borders constantly exist, and the desire to create a one-race utopia is overwhelming:

The well-known principle that all men are equal...[is] illustrated in the colonies from the moment that the native claims that he is the equal of the settler. One step more, and he is ready to fight to be more than the settler. In fact, he has already decided to eject him and take his place'. (Fanon, 1961, 34)

The deconstruction of borders is suggestive of utopian leanings and this must be acknowledged. However, this emphasis is a minor consideration in terms of the useful definitions which Haraway's model can offer to a discussion of jazz autobiography.

A further use involves appropriating Haraway's perception of the 'cyborg world', the imaginary futuristic world in which she situates her polemic. Through this we can alter our perceptions of the 'authentic', a term which is placed in difficulties by the presence of ghostwriters in these texts. Ghost-written texts are usually devalued by critics, who suggest that their lack of definite authorship, coupled with the pretence involved in suggesting one person has written the text, create problems of authorisation. But if unification and totality, even these totalities constructed from constituent parts, are no longer valid, then, for Haraway, the whole, non-hybrid self is no longer authentic. Her cyborg world consists of those who operate without boundaries or clearly defined roles. Indeed, in the case of much jazz autobiography, authorship, and therefore authentication of the author, is impossible to locate. As will be seen, lost manuscripts, ambiguous editing policies and lengthy composition periods all contribute to the unfeasibility of claiming sole authorship of such a text. In the case of these texts, hybrid authorship is the only type of authorship which can be recognised and, as such, in this particular genre of writing, should be valued above that which is defined by boundary and difference. As Haraway suggests, with identities (or texts) formed from parts, '[t]he transcendent authorisation of interpretation is lost'. (Haraway, 52) 'Authorisation' of the self, then, is only possible if hybridity is taken to represent or encompass a collaborative and multifaceted effort.

Haraway aids us further in establishing a theory of collaborative autobiography in suggesting that

[n]o objects, spaces, or bodies are sacred in themselves; any component can be interfaced with any others of the proper standard, the proper code, can be constructed for processing signals in a common language. (ibid., 55)

Without fixed, insurmountable boundaries, then, Haraway proposes that anyone can choose to represent another 'if...the proper code can be constructed'. The 'common language' which results from this code can then be used to communicate this hybridity to others. As the language of African-American jazz autobiography is examined, it will become apparent that this 'common language' not only represents the successful collaboration between musician and ghostwriter, but that it also reveals the relationship between the audience and writer. Jazz autobiography by white musicians fails to maintain this hybridity, in opposition to the constructions of comparative black texts. Problems of ghostwriting and editing are less important at this stage than the realisation that many African-American jazz autobiographies are hybrid texts with hybrid authors, whose 'common language' is a communication to the audience from a hybrid perspective. White autobiographers, while often occupying a physically hybrid space, purposefully draw boundaries and polarities which devalue any common or shared element between author, editor and reader.

These boundaries are primarily a result of the difficult and often contentious space occupied by jazz and jazz writing, referred to in chapter one. Existing on the margins of society, the black jazz musician becomes a focus for white interest, but only flirtatious interest. Culturally he is attractive, but physically he is unappealing. As an aid, Haraway proposes that 'cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves.' (ibid., 57)

Unfortunately 'the maze of dualisms' is not only the source and method for much recent critical writing on African-American texts, but is also often inherent in the character of the black protagonist. Examination of black autobiography will often reveal that he has 'explained' his identity to himself purely within these terms. The problematics of race and racism, then, are not exempt in jazz autobiography; these problematics, however, should not affect either the critical value or the hybrid nature of the authorship. They should not be used to make comment on any outward element of the text, including issues of authorisation and authenticity. In order that definitions may be constructed and then deconstructed, however, racial terminology cannot be ignored. Firstly, then, these 'dualisms' of race, of 'whiteness' and 'blackness', will be illustrated, and the importance of critical hybridity will, through this, become apparent.

'Really the Blues'? An exploration of whiteness as black text

While the terms 'whiteness' and 'blackness' are easily defined by an essentialist reading which posits one against the other and allows that authenticity is determined by racial origin, recent theories, particularly of the former, have allowed further aspects of the two terms to emerge. In order to set up the terms for an exploration of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' within the particular context of jazz autobiography, our focus now will be on one particular text, by a white jazz musician.

Really The Blues, Milton 'Mezz' Mezzrow's 1946 autobiography (written with Bernard Wolfe, whose insightful afterword is a key text for anyone discussing these issues) is in part an exploration of Mezzrow's attempt (which he believed to have been successful) to 'actually, physically, turn...black.' (Wolfe in Mezzrow, 389) While ideas

and enactments of *faking* physical blackness - minstrelsy. for example - can and have been discussed primarily with reference to intent, the belief that physical characteristics can be altered simply through immersion in cultural practices and role-playing (what Wolfe terms 'extended immersion in the ghetto') is at best farcical.³⁸ Mezzrow's belief in his inherent 'blackness' surpasses even Norman Mailer's hipster model, examined in the first chapter: his transformation is not only transcultural, but completely physical.

Our response to this belief, while incredulous, must consider the reasons for its existence. Wolfe's afterword follows Mailer's response to the place of the black man in white American culture, he discusses the 'pleasure culture' which surrounds the appropriation of blackness by those such as Mezzrow. Indeed, both the 1993 and 1999 editions of *Really the Blues* feature a front cover photograph of a black man: the author's photograph, easily overlooked. features on the inside, recognisably white. While Mezzrow's belief in his physical blackness was then clearly fabricated, it is the text which finally determines that total appropriation of black culture is also impossible. Simulation of blackness marks Mezzrow as a failure: he attempts to achieve hybridity, but, through overstating his place *within* the black race, loses. In his quest for blackness he overlooks whiteness, and in trying to deny his own cultural heritage, raises further boundaries between white and black. Unfortunately *Really the Blues* merely accentuates the dualisms it tries so desperately to avoid.

The actual language of the text, then, reveals a failure in appropriation: linguistic borders are *constructed*, and the successful hybridity of collaborative black texts is not evident. Mezzrow includes a 'dictionary' of black talk, presumably intended for white

³⁸ Although the American public has largely accepted the transformation of pop singer Michael Jackson, Mezzrow makes no mention of surgery or other physical techniques: his represents a mental belief in

readers. Although this tactic was previously used by the African-American entertainer Cab Calloway, who first published a 'Hepster's Dictionary' in 1938, here the main reason for this glossary appears to be a short section of *Really the Blues*, to be found between pages 214-217, which constitutes, according to Mezzrow, a 'jive'. While Calloway's dictionary stemmed from the need for translation and explanation of an entirely new cultural language, Mezzrow merely translates himself. The dire nature of *Really the Blues*' 'jive' section was apparently unnoticed by the 1999 publishers, and an excerpt from it is placed at the beginning of their edition as a preface. While the publishers may have considered the text valuable, in fact, while the 'jive' is supposed to represent Mezzrow's inclusion and comprehension of black street language, it reveals a complete misunderstanding of black informal speech, whose 'translation' (included in an appendix at the back of the book) is just as incomprehensible as the supposed 'jive'. By comparing Mezzrow's appropriation of black English with Miles Davis' use of it in his autobiography *Miles* (1989), the problems inherent in accepting *Really the Blues* as a text worthy of critical discussion will be illustrated.³⁹

A simple example is Davis' use of the expletive 'fuck', which for him, as for other black jazz musicians, represents both a positive and negative exclamation, depending on contexts and collocations. Mezzrow, however, never swears. His 'jive' is unfailingly positive. All the issues he touches on - drugs ('pushing my gauge [sic]'), pawning possessions ('the trey [sic] of knockers') and cheating on partners ('this is my new dinner') seem to be hilarious to him. Davis, one of many musicians who were well-

complete racial change.

³⁹Critical response to Mezzrow's text has been minimal, but almost completely resoundingly negative: Gayle Wald, for example, has denounced it as 'excruciatingly affected...ridiculously staged, merely theatrical and hyperbolic'. (Wald, 131)

known to have serious problems with money, drugs and fidelity, takes these kinds of issues seriously in his autobiography because he recognises them as real-life experiences. They certainly do not form the basis for street-corner conversations: 'I was in a deep fog,' Miles says of his experiences with drugs and pimping, 'I knew I had to do something.' (Davis, 138) Awkwardly, Mezzrow uses 'motherfreyer', which he classifies in his glossary as an 'incestuous obscenity'. Davis, as can be imagined, uses the more well-known version.

Mezzrow glorifies fighting and guns, discussing 'roam[ing] through the streets and alleys like desperados' (Mezzrow, 6), proud of his abilities as a burglar: 'we could take Mr. Anybody's car any time we had a mind to.' (ibid., 7) Davis, on the other hand, immediately associates guns with race rioting, recalling the East St. Louis massacre in the first few pages, when 'they [white policemen] just shot them [black rioters] down like they were out shooting pigs or stray dogs.' (Davis, 15) Mezzrow's text cannot fail to appear farcical under these circumstances. Indeed, Davis himself comments on 'that stupid *Our Gang* bullshit image white people had about black people.' (ibid., 19) As it strives for blackness from whiteness, *Really the Blues* achieves an insipid, unclear text. Perhaps Mezzrow's painful attempts to identify himself with the black race are nowhere more evident than in this passage, which describes the aftermath of a race riot in prison:

I kept looking at the blank walls and seeing the mean, murdering faces of those southern peckerwoods when they went after Big Six [a black inmate] and the others with their knives. It couldn't have been worse if they'd come after me. I felt so close to those Negroes, it was just like I'd seen a gang attack on my own family.' (Mezzrow, 16)

It is problematic that here Mezzrow is unable to identify with white culture but intensely disturbing that he attempts to appropriate and indeed dominate black culture. The ending of *Really the Blues* reveals his view of the significance of the text, and his attempt to furnish it with authenticity:

I sure never suspected I was living a saga and an odyssey, during all those frantic years. I thought I was just trying to keep my head above water, and feed my breadbasket now and then, and maybe chase a butterfly and a soapbubble or two. Now it turns out I was significant! Man oh man, it looks like you got to watch every move you make; you can't be too careful. If I'd known I was significant, instead of just hungry and beat, I sure would have changed my ways.' (ibid., 335)

Why, then, did this 'significant' man choose to abandon whiteness? What are the problematics of white culture which caused him to do so? And do we constantly have to define whiteness with reference to blackness, or can we truly achieve a hybrid critical viewpoint?

Racial belonging and authenticity: defining terms

In his autobiography, *Straight Life* (1979), the white jazz musician Art Pepper asks a vital question: 'Jazz is an art form,' he asserts, 'How can an art form *belong* to one race of people?' (Pepper, 113) Pepper is responding to critics of his music who have insisted he is not as proficient at jazz because he is white: he does not 'belong' to the correct race. Yet the question of 'belong[ing]' asserts itself in Mezzrow's text as a desire *to* belong. It becomes problematic, then, to even discuss such a polarised text: at least in the sphere of jazz autobiography, the affectation of black art forms in fact highlights the innate difference between white and black texts.⁴⁰ Although authenticity is often difficult to quantify with respect to edited autobiographies, the analysis below will suggest that focusing on texts by African-Americans or Creoles will in fact facilitate this.

⁴⁰Oddly, *Really the Blues* is the only jazz autobiography discussed by Henry Louis Gates in his study *The Signifying Monkey*: Gates ignores the controversies surrounding Mezzrow's adoption of the black race, and instead claims him as 'one of the first commentators to recognise that signifyin(g) as a structure of performance could apply equally to verbal texts and musical texts.' (Gates, 1988, 69) I find this problematic, as Gates locates 'signifyin(g)' as a 'Black experience'. (ibid., 111)

It has been suggested through examination of the theory of Donna Haraway that unifying conceptions of race and gender often prove problematic. By situating one white autobiographer in relation to one black (Mezzrow/ Davis), some of the difficulties in assigning meaning to that which so definitively and purposefully appropriates the Other have been revealed. An examination of recent critical views on whiteness will aid this. Valerie Babb claims that whiteness, and critical placement of the Other (here, the ethnic minority) in opposition to it, 'assisted in forging ties among people who had no natural ties, by inventing a series of myths to hold them together.' (Babb, 169) As whites, we claim kinship through definition of what is *not* acceptable rather than what is: a destructive, uncelebratory force. Without allowing ourselves the freedom to assess our own cultural situation, we assume one of two positions, either, as Mailer and Mezzrow have shown, fabricating ourselves *as* Other, or, as other white autobiographies will reveal, immersing our self within a homogenous mass of whiteness. It is time to evaluate the problematics of whiteness, and clear examples of these are evident in white jazz autobiography, whose tired narrative techniques do not often approach the vitality of equivalent black texts.⁴¹

These techniques will now be examined in selected white jazz autobiographies, excluding *Really The Blues*. For while for Mezzrow, whiteness clearly and categorically represents inferiority, he is the only narrated protagonist to suggest a complete dispersal of his racial origins in search of new ones. For other writers and readers, whiteness represents something far more indistinguishable. Rebecca Aanerud's essay 'Fictions of Whiteness' suggests that, in most texts, 'the reader, positioned as white, assumes the

⁴¹White jazz autobiographies in the bibliography are those by Condon, Kaminsky, Herman, Freeman and Mezzrow.

characters are white.’ (Aanerud, 37) As the ‘unspoken norm,’ whiteness functions as a purely peripheral part of the text; in contrast, black jazz autobiographers often situate their racial origin as central to it. As Jolanta A. Drzewiecka suggests, ‘what makes white identity different is its fleetingness and invisibility to those who are white.’ (Drzewiecka, 198) The world of jazz music is a racial world, and to discuss a life in twentieth century jazz without reference to the racial tensions and ideologies that flourished during the sixties and seventies seems almost as absurd as Mezzrow’s jive talk. Yet this is what many white jazz autobiographers attempt. As whites, their whiteness exempts them from becoming involved in race; there is no need to discuss the problematics of their own identity if it has already been consumed and dismissed as whiteness.

White jazz autobiography: a short evaluation in terms of homogeneity and Drzewiecka’s ‘imagined communities’

Drzewiecka discusses the construction of ‘imagined communities’ by white groups, who situate their white identity within false, non-existent terms. Because, she asserts, ‘whiteness is defined in transparent universal terms,’ (ibid., 206) the ties between white people are evident in their conservative, undeveloped language. These communities, manifested in the language of texts, she terms ‘imagined’. If we are to apply Drzewiecka’s theory to Mezz Mezzrow’s assimilation of black culture, it may suggest he has recognized this fault in himself. Dispensing with whiteness and ‘imagined’ connections between himself and other white musicians, he embraces black sociocultural and physical conditions. However, this is but one extreme and unique

manifestation of a fascinating trend in white jazz autobiography. Other texts reflect more clearly the idea of white community. The white jazz autobiographies which will be discussed here, in concordance with Drzewiecka, reveal a homogeneity and universality which attest to their desire to maintain white ties, to live within the 'imagined community' of whiteness. Each text clearly situates itself as white. Although racial links are drawn quietly, implied rather than shouted (compare, for example, Miles Davis' infamous violent outbursts regarding his racial identity), they are nevertheless there. In the absence of black musicians in the text, in the subtle polarization of black and white, and occasionally in the admission of racial prejudice, white jazz autobiography is replete with 'imagined communities' which flourish through insipid invisibility.

Eddie Condon's *We Called it Music* (1992) illustrates the dismissiveness with which black jazz musicians are often dealt with in white jazz autobiography. Condon's portrayal of Louis Armstrong, for example, sets the two musicians against each other as polar opposites:

Armstrong seemed able to hear what [King] Oliver was improvising and reproduce it himself at the same time. It seemed impossible, so I dismissed it; but it was true. Then the two wove around each other like suspicious women talking about the same man. When they finally finished [Jimmy] MacPartland said "How do you like it?" There was only one thing to say: "It doesn't bother me. (Condon, 107-8)

Condon's strange competitive dismissal of Armstrong and Oliver to MacPartland suggests his reluctance to engage in a musical analysis of something so alien to him. By revealing that what they were doing 'seemed impossible,' he illustrates his difficulty in placing Armstrong's playing in the same context as his own. In addition to this, when Condon organizes a mixed-race concert, he highlights the difference in his chosen title, 'A Chiaroscuro Jazz Concert'⁴². He lists the musicians, 'Negroes' first and 'others' second, setting them against each other as his title defines – black/ white, boundaries

never more evident than in his monochromatic mind. It is also interesting to note Condon's description of Armstrong and Oliver as 'suspicious women', emasculating and degrading his rivals.

Other autobiographers not only construct these polarities, but also maintain a clear dominance/ subservience aspect between white and black. Max Kaminsky's *My Life In Jazz* (1965) spends some pages reclaiming the history of jazz from the 'American Negro,' and attempting to prove that '[j]azz's beginnings were just as respectable as classical music's beginnings.' He situates jazz as a Christian tradition ('The Bible gave those poor, bewildered, uprooted Negro people an identity...and they took to that Bible like a duck to water, and in taking to the Bible, and to the harmonies, they eventually came up with jazz.') (Kaminsky, 24) While the factual element in Kaminsky's version of jazz history is clearly at odds with other accounts, his positioning of the black musician is even more disturbing. 'Imagine if jazz had been created the other way around,' Kaminsky speculates, 'by white Americans sold into slavery in Africa.' (ibid., 25) Thus he refuses to place black and white within similar terms: they must always represent polar positions, even in his fantastical dismissals of reality. According to Kaminsky, the particular characteristics of the black man's submission to the white man are not considered: the situation could easily be reversed, and the opposite effect take place. Polarities of power are controlled simply by a twist of fate, and they are inherently interchangeable. Interestingly, Kaminsky has a similar reaction to Condon's on hearing Louis Armstrong's music: 'All I could think of doing,' he says, 'was to run away and hide till the blindness left me.' (ibid., 40) In placing themselves in opposition through incomprehension to Armstrong, Kaminsky and Condon create a community of

⁴² The term 'Chiaroscuro' usually describes a monochrome work of art

white disbelief which joins them together through fantastic invention and misunderstanding.

White communities are also self-privileged through more simple means. Woody Herman's autobiography *The Woodchopper's Ball* (1994) declines to chronicle the achievement of any black musicians; his inspirations are detailed in a long list of white musicians and, according to one such character George Simon, 'who chronicled the big band era,' his band is better than Count Basie's ('I gave Woody an A – and Basie a B') (Herman, 55). White autobiographies such as Herman's, Condon's and Kaminsky's are simplistic: they use only one tense where black autobiographies (such as that of Mingus) move between past, present and future, they create easily identifiable narrative voices, and they discuss a proliferation of fairly unmemorable white characters.⁴³ They are sexually chaste and drug free, and their content is as such not only insipid but also highly unlikely. There is no reason to think that white musicians did not participate in sex, drugs and gambling as actively as their black counterparts. White jazz autobiographies move chronologically, constructing their identities in relation to an undefined and unmemorable whiteness. While whiteness may well be the subject of much future critical discussion, these texts are not the basis for a study of jazz, or of valuable and memorable jazz autobiography. Further to this, as much of my discussion focuses on black racial identity, it would be fairly inauthentic to include such texts as these or Mezzrow's within the scope of this work.

It will become evident that, in this thesis, some texts are included to the exclusion of others. This is not only for reasons of space, but also relates once more to questions of identity: as the majority of the jazz autobiographies are collaborative

works, it is crucial that their narrated protagonist maintains a powerful presence in the text. The critic Albert Stone offers one of the few theories of collaborative autobiography currently available, and qualifies *his* choice of text in this way:

It is unlikely that there exists any collaborative autobiography which can successfully survive the kind of multifaceted analysis here suggested without a subject possessed of a powerful memory and imagination. These qualities cannot be supplied by the writer, although that collaborator must also possess them. More important for the successful writer of a collaboration is the ability to submerge himself in another's life without losing critical perspective on that life and personality. (Stone, 263)

My choice also is essentially based on this: both the interest experienced in the subject whilst reading the text, and my critical evaluation of the collaborator. In this sense it is unashamedly subjective. Texts clearly lacking in critical value, or in need of an editing process, have been consigned to a brief description or reference. It should be noted that authenticity issues surrounding the figure of the 'collaborator' will be further defined in terms of the specific identity politics of 'the black text'.

The jazz fraternity: narratives of history and hierarchy

The importance of history to the autobiographies is vast and thus forms the beginning of my discussion, which should be read with an awareness of the musical and social history detailed in the first two chapters. The representation of this history seems especially significant to the beginnings of many of these texts. Historical representation in jazz autobiography generally takes two forms, either being worded through specifics (themes of slavery, oppression, and reconstruction) or through a more general sense of 'going back', and a selection of opening chapters or introductions reveals significant similarities between them. Michael Fischer remarks on the importance of beginnings in his 1994 essay 'Autobiographical Voices (1,2,3) and Mosaic Memory'. Fischer

⁴³Issues of tense and their relation to style will be discussed in more details in chapters four and six.

examines the relationship of autobiography to various theoretical positions, concluding that the genre represents 'a site of interplay between the modernist vision of autonomous bounded egos, and postmodernist decentred selves.' (Fischer, 1994, 80) Both these 'egos' and 'selves' are particularly evident at the openings of texts, where, Fischer claims, 'autobiographies enact...in ways their authors perhaps do not realise.' (ibid., 104) Whether or not that realisation is effected here, certain tropes which become apparent during the examination of the openings of jazz autobiographies are intrinsically related to the subject's sense of self. Acknowledgement of African-American history, both personal and social, reveals the 'enact[ing]' of postmodernist fragmentation, and a desire to represent a modernist 'autonomous' self. These concepts of self and ego will be crucial to our understanding of these texts.⁴⁴

The approach to a history of the self is perhaps most clearly revealed in the narrative structures and techniques used in the text. An awareness both of postmodernist theories of narrative and of racial tensions which affect the nature of the text will facilitate further examination of these autobiographies. The theorist David K. Danow, whose study *Models of Narrative* (1997) discusses narrative models of time and space, draws three basic types from this: epic, labyrinth, and mythic. Their application to jazz autobiography and the terms under which they will be discussed will be illustrated before a close reading of the texts begins.

Epic narrative, traditionally the clearest model for an autobiography, is defined by a story in which, as Danow claims, the 'hero attempts to give meaning to his life in spite of the oppressive uncertainty and indeterminacy.' (Danow, 23) In the case of epic

⁴⁴For further reference to modernist/ postmodernist criticism of the autobiographical subject, see Bergland, 1994.

narrative, both time and space appear linearly – usually a chronological development within a bounded space of past, present and future.

The second model, the labyrinth, is on one level similar to the quest narrative type commonly associated with the slave narrative of the nineteenth century⁴⁵, in which the hero seeks a prize or goal. However, Danow suggests a further level of meaning which complicates the labyrinth quest: should the quest fail, the hero will spend ‘an existential endless wandering in a space that accommodates one’s physical presence but affords no hope of spiritual accommodation.’ (ibid., 101) The lack of personal fulfilment present in many African American jazz autobiographies will be examined in reference to this.

The third type, the mythic narrative, whereby the quest structure and/ or style of the text become existent outside our traditional and chronological boundaries of past, present and future allow, according to Danow, ‘the recognition and acknowledgement of myth...[and] allow for time to appear circular or recurrent, seeking nothing beyond what is already known, what is already conceived to be absolute Truth.’ (ibid., 19) The mythic narrative type will be examined with sole reference to Sidney Bechet’s *Treat it Gentle* (1960).

Brother Ray: Ray Charles’ Own Story, published in 1978, is an autobiography by the African-American pianist Ray Charles and his editor David Ritz (the co-writer of ‘Sexual Healing’) and, although not credited on the spine, a Mrs. Joshua Kahn, who ‘patiently transcribed every word of this book into Braille’ for the blind Charles. (Charles, vii) Charles’ own short introduction, an unusual feature for so many ‘edited’

⁴⁵ For example, those of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs

autobiographies, reveals something about his sense of history, and answers his own rhetorical question, posed at the top of the page, 'How do I look upon myself?':

That requires going back. Putting everything in the right perspective. Seeing where I come from and what I've actually been through. That takes some time and some thought. I intend to go back and relive it. And I'm pleased to have you come along with me, pleased that you're interested enough to sit there and listen to me tell my story. (ibid., xii)

For Charles, the relevance of 'going back' to the past has great importance for his present work, and his sense of self is amplified by his own personal history. History is further strengthened when the reader 'sit[s] there and listen[s]', participating in the telling. Ray Charles' casual tone and vernacular style ('pleased to have you') is common to many jazz autobiographies, and denotes the participation of the reader, who will 'come along' for the ride. His text reveals an overarching epic narrative, evident, for example, in the meaning he attaches to his personal history and its effect on the present, allowing for the 'right perspective' to emerge. His world view is strongly structured by the need for this perspective, a constructive and positive view which is often associated with epic narrative.

David Danow suggests that in such narratives personal strength is often reflected in a belief in the strength of all humankind, and in the orderly regulation of the protagonist's environment. The chronological nature of Charles' text, then, is evidence of his belief in the organisation of the world around him, and of the wider relevance of his personal and familial history. The inclusion of the reader in this structure of importance also reveals a humanist aspect to *Brother Ray*.⁴⁶ This does not suggest an anti-religious celebration of humankind, but rather an identification, based on the essential qualities of being human, here between narrated protagonist and reader.

⁴⁶For more on the humanist theory of narration, see William Alexander, 'Howells, Eliot, and the Humanized Reader' (1970)

The concept of fraternity between black jazz writers, which will be discussed in detail below, is likewise a humanist construction. Understanding the 'perspective' of autobiographies, whether racial, musical, or simply chronological is of course crucial to understanding and analysing the text as a whole. From his simple introduction it is obvious that for Ray Charles there is a particular need to focus on the history that accompanies his stories. While he is certain of his factual origins, and details his family life fairly comprehensively, his sense of self is structured by a careful remembrance and telling of history, from the 'right perspective'. Charles details his family life for over sixty pages, a remarkable contrast to other autobiographies which never attain this sense of history.

Sidney Bechet's sense of the importance of history in his own autobiography, *Treat It Gentle* (1960), is similarly placed to that of Ray Charles. Bechet's 'perspective' is outlined from the beginning, and before he allows his life story to be told, his view of music history is presented. He begins, as do others such as Davis and Mingus, with a prologue, a scene set outside the chronology of the book, in this case a conversation between Bechet and an unnamed man. While the man appears to believe that jazz is boundaried by individual lives, validating and acclaiming the importance of existing musicians ('This music is your music'), Bechet argues with a sense of past times, not only his own, but also those which formed part of a hierarchy: 'Jazz isn't just me' (Bechet, 2). The conversation also suggests the importance of future musicians: the man worries 'what was going to happen to Jazz when people like me [Bechet] weren't around any more' (ibid., 2), and Bechet responds by proclaiming the omnipresence of music. Music, he claims, 'was there waiting to be me. It was there waiting to be the

music.’ (ibid., 4) Here, there is both a sense of responsibility to those who preceded him, and a duty to connect his personal past with the present, and with his future:

I got it [music] from something inherited, just like the stories my father gave down to me. And those stories are all I know about some of the things bringing me to where I am. (ibid., 4)

The casual assumed similarity between music and text (in the form of ‘stories’) here is interesting, because it not only reveals Bechet’s strong belief in inheritance, but also, more importantly, his desire for representation of that inheritance. Not only is a knowledge of music directly passed down, but ‘stories’, possibly just as important to the present, also exist within this frame. These ‘stories’ and the undefined ‘something inherited’ from which Bechet’s musical ability stems, represent history, redefining his own story and ‘bringing’ him to the present. He goes on to tell some of these stories, blending a manifest sense of past with an expansion of the ‘facts’ his father told him. Although this personal history is largely fabricated (‘Omar’ was in fact the name of his father, who was a shoemaker, not a slave), the importance to Bechet lies purely in its existence as *story*. For this is mythic narrative, a contrast to epic type which facilitates his representation of Truth, and allows the reader to escape overt involvement and identification.

The term ‘myth’ is usefully defined for narrative purposes in Alan Dundes’ appropriately titled *Sacred Narrative* (1984), as ‘a sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be in their present form.’ (Dundes, 1) This basic construct, then, can be seen in *Treat It Gentle*, in the cyclical time structure of the text, and in the presentation of the myth of origin as Truth. For Bechet was undoubtedly fully aware of the historical inaccuracy of this part of the text, perhaps an unusual tactic for an author

wishing to present his 'autobiography'.⁴⁷ It is interesting, however, that many critics have accepted *Treat It Gentle* without reference to this, reasoning, according to John Chilton, Bechet's biographer, that 'the language used was so evocative that truth was irrelevant.' (Chilton, 291) Presumably here Chilton is referring both to its irrelevance for the reader and for Bechet himself. The 'evocative' nature of the language, which is undeniable, is something that can be explored in more detail, and which allows some of Bechet's intention to come to light.

These first few chapters of *Treat It Gentle* focus primarily on the story of Bechet's 'grandfather', Omar, who is introduced as a musician, playing his own home-made drums in the famous Sunday celebrations at Congo Square. He appears as a mythological character, who experiences love potions, moonlight pursuits, and the loss of his intended: although he has what Bechet describes as 'an awful early beginning', (Bechet, 12) his role in the text is not merely to draw our sympathies. 'Omar' is a signifier of history and of our personal relationship to our past, and his fictional presence suggests that this past can present itself in story rather than factual document.

Interestingly, the presence of song in the story functions both as an indication of close community and as a link between Bechet and Omar. During one particularly evocative scene, Omar's fellow slaves, who knew he was being hunted down, 'took that glad song my grandfather had made and they sent it away into the night, sending it back to my grandfather, trying to give him the gladness and power of it again.' (ibid., 31) Although they are unsuccessful in the pages of the historical fiction, Omar's song *is* resurrected in the final pages: Bechet suggests his impact on the present, and reveals why he chose to write his story: 'it was the feeling of someone back there - hearing the

⁴⁷ We can assume Bechet knew his father's real name was Omar and that he worked as a shoemaker.

song like it was coming up from somewhere'. (ibid., 202) Not only does this provide a circular structure for the text (Omar is indeed 'back there' in the early chapters), but more importantly it functions as a significant reminder of the parallel nature of personal past and inherited past. For Bechet, his true grandfather's history may be unknown, but that fictional history which his father 'gave down to' him functions as a connection to, and inspiration for, his present. It is a narrative of origin and, for the reader, essentially 'Truth'.

In a similar response to Chilton's, Whitney Balliett suggests that for him '[I]t does not matter how much improvisation there is in the story. Bechet's language is dense and mysterious and poetical.' (Balliett, 32) Indeed, the ending, in which Bechet hears Omar's song 'like it was coming up from somewhere' suggests volcanic imagery, a powerful force which loses little strength in its transmission from the fictional past. In fact, after the Omar episode Bechet carries on with his story, now fairly factual, in roughly chronological order, from his father's childhood in New Orleans, 'a lost thing finding itself' (Bechet, 48), to his first experiences with marching bands, with music 'the onliest [sic] thing that counted.' (ibid., 68)⁴⁸

Bechet, then, suggests that this 'right perspective' functions alongside, and is made more powerful by, an awareness of his origins. This awareness is not necessarily of factual information, but is in fact complemented by fictional representations.⁴⁹ While both Bechet and Ray Charles are aware of their families' racial backgrounds, those autobiographies which do not possess this certainty place great importance on the need

⁴⁸Bechet's emphasis is on his paternal, rather than maternal background. Reference to gender issues of this type will be made in chapter five.

for it to be traced. This lack of epic narrative suggests the labyrinth model proposed by Danow, in which a failed search for history causes 'endless wandering' and wondering. *I Guess I'll Get the Papers and Go Home: The Life of Doc Cheatham*, published in 1995, opens with such an ambiguous view of Cheatham's ancestry, admitting that

back in those far off days there was a lot of hanky-panky going on, integration between the Indians, the black folks, the white folks. I wish there was a book written on that area where the Cheathams come from that would tell the story straight. (Cheatham, 4)

The desire for not only an orally known history, but also a text to validate this, reveals its innate importance to Cheatham. Without this knowledge his family history and racial origin is degraded, put down to a few instances of 'hanky-panky'. A similar sense of frustration is experienced by Cab Calloway in his autobiography *Of Minnie the Moocher and Me* (1976): as he tries to trace his family history back to emancipation, he realises that 'the whites only kept accurate records on us as long as we were their property.' (Calloway, 11) Again, Calloway longs for 'accurate records', for the text which will validate what his family have told him of his history. Both Calloway and Cheatham begin their autobiographies with little personal history, and Cheatham in particular avoids any admittance of racial discomfort: 'I don't hate anyone, I don't dislike anyone, and that has helped me,' he claims on the opening page, 'My father was very well-liked and got everything he wanted from the whites.' (Cheatham, 1) By page five, he has moved away from his childhood, and is discussing his first experience in a band, aged fourteen, stopping only briefly to suggest that to his family, who 'never thought too much of music', he was already 'like the devil.' (ibid., 4) Cheatham's reluctance to talk about racial issues was also suggested by Alyn Shipton, the book's editor, in a personal interview. Having been asked whether Cheatham, at the time of the book's composition,

⁴⁹In this aspect, Bechet's unique text is not to be confused with other autobiographies which may contain

held particularly strong racial views, Shipton replied that really, Cheatham had had two points he had wanted to make clear in relation to race, 'that there was almost no climate of racial oppression in Europe...and that this was a huge and welcome contrast with the USA and that on the road with everyone except the well-heeled Calloway band, privations were a way of life if you happened to be black.' (Alyn Shipton, personal interview, 6/2/02)

Calloway's lack of knowledge about his early years is emphasised in the opening chapter with the admission that he had to look at 'old issues of the *New York Times*' (Calloway, 8) in order to understand more about his childhood world. His father died when he was thirteen: 'I don't remember mourning,' he suggests, 'I don't remember feeling sadness or remorse.' (ibid., 14) He admits that he 'disappointed' his mother (ibid., 21), and shows a reluctance to reveal much about his immediate family. This lack of chronology and meaningful order is echoed in other autobiographies, including those who attained greater celebrity than Calloway. It is in contrast to Ray Charles' detailed descriptions of family life. Indeed, the first chapter of Miles Davis' *Miles: The Autobiography* (1989) claims that 'Looking back, I don't remember much of my first years - I never liked to look back much anyway.' (Davis, 1) In direct opposition to the ideas of Charles, while Davis' tone is similarly casual, and his voice vernacular, the text is confrontational and angry. The snapshot detail with which he describes his family, heightened by the typical Davis arrogance, suggests that looking back is, for Miles, intentionally fragmented. The history of the family, and their links to slavery, are cited on the second page: 'people in our family were special people - artists, businessmen,

fictional elements. There are a number of other reasons why fiction may be represented as fact, and these are discussed in terms of ghostwriters and in terms of representing race in a later section of this chapter.

professionals, and musicians - who played for the plantation owners back in the old days before slavery was over.' (ibid., 2)

Despite having a sound knowledge of his family origins and being raised in a very stable, middle-class background, Davis shows little inclination to maintain familial connections. He claims in *Miles* that he will leave his inheritance to 'Dizzy or Max, or somebody like that, or a couple of girlfriends who helped me a lot', and suggests that he doesn't 'believe in giving it to relatives.' (ibid., 400)⁵⁰ So while Bechet maintains both a family and musical hierarchy, Davis merely concentrates on his 'idols' as representing his youth, by far his happiest period. In the same way as Bechet, Davis opens his autobiography with a scene from his memory, in this case 'when I first heard Diz and Bird together in St. Louis, Missouri, back in 1944.' (ibid., v) While Bechet writes about his *sense* of past history, Davis introduces a myriad of experiences, each with one element in common: youth. Although he denies a desire to look back, he admits a longing for 'the feeling of that night in 1944', and suggests that 'when I was just a kid, still wet behind the ears, hanging out with all these great musicians, my idols even until this day...Man, it was something.' (ibid., viii) For Davis, then, the importance of musical history and hierarchy far outweighs the presence of family stories or anecdotes. His reluctance to look back is quite possibly structured more by disconcertion than a memory lapse: he writes at the end of the book that '[t]hose regrets I do have I don't want to talk about.' (ibid., 398) Here, history is only relevant if it is positive history, and as such, the 'right perspective' in *Miles* is fairly subjective.

⁵⁰ In fact, as Ian Carr's biography of Davis reveals, his estate was left to his son, daughter, nephew, brother and sister.

What Do They Want? A Jazz Autobiography by Sammy Price (1989) expresses similar concerns over the need (or not) to tell the story of the narrated protagonist. Price is a depressive character who seems, on the surface, far more interested in telling the reader his problems with women ('my thing was with the ladies' - p.40) than about his musical career: he is, for example, one of few who doesn't claim to have been born straight into participation in music. Indeed, at one point he suggests that as a young child 'music was the farthest thing from my mind.' (Price, 5) Price's melancholy attitude towards life is particularly focused towards the writing of his own history: he records on the first page that 'I did not ask to come into this world on 6 October 1908, and, on many occasions, I've been sorry it happened.' This is not an isolated occurrence. Recounting his first memory of a large cooking pot on the next page, Price goes on to suggest that 'maybe when I was born I should have jumped into the fire, and then I would not have to review the last 70 years of my life.' (ibid., 2) He ends in a similar vein, concluding 'I told Eubie Blake that I would like to live to be 100, but I don't think I can take it.' (ibid., 84) Price no doubt exaggerates his passion for death, but other aspects of the book are just as problematic for the expectant reader: for example, the sense of historical pride so common to other texts is certainly missing here. The complete lack of epic narrative reveals the wanderings of a labyrinthine mind which never reaches a goal: even the humanist identification with the reader that Calloway and Cheatham allow is missing.

There may be various explanations for this unusual attitude, but a fairly obvious one is in the length of the text - only eighty-four pages, as compared to, for example, Davis' four hundred. The length of Price's text may well stem from the divergent

sources which were used to create it: there is no indication that Price himself played a major role in its development. Price's editor, Caroline Richmond, compiled the text 'from various sources' (Editor's Note and Acknowledgements), including transcribed interviews with Alyn Shipton, and 'a large table in his [Price's] apartment on Fifth Avenue in New York [which] held several piles of autobiographical papers.' Richard Sudhalter's brief review of the text (1991) suggests that the opinions held within are representative of 'the author's idiosyncratic and often peppery views on fellow musicians, managers, and just about anyone or anything else in his path.' (Sudhalter, 213) If this is indeed the case, it is fairly clear they have not been affected by the editing process: the text remains laborious to approach, and laborious to read.

For Duke Ellington, whose autobiography *Music is My Mistress* was first published in 1973, a sense of the importance of history involves his first chapter being written in the style of a storybook. Ellington's autobiography is possibly the most clear representation of epic narrative within this genre, combined with a humanist fraternity which highlights security and stability. It is interesting that Bechet's fictional family stories form an integral part of his sense of history, as Ellington's history actually *becomes* a story. Thus his first memory evolves into a story entitled 'The Road' which tells of his father, mother and early life, and whose style is distinctly Biblical:

...and God blessed their marriage with a fine baby boy (eight pounds, eight ounces). They loved their little boy very much. They raised him, nurtured him, coddled him, and spoiled him. They raised him in the palm of the hand and gave him everything they thought he wanted. Finally, when he was about seven or eight, they let his feet touch the ground. (Ellington, x)

The security of the story is evident not only in the simplistic, Biblical style, but also in the soothing tone evoked in it. Ellington's fossilisation of memory into story allows the reader to accept its existence unquestioningly: he or she may be lured into believing in the characters almost before realising that this book is a subjective, unflinching positive

autobiography.⁵¹ This desire for telling a personal history is undoubtedly partly motivated by Ellington's sense of a strong musical history and hierarchy, which was maintained partly by his own statue-like presence in the jazz world. In a later chapter he portrays this hierarchy as a kind of world order, a continuous linear story:

The story of jazz is a long list of great names, rather like those lists of kings and queens and presidents in history books. Divided up by instruments instead of countries, you can easily trace how the crown was passed down - and sometimes usurped. (ibid., 415)

In making at least one aspect of jazz - its history - more concrete, Ellington suggests a fixed hierarchy of musicians, a structure that is common to many other jazz autobiographies. In the stability of this ordered world, everybody possesses the ability to construct and maintain a personal narrative. Not only do these texts 'look back' into their own past, but they also create a factual story from that past. In this way Ellington creates what may be seen as a hagiography within his autobiography, referring only to those people whom he respected and remarking only on their positive attributes. Henry Louis Gates' signification theory of African-American literature, based on the traditional slave folktale 'The Signifyin(g) Monkey', in which a trickster monkey overcomes a threatening lion through his linguistic prowess, is interesting to consider here. Gates claims that not only do African-American texts signify on themselves (an expansion of the idea of intertextuality), but also on those who preceded them, and whom they desire to emulate: 'It is clear', he argues, 'that black writers read and critique other black texts as an act of rhetorical self-definition.' (Gates, 1988, 122) Gates locates intertextuality primarily through a thematic response which testifies to both oral and literary abilities. The similarities drawn between these texts suggests that not only do

⁵¹Mercer Ellington's biography of his father suggests that having completed *Music is my Mistress*, Ellington exclaimed 'We've written the Good Book...and now we'll write the Bad Book!' (Ellington, Mercer with Stanley Dance, *Duke Ellington In Person: An Intimate Memoir* (New York: Da Capo, 1979), 172)

authors simulate themes and ideas across the genre, but also that much of this simulation is intrinsically linked to notions of identity and self-perception. The intense emphasis on self and the typical fragmentation of that self represent an attempt at self-definition which is common to many jazz autobiographies. This notion is vitally important to our understanding of these texts.⁵²

In Ellington's view, then, the hierarchies present in the world of jazz music are already fixed. Generally there is little argument with the system, or with individual 'Dukes', 'Counts' or 'Kings', and examples may be drawn from other texts. Rex Stewart's autobiography *Boy Meets Horn* (1991), for example, maintains Ellington's position as 'Duke', standing

above his contemporaries and feel[ing] free to give whatever he chose to give of his fertile imagination, not on a competitive basis but more in the manner of a god descending from Olympian heights. (Stewart, 163)

Note that in Stewart's view, Ellington never has to compete for the right to dictate musical style: his place in the hierarchy assures him that. He possesses the status of a god, and any interaction with those below him requires him to descend. Dizzy Gillespie's *To Be Or Not To Bop* (1979) mirrors this view although, as in other sections of the work, drawing tenuous links to Africa:

It's just like the history in Africa that is passed down from one generation to another by the spoken word. It's the same with our music; that's why all modern musicians should get a background in old music. They don't have to play it, but they should know it. It's just like building a house. You've got to start at the bottom. (Gillespie, 1979, 485)

Here, it is not that the suggestion of oral communication in Africa is unsound, but rather that Gillespie makes a little too much of his African heritage, claiming, for example, that 'Jazz is an African word.' (ibid., 492) The musical hierarchy suggested by these

⁵² David Dudley proposes an oedipal model for African-American autobiography by male writers (Dudley, 1991): 'intergenerational antagonism' which manifests itself in a determined hierarchy of autobiographers. According to Lionnet (1989), this model is also applicable to women's autobiography:

musicians is echoed in many later texts as well, and a structure begins to emerge. Milt Hinton's *Bass Line* (1988) places the hierarchy as continuing down through those he teaches, each musician giving something of himself to the one below him:

I was pretty young when I realised that music involves more than just playing an instrument. It's really about cohesiveness and sharing. All my life, I've felt obliged to try and teach anyone who would listen. I've always believed you don't truly know something yourself until you can take it from your mind and put it in someone else's.' (Hinton, 309)

Here the sense is of a never-ending linear progression of musicians, fostering a hierarchy of sound. The loyalty to other musicians extends outwards from the individual's place, with both upward respect and downward tuition. Hinton's emphasis on the importance of teaching those who are new to the profession is echoed by Sammy Price's experience of the TOBA circuit⁵³ during the twenties, where '[i]f you had a professional show and an amateur came along, they'd just stick him in there like he was a pro, and in no time flat he'd learn.' (Price, 28) Speaking in a 1976 interview, Art Blakey suggests that this loyalty to those who supersede you in the hierarchy even covers the individual sound of the jazz musician: 'you don't go into Duke's band and play Art Blakey, you go into Duke's band and play Duke Ellington. You go to Count Basie's band, you play Count Basie.' (Blakey, 22) General acceptance of these laws of hierarchy then allows a pecking order to develop: 'after a period of time as a playing musician,' claims Danny Barker, 'you will soon find out what your status rating in the jazz fraternity is.' (Barker, 1986, 46) Philip Larkin's *All What Jazz* (1970), a collection of his jazz writings for *The Daily Telegraph* dating from 1961-8, interestingly prefigures these suggestions of hierarchy. Even from a British perspective, and before musicians

she suggests, for example, that *Lady Sings the Blues* is an 'implicit intertext of [Maya] Angelou's autobiography.' (163, footnote)

⁵³Theatre Owners' Booking Association (often referred to as 'Tough on Black Artists/ Asses' by jazz musicians) Price claims it was 'like a *Who's Who in America* - or Black America - because if they were anybody in black entertainment, they travelled the TOBA.' (31)

themselves had admitted the existence of such a structure, writing in 1962 Larkin remarks of Duke Ellington that

[i]n an Ellington composition, solos are the result of a collaboration between leader and player. The player improvises, but he improvises Ellington's way. And when his solo appears it is at a premeditated moment in the rich confection of an Ellington arrangement: he is on his own, but with what a safety-net under him! (Larkin, 48)

Larkin's image of a 'safety-net' is in fact a fairly accurate reading of the security of the jazz fraternity, as an important aspect of loyalty within it involves refuting criticism of those above you. Teddy Wilson's *Teddy Wilson Talks Jazz* (1996), for example, angrily defends those stories that Louis Armstrong could not read music: 'I know personally they are untrue because I saw him read when I played with him.' (Wilson, 13)

We return to Ray Charles, who suggests that this fraternity extends to lifestyle as well as music, claiming that his experimentation with narcotics began partly as a result of his respect for older musicians: 'Many of the cats⁵⁴ - many of the great cats - who could really play were on drugs. I wanted to find out why. And I wanted to see if the dope helped.' (Charles, 112) This view may seem naive, but it is one echoed by others, including Miles Davis, who, at twenty, began drug-taking because 'the idea was going round that to use heroin might make you play as great as Bird.' (Davis, 86) This is not so much peer pressure as the influence of idolatry: adoration mingled with the hope that something other than sheer effort will produce a good musician. There may also be an element of masculine response here: although this will be examined in more detail in chapter five, it is worth noting that Hazel Carby suggests that, for Davis, '[t]he true sources of nurturance, sustenance, and stimulation for his work are mutually fulfilling [and] male'. (Carby, 143) Drug-taking comes to represent masculinity, a fulfilment of the requirement set by Parker and Gillespie to nurture talent through narcotics. It is

interesting that although both musicians condemn their drug-taking, neither condemn the hierarchical system which forced them into it, maintaining responsibility for their own actions: '[i]t wasn't society that did it to me, it wasn't a pusher⁵⁵. it wasn't being blind or being black or being poor,' claims Charles, '[i]t was all my doing.' (Charles, 108) Davis, indeed, admits that he 'might have been just waiting for his [Parker's] genius to hit me.' (Davis, 86)

Here, then, the hierarchies which exist in African-American jazz autobiography have been examined, and some of the ways in which the texts may be approached from a critical perspective have been explored. Recent theories of whiteness and blackness have been evaluated, and suggestions made as to their application here, with particular reference to the autobiographies of Mezzrow and Davis. Terminology has been introduced which facilitates this exploration, and the viewing of these texts as hybrid has been suggested. This hybridity will become more important as we examine the role of the ghostwriter or editor, the subject of the following chapter. Narrative technique has been considered, highlighting the diverse character of selected jazz autobiographies. In chapter four, the figure of the 'narrated protagonist' will be discussed in more detail, allowing a clearer picture of the jazz autobiography to emerge.

⁵⁴Slang term for jazz musician

⁵⁵Slang term for drug dealer

Chapter Four: The Black Narrated Protagonist and the Ghostwriter: Racism and Self-identity

The portrayal of the narrated protagonist in autobiographical texts may be examined in various ways. It is of course impossible to discuss it without reference to the role of the editor, co-writer, or, in some cases, ghost-writer. As Christopher Harlos claims, and as will be illustrated,

like jazz itself, where the completely solo performance is atypical, jazz autobiography also easily lends itself to being produced on a collective basis. (Harlos, 149)

This is clearly a perplexing matter: it is interesting to note that ghostwriting is rarely mentioned in contemporary criticism of these texts, and that there is a singular lack of theory available on collaborative African-American autobiography.⁵⁶ Issues of authenticity appear to be the main barrier to collaborative theory. In some cases, it is difficult to determine the authenticity of the text, due to the presence of a ghost-writer or editor. The projections of a narrative voice must of course be considered alongside the effects of this editing. This chapter will therefore explore both narrative and editing in parallel, expanding on the theory of hybridity suggested previously. Prior to an insight into the historical figures that ghosted and edited these texts, it will propose various theories regarding the positions of ghostwriter and narrated protagonist, and thereby suggest a foundation on which we may determine authenticity.

The ghostwriter as the Other: hybridity reconsidered and clarified

Constructions in white jazz autobiography which have already been examined, of polarisation between black and white characters, illustrate a useful starting point for

an examination of the position of the ghostwriter in these texts. Just as blackness is clearly necessary for whiteness to exist, so is the ghostwriter vital to the autobiographer's existence. The black self has traditionally been placed as object to the white subject: the black psychologist Frantz Fanon, for example, describes himself as 'an object in the midst of other objects', and suggests that 'not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man.' (Fanon, 1952, 109) Yet in contrast to this usual positioning of black as 'Other', in jazz autobiography it can be the case (as in, for example, the autobiographies of Charles Mingus, Sidney Bechet and Ray Charles) that white ghostwriters or editors become the Other to their black narrated protagonists. If the ghostwriter is to be situated here or indeed in any kind of meaningful relationship to his protagonist, it is necessary to explain and examine the complex relationship between subject and other.

In order to achieve this we require some kind of recent definition of the basic relationship between subject and other. Jacques Derrida's formulation of writing as the 'other' which enables the location of meaning for speech is the most appropriate for our purposes, as it poses interesting questions regarding the nature and translation of oral interview to written word which can specifically be related to the transcription processes involved in composing these texts. In order to examine certain other aspects of the narrative process, there will also be brief reference to the theories of Jacques Lacan.

For Derrida, speech is made more concrete, justified and formulated in a 'contingent situation' (Derrida, 32) by the presence of decoded writing, whether by direct transcription or note-taking. In terms of the collaborative autobiographies discussed here, this would suggest that their transcription from a spoken to a written

⁵⁶Albert Stone (1982) offers one of the few theories available on this subject.

medium actually authenticates, rather than distorts their text. Traditionally, as has previously been shown, critics are more willing to accept and praise a singularly authored narrative, and the response to collaborative autobiography is often lacking in fervour. Here, if authentication is indeed taking place, the authenticator must be the editor, or ghostwriter,⁵⁷ who has the literary skills that the subject does not.

However, the subject is not, according to Derrida, completely lacking in literary skills. In fact he refutes the well-known claims of Levi-Strauss that some societies are purely oral, suggesting instead that writing in some shape or form is endemic to all societies. The black autobiographer should not then be placed in a cocoon of orality, saved by the literariness of his ghostwriter. Writing is the 'other' which defines what speech represents, and both members of the society function as equals. Authentication of these texts takes place at the level of the ghostwriter, but there are equal parts to be played in their construction by the protagonists. So what is the role of the former, and how can we define it in relation to the autobiographical subject?

When the subject (in this case, autobiographical) becomes desired (i.e. discussed in terms of a possible text), Jacques Lacan suggests that he is defined purely in terms of 'the Other's desire.' (Lacan, 265) Lacan thus not only provides us with an insight into the possible relationship between subject and ghostwriter, but also authenticates both positions, allowing that 'any discourse is within its rights not to consider itself responsible for this effect.' (ibid., 268) Because the spoken voice is authenticated by the desire for a written voice, both can 'affirm [themselves]...as truth' through the narrative. We are returning to a position of hybridity, but with slightly more clarity: Lacan's theory also allows us to suggest that by examining the narrative we can observe this

⁵⁷for ease of reference, this role will now be referred to as that of 'ghostwriter'

hybridity in progress. Writing about Lacan, the theorist Robert Con Davis (in his introduction to *Lacan and Narration*) describes the resulting text (which would represent collaborative autobiography), as follows:

Narration – irremediably diachronic *and* synchronic – repeats and represents unconscious discourse in the only way the unconscious can be known: as a sequence of opportunities for linguistic substitution and (re)combination. The potential for continuity and unity in such sequences makes possible the ‘gaps’ or ‘lapses’ that indicate the ‘Other’ scene of signification...not a part of manifest narration but which (like a buoy, or series of buoys) holds it up and enables it to exist at all. (R. C. Davis, 853)

The ‘enabl[er]’ here is the ghostwriter, the ‘other’ who does the writing and who manifests himself in the ‘gaps’ or ‘lapses’ of the written text. In fact, the presence of the ghostwriter solves certain problems which have long been associated with Lacan’s theory. Davis reminds us that Lacan’s ‘revolution of the subject’s status’ poses a problem for those who view the subject as authority and authenticator of the text. If however, this emphasis is shifted onto the ghostwriter, there is little difficulty in allowing the subject to take the place of object, and for gaps or lapses in the narrative text to be attributed to the ghostwriter.

Having classified the ghostwriter as the ‘other’, we may see that it is he/she who facilitates the meaningful construction of the hybrid text. It is necessary to return briefly to the subject of narrative, discussed in detail in the previous chapter, with reference to this, in order to clarify our conclusions regarding hybridity. Gerard Genette’s study of narrative, *Narrative Discourse* (1980) suggests the ‘Platonic categories of *mimesis* (perfect imitation) and *diegesis* (pure narrative)’ by which we may define our particular text. The former, with which Genette refers to fiction, but which could easily be applied to a collaborative text as well as to a dual author/ narrator text (such as Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*) assumes that ‘the role of the narrator is itself fictive’ (Genette, 214). In *diegesis*, on the other hand, the narrator and author are indistinguishable. The former

bears some resemblance to the quest narrative structure previously discussed, although here the quest is to bring author and narrator together at the close of the text. 'in order that these two hypostases might meet and finally merge.' (ibid., 226) This theory prescribes a certain level of authenticity to the author/ narrator, as Genette writing about fiction, in which one authority (the biographical author with an easily identifiable past) can emerge.

Genette's theory is useful in terms of definition. The hybridity of collaborative texts such as jazz autobiographies means that there can be no single authority, and thus no single authoritative narrative. The narrator, whom we have termed 'narrated protagonist' may well be 'fictive'. We have seen that the dilemma of authenticity which surrounds these texts undoubtedly stems from the presence of the ghostwriter, and that this can be explained by positioning him as the Other. Jazz autobiography is far more complex than a mere individual authorial presentation of self knowledge and identity. However, the problem for the reader is twofold: not only his or her perception of the hybrid author, but also that of the authenticity/ inauthenticity of the actual *narrative*. As the critic Marie-Laure Ryan suggests, if we utilise terms of virtual technology to construct our theory,

The user who programs a computer in a higher-level language, such as C or LISP, is said to communicate with a virtual machine because the physical machine can only understand instructions coded in binary form. The program must therefore be translated into machine language before it can be executed. But from the point of view of the user, the virtual machine is "as good as" the actual machine. (Ryan, 116)

The inauthenticity, then, of the user's belief that the virtual machine represents the real machine, and their inability to communicate directly with it, reveals a source of concern. The reader may accept the presence of the ghostwriter, but may question the impact of this on the narrative. Does 'transla[tion]' occur via the ghostwriter, and, if so,

does this show to the reader an inauthentic, essentially merely 'virtual' text? We are aware that the protagonist has played some part in writing the narrative, but the difficulty involved is defining exactly what this part is composed of.

The presence of multiple identities within the text, then, incurs the necessity of examining each identity individually, and reveals the importance of the ghostwriter. Establishing a basis for authenticity, when faced with white ghostwriters of black texts, becomes crucial, and is facilitated by contemporary critical theory. Having looked at some definitions, let us now consider the ghostwriter as a historical figure, as presented in specific jazz autobiographies.

The historical figure of the ghostwriter

The presence of ghostwriters in these texts is clear. Taking a selection of thirty texts, only three (that of Babs Gonzales and those of Louis Armstrong) are not credited with any kind of co-author on the spine. Adaptation from 'interview notes' is a common technique: around seven more autobiographies claim to be based on interviews. A further six are merely 'edited', four are written 'with', four are 'as told to' and two have the musician 'and' the editor as co-writers. Two more name the existence of 'co-authors' (Miles Davis and Count Basie) and one claims to have been 'written by' the editor (Dizzy Gillespie). One, Alan Lomax's *Mister Jelly Roll* (1991), could easily be seen as both biography and autobiography. Others are even less clear: some disclaim their status as autobiographies. For a few, the primary issue is simply how many people have actually participated in the writing of the book. While some texts contain little explanation of their origins and development, those that do are worth examining in

detail, if only to provide us with a clearer view of what was generally accepted as the ghostwriter's role during the period in discussion (1936-1996).

At least in the case of Armstrong, this is likely to be a deliberate action designed to sell more copies of the text. The 1993 edition of *Swing That Music* (Armstrong's first autobiography, first published in 1936) contains a foreword by Dan Morgenstern, who not only terms the text a 'biography', but also suggests that

The pace of the earlier part of the biography indicates that it was based on Armstrong's own written or dictated materials, while the later passages more likely were adapted from interview notes. As is so often the case with book projects, time may simply have run out - or someone decided that the manuscript was getting too long. (Armstrong, 1936, x)

Other critics hold more strident views on the text, considering it to be one of the more corrupt jazz autobiographies in existence. William H. Kenney's 1991 article, 'Negotiating the Color Line' suggests that Armstrong 'was not the captain of *Swing That Music*' (Kenney, 1991, 45) and William L. Andrews, writing in 1986, suggests that an unknown writer exercised 'ultimate control over the fate of the manuscript and considerable influence over the immediate future of the narrator'. (Andrews, 21) The problem with such assumptions, either positive or negative, is the lack of fact: Armstrong's autobiography, one of the most popular and successful jazz autobiographies, has never been unequivocally credited to anyone else. While it is possible, as Kenney does, to compare Armstrong's letters with his published books, and conclude on the inauthenticity of the latter, the editing process still remains unclear. In fact, it is far more effective to criticise and evaluate later texts, which freely admit their debt to co-writers.

An interesting case of clear hybridity is that of Dizzy Gillespie. First published in 1979, the spine of *To Be Or Not To Bop: The Autobiography of Dizzy Gillespie* credits the volume to Gillespie 'with Al Fraser'; the body of text, however, only serves

to cause confusion. Fraser complains in the introduction that '[w]riting Dizzy Gillespie's personal memoirs...was not an easy job' and goes on to explain that 'the object of all this...was to get closer to the liberating truth about him - not to convince the world about anything, or anyone, else.' (Gillespie, 1979, xviii) It becomes extremely difficult to locate what Fraser is referring to by 'liberating truth' when sections supposedly written by Gillespie suddenly move into the third person. 'Jazz is an African word' claims Gillespie, and that fact 'surely didn't bother Duke Ellington; or Louis Armstrong, they say he's a jazz artist; or Dizzy Gillespie.' (ibid., 492) The vernacular style of the comment on Armstrong suggests it is Gillespie's own; the whole sentence is then thrown into doubtful authorship by the last three words.⁵⁸ Added to this, much of the text is formed from interviews with family, friends and fellow musicians: within most chapters, three or four other first-person voices enter the text, a few pages at a time, to reminisce about Gillespie. A typical chapter has a two-page section by Gillespie, followed by eight pages of reminiscences, followed by Gillespie again, with a short concluding paragraph. It is difficult to retain the title of 'autobiography' under these circumstances, when even the short sections seemingly in Gillespie's own speech are clearly the result of a hybrid voice. *To Be Or Not To Bop* is an expansive text, which reveals much about Dizzy Gillespie, but it is challenging to locate Gillespie's own voice within it. Some texts have important reasons for being co-authored: for Ray Charles, who is blind, a co-writer was obviously necessary: the book was based on interviews turned to text, which was then typed in Braille for Charles to approve. For others, the

⁵⁸While some jazz autobiographers *do* commonly refer to themselves in the third person (Charles Mingus, for example, moves dramatically between first and third person throughout *Beneath the Underdog*) Gillespie does not.

function of the editor is more obscure, and in this case, confusing. Here the editor reveals himself *through* the problems of the collaborative text.

Any attempt to locate Dr Al Fraser himself is likewise confusing. Aside from his editing of Gillespie's autobiography, Fraser, an African-American folklorist, has focused his attention on collecting artefacts and displaying them in his home in Charleston. His website (www.fraserhomestay.com), which offers the same home for vacation rental, describes him as 'an expert in African American history and culture' and shows photographs of his folk collections, of which he is rightly proud. It seems strange that someone so dedicated to the preservation of positive African-American culture would suggest the inclusion of Gillespie's memories of 'playing African, using sharpened sticks for spears' (Gillespie, 1979, 5), and of 'a little minstrel show at the end of the [school] year.' (ibid., 20) However, this may well be indicative of the expectations of the readership, to be discussed in chapter six.

Successful evaluation of the function of the co-writer is certainly aided when he or she is accepted as a fully comprehensive part of the text by the musician. Such a text is Count Basie's *Good Morning Blues* (1985), whose title suggests it is 'told to' the black writer and commentator Albert Murray and whose inside cover freely suggests other works by the same author ('also by Albert Murray'). Undoubtedly the combination of the well-known names of Basie and Murray was integral to the volume's success, and thus collaboration is celebrated here.

Basie himself offers an explanation of Murray's role in the preface, suggesting 'My co-writer also likes to think of himself as Count Basie's literary Count Basie: in other words, he comps for me pretty much as I have always done for my soloists.'

(Basie, xiii) ‘Comping’, a style of piano accompaniment for soloists in big bands pioneered by Basie, is an improvisatory method during which the accompanist unpredictably alters the chord sequences, which the soloist then follows. In this way the pianist defines the direction of the melody and creates new harmonic sounds from the band as a whole.

In claiming that Murray is ‘comping’ for him, then, Basie is suggesting that Murray is in fact the instigator of the text, and the force behind its development. Crediting his editor with a similar achievement to one which he himself pioneered also expresses Basie’s satisfaction with the final result, and suggests that the fragmentation of Count Basie into two selves, one musical, one ‘literary’, has produced a new a co-authored, hybrid text. Interestingly, a radio interview given by Murray recently commented on the writing of the text, what he called ‘processing an everyday experience into an aesthetic statement’, thereby connecting music (Basie’s ‘everyday experience’) and words (the ‘aesthetic statement’ of his autobiography)⁵⁹. A similar achievement is suggested by Milt Hinton in his ‘acknowledgements’ in his 1988 autobiography *Bass Line: The Stories and Photographs of Milt Hinton* (by Milt Hinton and David G. Berger), in which he contends that ‘[t]he photographs and stories are mine, but this book is David’s just as much, so much so that as this point I couldn’t possibly distinguish his contributions from mine.’ (Hinton, vii) The ‘stories’, however, form the entire book, and are in the first person: if not actually written by Hinton, then they are at least purporting to be.

The writing relationship between Duke Ellington and Stanley Dance is remarked upon by Mercer Ellington in his book *Duke Ellington in Person: An Intimate Memoir*,

which was published in 1979, five years after Ellington's death. Mercer suggests that his father actually wrote most of the book himself, and the snapshot style of the text, divided as it is into short sections which deal primarily with Ellington's memories of individual musicians, certainly supports the following account:

Stanley had expected that it [the book's composition] would be done with a tape recorder, following the same method they had used for articles, so he was surprised to find that Pop intended to make it himself. The manuscript that eventually materialised was undoubtedly unique. It was written on hotel stationery, table napkins, and menus from all over the world. Stanley became so familiar with the handwriting that he could often decipher it when Pop could not. That is the meaning of the minuscule credit at the beginning of the book, which they mutually agreed upon. (M. Ellington, 171)

The 'minuscule credit' referred to here is part of an 'acknowledgments' paragraph on the inside front cover in which Ellington thanks Dance 'for extrasensory perception revealed in his amazing ability to decipher my handwriting.' Dance (1910-1999) and Ellington appear to have had a simple editor/ author relationship, which, like the resultant text, was very successful.

This may have been due to Dance's extensive experience on the world of jazz writing. Having won a Grammy award in 1963 for the album notes to Ellington's 'The Ellington Era', and having written for *Jazz Journal International*, *Jazz Hot* and *Down Beat* for many years, Dance was a safe choice for collaboration with his subject. Indeed, in 1974, the year after *Music Is My Mistress* was published, Dance famously gave the eulogy at Ellington's funeral, in which he named Ellington as a 'beloved friend...a genius of the rarest kind.' (quoted in M. Ellington, 215)

A similarly positive approach to his co-writer is displayed by Willie 'The Lion' Smith, whose autobiography *Music On My Mind: The Memoirs of an American Pianist* was published in 1965, written by Smith 'and' the jazz critic George Hoefer, well-known for his series of profiles of musicians published in *Down Beat*. Smith's text is

⁵⁹The interview, for WBR 90.9, is available at www.archives.theconnection.org

comprehensively edited, with 'Interludes' by Hoefer, which apparently add 'reliable historical information...to Willie's account' (Smith, xiii) and footnotes, explaining the meaning of vernacular musical terminology. Unfortunately this editing process does cause extra difficulties at first. There is some confusion as to the author of the 'Editor's Note' (p.xiii), initialled 'SSV', and Smith frequently uses the third person with reference to himself, indicating a similar distancing from the reader as found in Dizzy Gillespie. However, Smith's use of third person is easier to recognise as his voice, if only because it is generally used to emphasise the emotive force of particular passages. At the end of the first chapter, for example, Smith's triumphant conclusion claims that '[i]t all goes to prove that music does not stem from any single race, creed, or locality. It comes from a mixture of all these things. As does the Lion.' (ibid., 4) Thus Smith accepts hybridity, and uses his third-person voice to glorify himself from another perspective.

Smith is unusual in defending the participation of his co-writer: although Basie and Hinton acknowledge the participation of others, they avoid justification of it. In his 'acknowledgements', however, Smith angrily denounces those who 'tell me that if you get somebody to write your book for you there's something funny about it.' He then appears to contradict himself, claiming that

[n]obody wrote this book for me but this book wouldn't *be* if George Hoefer hadn't put the words down on paper. But almost all the words he got from me. You ask *anybody* if anybody ever said anything for the Lion. They're lucky if they get to say it with him. (Smith, 'Acknowledgements')

In admitting the existence of a hybrid text without a clear whole, authentic author, Smith is allowing authentication to come from interpretation by the reader. The parts, the 'words' are more important than the final result, and hybridity is recognised as positive, added to a strong and vibrant personality which must surely have inspired Miles Davis' own autobiography. His confusion is interesting in terms of character, but in fact merely

suggests acceptance of a multifaceted approach to autobiography represented by the collaborative effort.

This recognition is also present in other texts, although in a less confrontational format. The foreword by Stanley Dance to *Big Bill Blues: William Broonzy's Story as told to Yannick Bruynoghe* (1955) suggests that the text of the book is augmented by the presence of Bruynoghe's editing, being 'all the more vividly real for being in his [Broonzy's] own direct, uninhibited language.' 'A book like this,' Dance assures us, 'can only have been accomplished by the most faithful and understanding collaboration.' (Broonzy, viii) There are certainly indications within the book that Broonzy was hardly capable of much more than talking and singing; illustrations by the blues critic Paul Oliver consecutively show him working in a field, drinking in a field and playing fiddle and guitar in a field. Broonzy also occasionally lapses into third person, ending an anecdote about his love life with the assurance that 'that's the truth, too, because that old man was William Lee Conley Broonzy, better known as "Big Bill".' (ibid., 52) The ending, too, is written in the third person, which lends to it a slightly depressing tone: 'Some blues singers can and do sing and don't drink, but not Big Bill - he loves his whisky, he's just a whisky-head man.' (ibid., 118) This disadvantageous portrait of Broonzy highlights the need for acceptance of hybrid influences on the text: not only to satisfy our own interests, but also to protect its subject. The 'whisky-head man' who spends all his time in fields: is this really a 'vividly real' portrait of William Broonzy?

One of the first autobiographies to be written, W. C. Handy's *Father of the Blues* (1941) is one of the few texts which reveal something of the reasons behind its

conception. Handy describes an evening in his house during which two prominent white businessmen 'sat up all night...trying to convince me of the importance of writing my life's story and offering to collaborate.' (Handy, xiii) The contribution of these businessmen is likely to have been financial: only one editor is credited on the spine: the African-American children's writer Arna Bontemps (1902-1973). Bontemps, whilst best-known for his children's fiction, also wrote biographies of Frederick Douglass, George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington. Between 1925 and 1967 he corresponded with Langston Hughes, and these letters, published in 1980, reveal something of the writing relationship between Bontemps and Handy.

Bontemps first mentions Handy in detail in August 1939, when he writes to Hughes that he is '[j]ust back from New York where I talked with Handy about his biography (auto). He sent for me.' (Bontemps and Hughes, 34) The use of 'auto' as an apparent afterthought suggests what is confirmed in September of the same year, when Bontemps writes that he has 'done three chapters...[but] Handy will take no steps without his lawyer's guidance': clearly his position is that of a ghostwriter. (ibid., 37) Interestingly, the presence of the 'lawyer' mentioned here is clear: in this passage, in which Handy describes how he was cheated by white businessmen, not only are they unnamed, referred to only as 'X____' and 'Z____', but Handy is surprisingly passive, suggesting that 'I determined to swallow that resentment [towards X____ and Z____] like a true philosopher, set my head to new things, and see if I couldn't do better next time.' (Handy, 116)

A refusal to name those involved in racial incidents is also present in Babs Gonzales' *I Paid My Dues: Good Times - No Bread* (1967), an apparently unedited text

which details Gonzales' avoidance of his African-American roots. Gonzales' insistence on protecting his new identity (he alternates between Mexican and Indian nationality to avoid being 'treated as a Negro' (Gonzales, 25)) leads to an odd disclaimer for the inside front cover of an autobiography, that '[a]ny resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental. The names Mickey, Ralph, Jim, Jean, Willie and Rolfe are fictional.' This latter list of names in fact covers the major characters in the book, as if Gonzales is deliberately distancing the reader, changing the book from one of fact to a work of fiction. The mere presence of this disclaimer suggests that an editor may be involved, and that the clouding of identities may be linked to this.

A common element in the editing of many texts is the time taken, and the methods employed, to achieve the finished result. We have already made reference to the problems caused by over-lengthy editing in Sammy Price's *What Do They Want?*. Alyn Shipton's editor's note to Danny Barker's *A Life in Jazz* exemplifies the complicated processes involved in producing an edited autobiography:

During four visits to New Orleans I worked with Danny on the text of this autobiography. A few small sections were filled out by taped interviews, the transcripts of which were then edited with Danny's usual keen attention to the details of his style, but by far the largest part of the book is a text that has evolved over forty years. (Barker, 1986, vii)

Barker's 'style' is one aspect of the book that suggests the editing process. The first one hundred and fifty pages are fairly undistinguished by any vernacular style, rather depending on various humorous anecdotes to keep the reader's attention. There is, however, a sudden shift in the tone, when, at page 154, Barker suddenly and frequently injects the word 'fuck' into the text. After this point he also begins to contradict his previous assertions about drug-taking: whereas on page 148 he avows that 'I wasn't for that [reefer smoking]; I wanted to be fully aware of everything happening to me at all times', just under thirty pages later he claims that one night in Harlem he '[g]ot high.

[and] stayed up until about seven o'clock.' (ibid., 173) Contradictions are bound to exist in autobiographical texts, and there is little value in locating each one, but there are several unusual aspects of those existent here. For example, jazz musicians are generally very frank about their love or hatred of narcotics; evidence from other autobiographies examined here attests to their willingness to admit drink or drug problems. Barker, however, seems confused on this issue. Added to this, the style change is present only in the last fifty pages of text. Shipton offered some insight into the editing process during e-mail correspondence, in which he claimed that while '[f]or the most part, critical reaction has been to do with Danny's remarkable skills as a storyteller...[there are] numerous oddities of spelling and other editorial matters, which I still worry about even today.' The fact that he admits this problem suggests there was little he could do to solve it: seemingly, he has indeed allowed Barker to represent his own changes in style and opinion within the text, creating a slightly disjointed narrative which clearly reveals those 'gaps' and 'lapses' previously discussed. Indeed, Shipton suggested in the interview that Barker wrote much of both his autobiography and his second book on Buddy Bolden more as 'collections of vignettes than through-written self-portraits, and my job was to help create a narrative structure into which Danny's extant writing would fit.' (personal interview, 30/1/02)

Our experience of texts, then, can conceivably be altered through the different stylistic and structural techniques used by the editor(s) and by the recognition of hybrid constructions. It can also be modified by the unfortunate ill-health or even death of the autobiographer. Sidney Bechet's *Treat it Gentle* suffered a similar style change to Barker's when Bechet became ill as he was reading Desmond Flower's draft. According

to Flower's foreword, when he joined the project Bechet had recorded a 'considerable amount of material on to tape' with 'a young woman named Joan Williams': Flower transcribed this to book form, and Bechet later approved 'the story to about 1936 [chapters 1-12]...together with the final chapter [16]' that Flower had written. Chapters thirteen to fifteen were completed by Flower at a later date, and shown to Bechet, who 'read and approved of these too, but said that there were some passages upon which he would like to enlarge, as he had more to say...[but] he was never again well enough to do what he had intended.' (Bechet, v) Flower's own memoirs repeat this story almost identically. It is impossible to predict the detail which has been lost, or indeed to determine which sentences were created by the editor to make a more rounded text available. Acceptance of hybridity is inevitable, and is the only construction which allows us to view these texts as autobiography.

In terms of genre, it seems that deciding what does constitute an autobiography is in many ways determined by style. In those texts which are designated 'biographies', the editing process is seen far more clearly. For this reason alone, it is worth examining one such text, here Alan Lomax's *Mister Jelly Roll* (1950). While not strictly an autobiographical text, it is so near in form, content and style to so many of the others discussed here that it is certainly worth consideration as part of this chapter. Ferdinand 'Jelly Roll' Morton, a Creole pianist from New Orleans, claimed to be the 'inventor of jazz', a title which formed part of that of Lomax's first edition⁶⁰, published almost a decade after Morton's death. The evolution of Lomax's book has much in common with, for example, that of Bechet, if on a smaller scale. Lomax taped interviews with

⁶⁰The first edition (1950) was entitled *The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton. New Orleans Creole and 'Inventor of Jazz'*

Morton over the course of a month, '[d]uring breaks in the recording sessions [of his music].' The long gap between Morton's death and the book's publication suggests that Lomax was searching, with an unknown degree of success, for extra sources of information to complete the story: Morton had only approached him three years prior to his death. Although Lomax claims that Morton 'wanted to tell it all...wanted me to write his life story', he admits that 'there was too much to tell': it must remain incomplete. (Lomax, 1950, 243)

Lomax expands upon some of the story himself: just as George Hoefer offered 'reliable historical information' (Smith, xiii) to add to Willie 'The Lion' Smith's *Music On My Mind* (1965), so Lomax offers 'Interludes', in which he explains his reaction to the interviews and clarifies some of the information for the reader. Indeed, aside from expansion of the current length of the text, their function is occasionally unclear, as they appear to merely prefigure Morton's own words. Compare for example page 38 (Lomax): 'The evening of the day his grandmother shut him out of his family, the boy wept', and page 41 (Morton): 'I thought about how my mother had died and left me a motherless child out in this wide world to mourn, and I began to cry.' The purpose of Lomax's sentence appears to be to indicate that Morton wept, but the fact that he tells us this himself just three pages later (along with more detailed information) renders this, and much of the rest of the 'interlude', obsolete. Lomax also occasionally moves into sentimental monologue, such as his passage on the multiracial musical environment of New Orleans, in which he suggests that in the city 'a truly fresh stream of culture begins to flow. Such moments of cultural ecstasy [the origin of jazz] may occur prior to all great cultural moments just as seeding precedes birth.' (Lomax, 100) Perhaps

fortunately, there are only three such ‘Interludes’: in fact, the bulk of the text is written in the first person. Apart from Lomax, the other spokesperson in the text is Morton’s wife Mabel: it is her voice that we hear in the last fifty pages, describing Morton’s life to its ‘strange and terrifying end’. (Lomax, 202) The conversations she recounts are however firsthand experiences with Morton himself, and as such are invaluable. For the purposes of this thesis, then, *Mister Jelly Roll* will be treated as an autobiographical text, if only because it has so many similarities with so-called ‘autobiographies’..

The obvious, named existence of constituent parts of a text such as ‘Interludes’ or ‘Interchapters’ can actually cause further problems, as they often suggest bounded definitions, authenticated by different voices rather than the hybrid collaboration they truly represent. Pops Foster’s *Pops Foster: The Autobiography of a New Orleans Jazzman* (1971) (as told to Tom Stoddard) features not just Stoddard’s voice, but also those of Bertram Turetzky (‘Introduction’), Ross Russell (‘Interchapters’) and Brian Rust (‘Discography’). Russell’s ‘Interchapters’ are fairly short, two or three page sections, which provide historical information in a concise format, much of which, as with Lomax/Morton, is revealed by Pops himself within the following chapter. Unsurprisingly, the multitude of voices present in Foster’s text has been the subject of some criticism.⁶¹ Although Stoddard insists on the ‘free-flowing’ nature of the text (ix), the interruptions provided by Russell do inhibit a continuous style. A less intrusive solution may well have been to place the interchapters in a separate section, to be read after the autobiographical text. Because Stoddard has transferred the vernacular tone of Foster’s voice onto the writing (retaining, by his own admission, the ‘colloquial language...interesting phraseology and syntax...and as many musical, folk, and regional

expressions as possible' (Foster, ix)), Russell's text contrasts oddly with it. For example, describing Foster's modest attitude to his bass playing, Russell suggests that 'his candour stops short of his own accomplishments.' (ibid., 38) A few pages later, however, Foster merely claims that the band he was with at the time 'didn't play rough enough to suit me,' and that he was forced to go and play with other bands who matched his calibre. (ibid., 41) There is little question that Foster recognises his 'own accomplishments', and the reader needs no further indication of this. Likewise, although the historical detail which Russell supplies is interesting, it can be found in any basic history of jazz, without the need to interrupt a unique first-person account. Probably due to the nature of taped interviews, Foster's text is in any case written in a snapshot style, moving suddenly from point to point; there is little value in disrupting this mode further.

Similar to Lomax's 'Interludes' and Russell's 'Interchapters' are Stanley Dance's 'Introductions' as the editor of Dicky Wells' *The Night People: The Jazz Life of Dicky Wells* (1991), also placed at the head of Wells' chapters. They seem to adopt the same function as those of Lomax, but are even less essential, as they summarise the entire chapter before the reader has an opportunity to gain this knowledge by him or herself. Dance makes 'sincere apologies' for the existing content of the book, 'offered in advance for such factual errors and oversights as may have been made', thus almost taking responsibility (and excusing himself from it in the same sentence) for the invalidity of Wells' reminiscences. (Wells, viii) Interestingly Lomax also makes such an excuse for any faults the reader may find in the Morton text, complaining that '[i]t has proved vain to try to check or correct Jelly's story. Jazz musicians are strong on downbeats but weak on dates.' (Lomax, 'Prelude') Stoddard also refers to this problem

⁶¹See, for example, Harlos, 153

in his foreword to Foster's text, predicting 'to be deluged with correspondence regarding inaccuracies and errors. I realize that many things in the book conflict with 'known' jazz history.' (Foster, x) While Lomax, Stoddard and Dance, along with other editors and co-writers, relish the opportunity to add to the text, they deny complete responsibility for its possible errors, creating a sense of uncertainty as to the collaborative nature of the content. If responsibility for content is denied *to* the musician and denied *by* the editor, it becomes more and more difficult to locate the true text. Interludes and interchapters fulfil only a minor role in providing factual evidence that is readily available elsewhere. They also generally present a negative view of the role of the editor.

However, this denial of responsibility is not present in all texts. Garvin Bushell's *Jazz From the Beginning* (1988) is based on thirty-one interviews with Bushell conducted over one and a half months by Mark Tucker. Tucker describes the editing process comprehensively, suggesting that

[i]n editing what Garvin said during our conversations, I have had a free hand in organising and shaping the text to remove minor inconsistencies. While Garvin has reviewed the entire text and offered corrections and suggestions, I take full responsibility for its final form. (Bushell, viii)

Despite these reassurances by Tucker, there are some confusing aspects of the text. In the introduction, not only does Lawrence Gushee refer to the book as a 'jazz biography', but Tucker also admits that some sections are formed from a conglomeration of various articles:

In Chapters 2-4, I have incorporated sections of the article 'Garvin Bushell and New York Jazz in the 1920s', with the kind permission of Nat Hentoff, Martin Williams (his co-editor at the *Jazz Review*), and Garvin himself. I have drawn upon two additional sources only sparingly (a phrase here, a sentence there): Monk Montgomery's interview of Bushell in August 1977 for the Jazz Oral History Project; and Patrick Gafey's profile of Bushell in *Arts Alive: The Southern Nevada Magazine of the Arts*. (ibid., xi)

Tucker also includes 'notes' to each chapter, perhaps incorporating into them the extra information he mentions here, although it is more likely that a focus on chronology required extra confirmation of historical fact. Bushell's autobiography is in strict

chronological order in contrast to those of others, a characteristic that will be important in later examination of the stylistic features of these texts. Indeed, the factual element of the text was the subject of a favourable 1988 review by Dan Morgerstern, who claimed that the book 'comes as close to objectivity as any autobiography I've read,' and remarks on the 'wholly authentic' nature of Bushell's voice: 'the only voice,' he suggests, 'heard here'. (Morgerstern, 1988, 217-222) Morgerstern likewise deems the foreword, introduction, appendix and glossary as 'excellent idea[s]', suggesting once more his desire for a factual text. It is, however, difficult to merge the concept of objectivity with the evidence of multiple sourcing present in the introduction: the 'authentic[ity]' of the text is presumably based solely on the fact that Bushell reviewed and approved of it prior to publication. Is this kind of objectivity, then, really a desirable aspect of an autobiography, and is it really the basis for authenticity?

If objectivity and chronology are indeed highly valued, then what is perhaps the most celebrated jazz autobiography of all, Charles Mingus' *Beneath the Underdog* (1971), should claim little attention. As well as being non-chronological and highly subjective, *Beneath the Underdog* also possesses one of the most intriguing stories we have of a manuscript's journey through editing to publication. Mingus originally wrote a draft manuscript in the early sixties, eventually creating over one thousand pages of text. In 1963 it was denied publication by McGraw-Hill, who decided, as Mingus admitted in an interview in 1964, that it was too 'dirty in parts'.⁶² The final script, published by Alfred A. Knopf Inc. in 1971, had been reduced from over one thousand pages to just three hundred and sixty-five. Unfortunately, as Mingus' biographer Brian Priestley says, 'the substance of the deleted passages must forever remain a mystery.' The suggestion

put by Susan Graham, his last wife, that Mingus 'left a lot of decisions to Nel King' (his white editor) because of his poor mental health around the time of writing suggests not only deletion, but also alteration of the manuscript. Priestley backs this up, claiming that 'many of the names of the dramatis personae were changed' (Priestley, 181), suffering a similar fate to those characters of Gonzales and Handy. Further examination of Mingus' writing style through the lens of gender in the next chapter will reveal a need to fragment his own identity, which may well have been carried through into his portrayal of others.

Many texts are arranged in chronological order by the editors, created from various papers, both longhand and typed, and often extremely difficult to organise. As Rex Stewart died before his autobiography, *Boy Meets Horn* (1991), could be completed, Claire Gordon, his editor, claims to have compiled the remainder of the text from 'many legal pads, plus scraps of paper, scribbled notes on envelopes and so on' in order that it could be published posthumously (Stewart, vii) Gordon also offers a surprisingly frank account of the final result, claiming that 'only about 500 words were not written by Rex. These consist of further explanations, connecting sentences and such.' (ibid., vii) This is also one of few texts in which we can easily compare manuscript and copy, as a photograph of a page of manuscript is included near the beginning of the book. While Gordon has not altered the meaning of any sentences, the changes which have been made are fairly obvious. Taking a sentence at random, we can examine the editing process in miniature. The manuscript collates with page 74 of the final copy, beginning with the sentence 'One way and another, I was exposed to all kinds of establishments those days. And of them all, the Rajah's was the most bizarre.'

⁶²Interview with Bill Whitworth, *New York Herald Tribune*, 1st Nov., 1964

The manuscript reads ‘The Rajah’s establishment was perhaps the most bizarre, of all of the places of that type that I have ever known.’ Gordon dramatises the sentence by focussing on the adjective ‘bizarre’, placing it at the end for emphasis. She deletes Stewart’s modifier ‘perhaps’, and creates two sentences from one whilst maintaining the vernacular style with the phrase ‘[o]ne way or another’: the new text is constructed directly from the manuscript.

A similarly constructed text is Lee Collins’ *Oh, Didn’t He Ramble* (1989), which was dictated to his wife, Mary, and then prepared in longhand and typescript, to be sent to the editors, Frank J. Gillis and John W. Miner. Gillis and Miner explain the complex process in their preface to the book, describing how

[t]he raw material was arranged in chronological sequence, gaps were filled in through exchanges of correspondence with Mary Collins, punctuation was standardised, and spelling was corrected to conform with generally accepted spellings of place and personal names with which Lee had had contact. (Collins, ix)

This seems to be a truly hybrid form of editing, focusing as it does on correction and arrangement rather than addition and modification. So how should we see these texts? Teddy Wilson’s *Teddy Wilson Talks Jazz* discards the notion of ‘autobiography’ in his ‘Introductory Note’: ‘[t]o say this is an autobiography would perhaps [be] too pompous: it is rather a book of reminiscences and comments on an important era in the American music we call jazz.’ (Wilson ‘Introductory Note’) Indeed, the concept of ‘a book of reminiscences and comments’ does fit in with some of the texts discussed above, particularly those of Gillespie and Morton, but less well with other, more chronologically based life stories such as those of Davis and Calloway. Without a direct record of their input, and even with extensive research, the role, and indeed identity, of many ghost-writers remains difficult to locate in fact. It is clear that the theory of

hybridity examined in the previous chapter is essential in order to avoid locating critical value in the location of a single voice.

Criticism of African-American autobiography: the focus on identity

It is worthwhile examining criticism on African-American autobiography not only in order to gain new perspectives on these texts, but also to suggest reasons for the limited development and focus on collaborative texts. Early criticism on African-American writing such as Sidone Smith's *Where I'm Bound* (1974) focuses on, for example, biographical readings, drawing on themes of flight, capture and freedom which are crucial to the portrayal of the narrated protagonist. While these are perhaps immediately more applicable to the slave narratives than to later African-American autobiography, early criticism undoubtedly foregrounded the identity politics⁶³ now commonly used in discussion of the latter. Smith, for example, identifies three categories of autobiography within celebrity texts which are evident in jazz autobiography today. Smith's first group, who draw their titles directly from the celebrity name, and of whom she claims that 'the name itself symbolises a viable form of freedom' (Smith, 46), are particularly interesting. In such titles as *Miles*, *Hamp* and *Brother Ray*, the identity of the narrated protagonist is undeniably stressed, especially when compared to a title such as *Beneath the Underdog*. *Miles*, in particular, places great emphasis on the power of the protagonist, whose flight to and from the comforting refuge of heroin addiction could easily be discussed thematically. Smith's other two categories are also applicable: the second make their area of expertise the title (here,

⁶³The word 'identity' can be found in the titles of numerous book length studies of African-American writing, including, referenced within this thesis, those of Sartwell, Mostern, Thompson and Harper.

Smith's example is W. C. Handy's *Father of the Blues*), and the third 'suggests the direction of the personal journey - up, out, away, from the onus of racial handicap'. her example being Mahalia Jackson's *Movin' On Up* (1966) (ibid., 45-6). Immediately, then, there is a determined focus on the character of the protagonist.

Contemporary criticism has developed from early texts as Smith's in terms of a further emphasis on identity, and particularly the relationship of that identity to the reader. Kenneth Mostern's *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics* (1999) proposes two axes by which to read theories of African-American autobiography, one of 'referentiality', whereby the critic believes that the text depicts and makes reference to our own world, the world outside the text, and one of 'subjectivity', whereby the critic sees the text as purely internal, focusing purely on the perceptions of the narrated protagonist. 'No definition of autobiography is possible,' he suggests, 'without some explicit or implicit position along each of these axes.' (Mostern, 28) These axes appear to represent completely contrasting critical views, and Mostern, although he claims that he has merely undertaken 'a survey of theories of autobiography' (ibid., 30), does in fact take a particular stance. He begins, for example, by dismissing the theories of Philippe Lejeune and Paul DeMan⁶⁴ for their lack of attention to referentiality, apparently warning against an overt subjectivity. He classifies various responses as 'individualist' and 'identitarian', the latter referring to a critic or reader who identifies directly with the referentiality of the text, and the former basing his awareness wholly subjectively: both these positions ignore the political or social environment in which the text is composed and set. However, he then reasons that African-American autobiography can be

⁶⁴Specifically Lejeune's 'The Autobiographical Pact' (1989) and DeMan's 'Autobiography as De-Facement' (1979)

subjective only if the 'I' of the narrated protagonist is taken to represent 'we'. Despite his denials, he has thus formed a new, inclusive theory, exclusive of 'you', the reader, yet with reference to a world which we are able to recognise. There are of course problems associated with merging referentiality with exclusivity, which Mostern does discuss briefly. For if we are able to locate recognisable forms within the text, does it then by default include us, whether or not we are racialised correctly, within it? Is referentiality only possible if we can become fully 'identitarian'? And can a communal 'identitarian' policy be possible? Having examined the identities existent outside the text (i.e. ghostwriters, editors and authors), let us now examine those of the characters within the text (i.e. the 'narrated protagonist').

While Mostern does not conclude some of the issues he has raised, he does point to the importance of authenticity and identity. Because of the difficulties raised by the paradoxical situation of referential yet exclusive texts, the critic's need to claim authentic texts by African-American jazz musicians is often caught up in the need to see them specifically as *black* texts written by a single black author. Theories of exclusivity are then possible, especially if the critic is white, and the element of referentiality can be overcome by his or her factual knowledge of black history/ slavery. Crispin Sartwell's *Act Like You Know: African-American Autobiography and White Identity* (1998) achieves just this, 'attend[ing] to black autobiographies...in order to reveal whiteness by hearing what whiteness excludes.' (Sartwell, 9) By 'hearing' about black history, that which has traditionally been excluded from white knowledge, Sartwell presumes himself capable of dealing with, and re-structuring, his own exclusion. While he accepts the difficulties involved in maintaining an inclusive referentiality through the terms of

racism (oppressor/ oppressed), he does suggest that it is possible. In autobiographical texts, he suggests, '[t]he oppressed person knows the oppressor better than the oppressor knows himself.' (ibid., 11) This 'know[ing]' does not necessarily, as Sartwell suggests, emerge purely from reference to white history within black texts. It can also emerge from the presentation of *black* history, because, as we have seen, this presentation often structures the way that the text is perceived. The exclusive nature of many black texts can, the critic Philip Harper suggests, also be observed through the use of a second-person pronoun, 'you', which 'invites us to conflate addressee and audience [so that] it appears that the material is meant to be *heard* by blacks, and *over*-heard by whites'. (Harper, 46) The use of second-person pronoun will be explored below with particular reference to Davis' autobiography *Miles*.

The importance of race and racial origin has already been suggested with reference to historical background. This forms an interesting start to our examination of the narrated protagonist. How, then, do these artists portray *themselves* as racial beings: how much emphasis do they place on understanding the racial divide? How exclusive and referential are they? To clarify, Sammy Price suggests that

because we think in the tradition of heritage, of black heritage, that may be the thing that people have not been able to unscramble. In black jazz, writers need to determine what we're talking about. See, we're talking about black jazz here; when we speak of jazz, then we speak of a thing that's a black creation, but that doesn't mean that it has to necessarily remain that. Then we believe that there should be those original roots. (Price, 25)

Price, then, marks jazz 'as a black creation' with 'original roots' that changes at some unspecified point to become something else. Just as this is unspecified, so the factual 'original roots' of many jazz autobiographers remain unclear, even to themselves, as we have seen in consideration of the autobiographies of Cab Calloway and Doc Cheatham.

The problem of exclusivity is not confined to the white critic. However, the invention of new roots, and the resulting fragmentation of the self which accompanies this, is a feature common to many autobiographies. Many jazz musicians do not feel the need to 'remain' black, assuming new or multiple identities which they reveal through their writing. These texts often also reveal their fidelity/ infidelity to their origin and roots through their emphasis (or lack of emphasis) on racial issues. These issues obviously cover a wide time frame, as some narrated protagonists (for example, Bechet) begin by informing the reader of their slave ancestry, while others begin with the segregationist laws of the twentieth century. Racial confrontation and abuse in the commercial music world is well documented⁶⁵, and narrated protagonists often refer to problems they experienced while on touring circuits such as the TOBA. Those with a more secure sense of origin often mention problematic racial incidents briefly, highlighting, for example, the idiocy of the situation, as when Ray Charles refers to the segregation of blind children at his school: 'It's awfully strange thinking about separating small children - black from white - when most of 'em can't even make out the difference between the two colours.' (Charles, 22) Charles is generally silent about any racially-motivated problems in his adult life, claiming later in the text that he is 'not sure I made all those black and white distinctions you're always hearing about. Years later, when someone asked me about the difference between, say, a black band like Chick Webb's and a white one like Tommy Dorsey's, I said, "Oh, about a hundred dollars a week.'" (ibid., 86) Not only does Charles present the difference purely in financial terms, but he also maintains a casual, light-hearted tone, never suggesting a

⁶⁵See, for example, Kofsky (1998)

weighty import. Is race, then, something which becomes subsumed in the hybridity of the text?

Similarly, Duke Ellington's *Music is my Mistress* mentions racial issues in the United States only briefly, when Ellington is at a press conference on a U.S. State Department tour in 1963, and is asked 'What about the race question?' He responds by denying that his country has a specific problem, claiming instead that '[e]verywhere, there are many degrees of haves and have-nots, minorities, majorities, races, creeds, colours, and castes.' (Ellington, 308) Ellington constructs a world-wide view of the balance between equality and inequality, his vernacular phrase 'have and have-nots' suggesting a relaxed attitude and a lack of experience of specific discrimination. While this may be merely his *intention*, the book's general lack of emphasis on racial issues is echoed in other jazz autobiographies. W.C. Handy's *Father of the Blues*, for example, reveals a similar tone. Aside from refusing to name those white men who cheated him financially, there are also odd comical descriptions of black men which stand out from the body of the text (on page 183, for example, 'a bewildered Negro with a watermelon head' is encountered). The last line of the book, 'God Bless America' (Handy, 304), likewise sits strangely with the reader. A few pages earlier, Handy describes the death of his wife, after she was refused entry to a whites-only hospital, the receptionist claiming 'we don't take colored people in private rooms'. (ibid., 282) The uncertainty as to the tone of the final line highlights the problems involved in editing black texts. Although it could be suggested that this last line is a patriotic statement in the middle of the second world war, it is difficult to read it without some suggestion of sarcasm.

Albert Stone's theory of collaborative autobiography is particularly relevant here. Stone, for example, attributes the racial content of Billie Holiday's *Lady Sings The Blues* to what he identifies as the specific formula of the autobiography: 'the hallowed success... from the farm or slum to Carnegie Hall or Yankee Stadium.' (Stone, 238) He suggests that the facts of Holiday's drug addiction are forced into submission while the racial element is overemphasised, in order to fit the formula: this, he claims, is partly a result of the intended readership ('middle-class, white, and as unfamiliar with a black ghetto as with the Brown Derby') and partly in order to allow the narrated protagonist 'his or her right to criticise as well as praise America on grounds of experience with both extremes.' (ibid., 238) While this theory is undoubtedly applicable to Holiday (the overt racial motivation of *Lady Sings The Blues* does not appear in many other texts), it is also interesting to consider it in relation to those texts without obvious racial concern, such as *Father of the Blues*. Handy's confusion, highlighted above, would be conveniently explained by the presence of a dual mechanism of criticism and praise which Stone identifies, and would suggest that Handy's intended audience of 1941 was almost certainly white.⁶⁶ The same is almost certainly true of Louis Armstrong's second autobiography, *Satchmo - My Life in New Orleans* (1954), whose publication date almost twenty years after his first book clearly reflects the augmentation in white audience numbers. While *Swing That Music* contained only sporadic, usually stereotyped references to African-Americans, *Satchmo* portrays Armstrong as a happy-go-lucky character who, when young, played hide and seek with 'clever little white kids [who] always found me' (Armstrong, 1954, 9), and describes the following fairly terrifying incident, which occurs after a friend's bathing shorts fall off, as 'funny':

⁶⁶Theories of audience and reception will be examined more closely in chapter six.

While we were hurrying to fish them out of the water a white man took a shot gun off the rack on the porch. As Jimmy was struggling frantically to pull his trunks on again the white man aimed the shot gun at him and said "You black sonofabitch, cover up that black ass of yours or I'll shoot." We were scared stiff, but the man and his party broke out laughing and it all turned out to be a huge joke. (ibid., 49)

In *Satchmo* Armstrong projects his image of himself in relation to 'white folks', and suggests the hierarchies which function as a part of that relationship. Armstrong concludes with a similarly inconclusive line to Handy's, suggesting 'I have always loved my white folks, and they have always proved that they loved me and my music.' (ibid., 195) While this may well be true, when added to the presentation of white and black 'folks' in the text, it is difficult to accept an equal partnership in love between them. Stone's theory allows us to view this difficulty in terms of a desire to represent both criticism and praise of the racial situation in America. The critic William H. Kenney also suggests that the reader evaluate Armstrong's texts using a similar theory. Armstrong (and his various editors and co-writers), he claims, both manipulate and maintain a balance between white and black possible audiences. Indeed, he comments on the complexity of the authorial structure of *Swing That Music*, identifying four different 'voices' in the text (Vallee, Gerlach⁶⁷, and two conflicting Armstrongs) who 'speak to various audiences at different times.' (Kenney, 1991, 42)

The problem with acceptance of this theory, however, is that it suggests the result of the collaboration to be determined purely by the editor, and that the result is always to present a dualistic quality. It is worth considering that Stone's theory is difficult to apply with certainty to some of the most apparently racially motivated texts: although Davis, for example, places much emphasis on his racial identity, *Miles* is hardly reticent about describing his heroin addiction. In the same way, Charles Mingus'

⁶⁷Rudy Vallee, a white bandleader, author of the introduction, and Horace Gerlach, a British musician and author of the final chapter.

Beneath the Underdog, a collaborative text in that it has been extensively edited, places little emphasis on a balanced view of American society, rather highlighting depravity and extreme levels of fantasy.⁶⁸

In certain areas of life as an African-American musician, then, it would seem impossible to represent the balance of criticism and praise that Stone proposes. Generally, as has already been suggested, musicians encountered racial discrimination when they were touring. Particularly in Southern states, they often found it difficult to find a hotel bed for the night, and were forced to lodge in people's houses. It is unusual to find an autobiography which presents this as a positive situation, but *Oh, Didn't He Ramble: The Life Story of Lee Collins* does just this, claiming that '[o]ne reason some of us musicians liked to rent in private houses was that the few hotels there were in the South at that time generally weren't fit to live in.' (Collins, 30) Compared to Billie Holiday's experiences on the touring circuit, Collins' stance seems fairly unlikely. It may however be provoked by the same defiance that Ellington exhibited in response to the question at the press conference, above. Similarly, Count Basie highlights the problem of overemphasis on the question of racial tension near the end of *Good Morning Blues*, complaining that

some people seem to be mainly concerned about that aspect of your life as a musician. So maybe they will think I haven't mentioned enough about it. If I haven't spent a lot of time complaining about all of these things, it's not because I want anybody to get the impression that all of that was not also a part of it. It was. So what? Life is a bitch, and if it's not one damn thing, it's going to be something else. (Basie, 474)

Basie's confrontational tone highlights a refusal to conform to other people's experiences and opinions. Other musicians appear to be more directly aware of their black roots, and present this awareness both subtly and conspicuously. Sidney Bechet,

⁶⁸Charles Mingus, among others, was undoubtedly seen as an artistic voice against repression by the African-American public of the sixties and seventies (for more on this, see Berry and Blassingame, 1982).

for example, provides a thinly veiled comparison between slavery and the commercial record industry in suggesting that '[i]f you start taking what's pure in a man and you start putting it on a bill of sale, somehow you can't help destroying it.' (Bechet, 124) In general, Bechet makes little reference to racial issues, but the presence of Omar, his enslaved 'grandfather', at the beginning and end of the text, does reveal a surrounding subtext of slavery.

Seemingly overt racial stereotyping can often reveal the presence of the ghostwriter or editor, covering over those 'gaps' or 'lapses' in the text which stem from a hybrid construction. It is possible to suggest that the acknowledged presence of a ghostwriter thus confirms the relationship between narrated protagonist and editor, allowing the latter's presence to become apparent. Louis Armstrong's *Swing That Music* (1936), whose editor is unknown, also contains various heavy-handed attempts to stereotype its narrated protagonist as black. Armstrong comments on the origin of the word 'jazz', suggesting that 'it went back to the tom-toms of our people in Africa before we were civilised.' (Armstrong, 1936, 6) He also mentions the literary character 'Tom' from Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*, claiming 'I had always liked it and always wanted to meet a boy like Tom.' (ibid., 44). This apparent idolisation of Tom is echoed in the occasional 'No, suh!' interjections which occasionally invade Armstrong's writing, reminiscent perhaps of Jim, the fugitive slave of *Huckleberry Finn*. As with Gillespie's *To Be Or Not To Bop*, Armstrong's text has only a few isolated examples of this stereotyping, suggesting that they do not form a natural or extensive part of the author's reminiscences. Instead they are part of a hybrid construction of a text which has more difficulty than most in achieving authenticity, because it does not acknowledge the

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presence of multiple voices. Indeed, Dan Morgenstern's foreword to the 1993 edition of the book suggests that

The lengthy business about the ship's captain who knew Mark Twain, and Armstrong's supposed interest in the great writer, seems a bit suspect since it is never mentioned in his later autobiographical writings or interviews. One is left with the hunch that it was the ghostwriter or editor (who may have been one and the same) who had read *Tom Sawyer*...and who thought that any account of life on the Mississippi should include Twain. (ibid., x)

Morgenstern's dismissal of any authenticity behind the 'Tom Sawyer' phrases reveals the problems inherent in a reading of texts which demands all voices be acknowledged and identified. These isolated moments of identification with Sawyer seem to play a similar role to the lynchings that some musicians mention in the early pages of their books. Both Garvin Bushell and Milt Hinton suggest the effect that lynchings had on their childhood, the former claiming 'the mob came right by our house' (Bushell, 4), and the latter having witnessed one such event at age 'seven or eight'. (Hinton, 7) The critic Albert Stone, referring to a theory of collaborative autobiography, suggests that events of great distress such as the witnessing of a lynching augment the authenticity of the texts: '*What* happened...is more immediately compelling than *how* it is being communicated or *by whom*'. (Stone, 234) However, the difficulty in dismissing the author(s) here involves the fact is that, as with Armstrong's 'Tom' interest, the lynchings are not described in much detail and are not mentioned again. Perhaps here their presence may be put down to the 'gaps' and 'lapses' of the text which have been associated with the presence of a ghostwriter. In the case of Armstrong, the lack of acknowledgement of such a presence merely causes critical frustration, as the hybridity of the text can neither be confirmed nor denied. In order to reveal something more about the (un)importance of factual authentication of individual texts, reportage of the same events by two jazz musicians and autobiographers will now be analysed.

The story of Clerk Wade, a waiter-turned-pimp who, according to Louis Armstrong ‘was so great a pimp in Storyville that he wore diamonds in his garters’, is narrated by both Armstrong (quoted in the Bergreen biography) and Danny Barker (in his second book, *Buddy Bolden and The Last Days of Storyville*).⁶⁹ Wade’s fateful story, which ends with him being shot by one of his own prostitutes, has, according to Barker’s editor, Alyn Shipton, become ‘a well-known piece of New Orleans folklore’. (Barker, 1998, x) Barker apparently selected the version which he recounts from ‘three different extant endings’; this selection process thus reveals in miniature the intentions of two memoirists of the Storyville era, Armstrong and Barker. Barker details Wade’s life fairly dramatically over ten pages, revealing not only what Shipton found to be ‘the skill of a master storyteller’ but also his desire to present the excitement and vitality of New Orleans life, where pimps and whores fought to maintain their status and, in this case, reversed the established hierarchy. In Barker’s version, Wade goes to ‘consol’ his whore, Angelina, who has been drinking herself into a stupor after being rejected by him earlier in the day. As he sits in a booth with her and begins to eat his dinner, she shoots him five times, killing him instantly, although not before he has apologised to her : “Li’l girl, I’m sorry I did not take you to the ball.” (ibid., 64)

On the other hand, Armstrong’s version is presumably one of those Barker rejected. Here, the whole story happens in a matter of minutes: Wade is ‘standing at the bar’, he rejects Angelina, and she shoots him. The drunken drama which Barker portrays is in complete contrast to the short paragraph in which Armstrong dismisses the case: ‘Clerk died right there on the spot. The district was very sad about it for days and days.’ (Bergreen, 50) Clearly it is impossible to decide which version is factually correct, but

⁶⁹I am grateful for Alyn Shipton for drawing this to my attention

fairly simple to conclude which one reveals more about the atmosphere in Storyville at that time. A comparison of Armstrong's and Barker's portrayal of Clerk Wade does not reveal much about Wade himself, but instead allows us to view the intentions of these chronicling jazzmen. Armstrong desires a clean-cut version, while Barker revels in the gruesome details. We can thus locate critical value without faltering on the often unanswerable question of what represents an authentic text. This critical value is often to be found in an examination of the persona created by the text which is termed the 'narrated protagonist'.

Critical value and interest, then, is often located in the persona which the jazz musician at the centre of jazz autobiography wishes to reveal. Miles Davis' edited *Miles* attaches much importance to racial conflict, which he returns to throughout the text, revealing not simply obvious 'gaps' and 'lapses' but a more complex construction of hybridity and character. He begins by suggesting that his main association with the town he grew up in, East St. Louis, was 'that it was there, back in 1917, that those crazy, sick white people killed all those black people in a race riot.' (Davis, 4) On the next page he proposes that 'some of remembering that [racism in the past] is in my personality and comes out in the way I look at white people.' (ibid., 5) Davis' turbulent attitude towards the white race has been suggested by many critics, but the fact that here this attitude is related to a past event, and not to those which occur during his lifetime, is particularly interesting. He seems to immediately associate his past with racial tension, despite the fact that he is referring to 1917, a time before he was born.

Davis' autobiography is one of the few which has attracted some critical discussion, and these critical responses focus primarily on racial issues. Stanley

Crouch's article 'On the Corner: The Sellout of Miles Davis', for example, is a damning critique, suggesting that his self-obsession and disrespect for others complemented a destructive drug addiction. Crouch terms Davis 'the jet-black Little Lord Fauntleroy attracted to the glamour and the fast life of the jazz world' (Crouch, 1997, 910), a reference to his middle-class, high-colour privileged upbringing which Crouch suggests is in conflict with the hard realities of life as a jazz musician. It is certainly true that Davis received a high level of financial support from his parents: Babs Gonzales recalls in his autobiography *I Paid my Dues* (1967) that as a student at Julliard, Miles 'was the envy of everyone because his father sent him seventy-five (\$75) dollars a week which was as much as the guys working were getting.' (Gonzales, 36) Crouch's criticism of the text, however, seems to be that Davis denied the responsibilities of his role as a African-American, focusing instead on his own, often deficient, personality: *Miles*, claims Crouch, 'is overwhelmingly an outburst of inarticulateness, of profanity, of error, of self-inflation, and of parasitic paraphrasing.' (Crouch, 1997, 910) 'On things racial,' he continues, 'it's impossible to figure out from this book what Davis really felt.' (ibid., 912) Crouch thus suggests the inauthenticity of *Miles*, which he suggests stems from the impossibility of defining a consistent racial viewpoint for Davis.

Yet 'figur[ing] out' what Davis 'felt' about racial conflict is surely not impossible. In fact, the construction of character within *Miles* is such that the hybrid nature of the text is often disguised by what is revealed about Davis himself. In other words, the virulence of character present here enables problematic gaps and lapses to be covered over. Davis' difficulty in detaching the past from his personal present is of course augmented by his defensive and self-obsessed stance, but it is precisely this

stance which defines his attitude towards white people. His constant focus on 'what *I* want' (Davis, 9), which he admits in the opening pages, also provokes a focus on what he wants the reader to think, and some of the conflict between racial pride and submission on which Crouch remarks is affected by this. Because he is overtly aware of his own self-importance, Davis constantly assures the reader of the difference between himself and others, suggesting for example that the townspeople of East St. Louis 'treat[ed] us [the Davis family] most times like we were different. They expected us to make something important of ourselves.' (ibid., 14) This arrogance and heightened sense of superiority often leads Davis to assert his dominance over other characters in the book: when they are white, that superiority becomes an expression of racism. The following passage, for example, clearly suggests that Davis' achievement in going to Minton's nightclub to listen to 'hot' and 'innovative' music outweighs that of most other potential audience members:

The idea was that you had to calm the innovation down for the white folks downtown because they couldn't handle the *real* thing. Now, don't get me wrong, there were *some* good white people who were brave enough to come up to Minton's. But they were few and far between. (ibid., 44)

Davis' aim here is to locate a group of people to whom he can appear superior: audiences at Minton's were largely black, so he defines his individuality against those people whom he knows did not appear. His admission that '*some* good white people' did come is actually true: problems of racism only appear when the phrase is applied to Davis' view of all whites, and not just those who attended one specific nightclub. Note also his phrase 'the *idea* was' [my italics]: the 'idea' is not necessarily his opinion.

The passage that Crouch uses to justify his sense of confusion with his racial viewpoint is yet another in which he suggests his superiority, and in which this lofty attitude could easily be mistaken for racism (this time towards black people). While at

Julliard, he mentions the importance of the music libraries, from which he would apparently borrow ‘scores by all those great composers, like Stravinsky. Alban Berg, Prokofiev.’ (ibid., 51) Not content with merely mentioning his borrowing habits, Davis insists on exalting himself above others once again, this time focusing on his own race:

Knowledge is freedom and ignorance is slavery, and I just couldn’t believe someone could be that close to freedom and not take advantage of it. I have never understood why black people didn’t take advantage of all the shit they can. It’s like a ghetto mentality telling people that they aren’t supposed to do certain things, that those things are only reserved for white people. When I would tell other musicians all about this, they would just kind of shine me on. You know what I mean? So I just went my own way and stopped telling them about it. (ibid., 51)

Davis exalts himself to the position of being the one person who knows about white culture and ‘take[s] advantage of it’; he alone ‘tell[s] other musicians all about’ the problems he associates with lack of knowledge. Eventually, his efforts all to no avail, he stops ‘telling them’, and does not mention this issue again. As he did when discussing Minton’s nightclub, here Davis is presenting himself as a revolutionary, and not, as Crouch sees it, specifically as a critic of any particular race. This emphasis on his own self-importance continues throughout the text, and many apparently racist attitudes that Davis holds can be traced back to his difficulty in submitting himself to anyone. As Richard Sudhalter adeptly claims in his short review of *Miles*, ‘[t]he little boy determined to shock and scandalise may be, after all, the substance of the man.’ (Sudhalter, 206)

In both the above extracts, and, indeed, throughout the book, Davis utilises the second-person pronoun ‘you’. It is particularly noticeable when he addresses the reader directly: ‘[y]ou know what I mean?’ The complexities of the passage above, which at first appears to address itself only to white readers (‘I have never understood why black people...’) are well-addressed by Philip Harper’s thoughts on ‘hear[ing]’ and ‘over-hear[ing]’, although they are in fact reversed. Davis maintains his desire to inform and

educate *everyone* through his use of you: as Harper says, ‘conflat[ing] addressee and audience’, but failing to distinguish between black and white types. (Harper, 46) For him, both are subservient to his demands: in fact the identity of the ‘you’ of his intentions is fairly irrelevant, and all his ideas are *over*-heard precisely because racial distinctions do not concern Davis as much as the sound of his own voice.

Despite the assurances of Basie and Collins that racism was not especially problematic, life on the musicians’ circuits such as the TOBA seem to have been full of racial incidents which often appear in autobiographies, down to such brief phrases as ‘hitting the bushes’, a common problem for black musicians who were not allowed to use white toilet facilities. Billie Holiday is one of those who uses her autobiography to vent her anger about conditions on the road, claiming problems with facilities to be so bad that she ‘hardly ever ate, slept, or went to the bathroom without having a major NAACP-type production.’ (Holiday, 74) Indeed, Holiday’s book seems to be far more racially motivated than other texts, drawing various similarities between slavery, working as a singer, and her addiction to heroin:

It wasn’t long before I was one of the highest-paid slaves around. I was making a thousand a week - but I had about as much freedom as a field hand in Virginia a hundred years before. (ibid., 106)

There are also constant references to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which would have been a recognisable text among readers at the time of the publication of *Lady Sings the Blues*. Holiday likens herself to ‘Liza crossing the ice’ during her fight against heroin (ibid., 164), and dubs other characters ‘Tom’ or ‘Legree’, the former used in a fairly condescending manner, as was the prevalent view at that time among critics. She suggests that the point of her book is to warn young people away from drugs: ‘I do hope some kids will read this book and not miss the point of it’ (ibid., 183), but there is

also an undeniable effort to present her in a particular way, oppressed not only by heroin, but also by racial discrimination. Much of the text, from the opening scenes of attempted rape, violence and punishment which Holiday suffers during childhood, to the failed attempts to give up drugs near the close of the book, seems deliberately shocking. The necessity of viewing this as a hybrid text is clear: William Dufty 'enables' the text through the maintenance of a 'common language' with which both black and white audiences may identify and sympathise.

In mid-twentieth century America the only solution for many jazz musicians to the problem of poor pay and conditions as a result of racial discrimination was to manipulate their physical characteristics and social behaviour, so as to look 'white'. These attempts are chronicled by two jazz autobiographers, William Broonzy and Babs Gonzales (a.k.a. Lee Brown). Broonzy's attitude is clearly motivated by racial problems, as he realises that '[e]ven a half-white Negro was treated better than a black Negro' in thirties America. Repeating the commonly heard shout 'If you're black, get back!', he reveals 'I straightened my hair, changed my way of talking and walking, always trying to do things like a white man so I wouldn't have to get back.' (Broonzy, 63) Babs Gonzales' identity issues in *I Paid My Dues* are even more complex. While he avoids detection as a black American himself, Gonzales claims to be a revolutionary in racial conflict, citing an incident when, refused service in late-night cafeterias, he 'recruited about one hundred students and after two weeks of marching in front of the cafeterias...won the fight to eat in automats.' (Gonzales, 15) This suggests that subversion and fragmentation of self-identity was relatively easy to achieve: both Gonzales and Broonzy utilise fairly simple techniques to manipulate their racial origin.

the former creating a humorous situation where simply by wearing a turban ‘the southern ofays⁷⁰ in the neighbourhood bowed to me because they thought I was an Indian.’ (ibid., 20) Gonzales never reveals his true name in his autobiography, and even dresses as a woman to avoid being drafted for World War II: in this final deception he refutes not only his black American identity (at this point he is pretending to be Spanish), but also the simple fact of being male. In general, he appears to have no wish to maintain or celebrate his origins: on one occasion, rather than pay a black drummer extra to form the required ‘all-colored band’, he hires a cheap Swedish musician and puts black makeup ‘all over his face and hands’. (ibid., 92) Indeed, during an interview with the jazz historian Valerie Wilmer, Gonzales reveals the following:

My real name is Lee Brown, and I picked Gonzales when I was with Charlie [Barnet] because they was Jim Crowing me in ofay hotels on the road and so I said if it’s just simple enough to change my las [sic] name – why not? Get in the crazy hotels and sleep with the ofays. They think I’m Cubano and I can speak the language, too. So it stuck and only real close people know my expubidence. (Wilmer, 1970, 95)

His lack of concern is evident. Gonzales also obviously regards himself as intensely heterosexual and fairly dominant: he makes reference to numerous women, and even suggests that he was hospitalised as a result of his overactive libido. (Gonzales, 69) One of his final statements in the book is an evaluation of the nationality of his lovers: ‘I’ve known intimately,’ he suggests, ‘at least three thousand girls of every nationality, except Mongolian and Chinese.’ (ibid., 155) It is interesting that Gonzales’ text is one of the few without an editor or co-writer credited. The constant confusion over his identity and self-awareness do suggest that this is largely the case. This should be seen as a direct result of racism on the touring circuit, and, as neither Broonzy or Gonzales believed they had physically become white, does not impact on our discussion of Mezzrow.

⁷⁰Slang for poor white

The historical background to the style of the texts: why are they written this way?

It is important to understand the historical background to the writing of the jazz autobiography in order to expand on these stylistic differences. As texts written in mid-twentieth century America, all black autobiographies have an important role to play in illustrating the issues surrounding black representation during the so-called 'Jim Crow' era of oppression. While their precursors, slave narratives, often rescinded the presentation of individual identity in favour of polemical, representative abolitionist statements, jazz autobiography frequently modifies this. We have seen examples in the previous three chapters which consistently undermine traditional autobiographical forms: rejecting, for example, the quest style narrative and the maintenance of a single authoritative voice. In order to clarify this position, here we will briefly examine the background to the style of African-American autobiography, and the reasons for its development, before directly comparing the style of two contemporaneous texts: Louis Armstrong's *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* (1954) and Malcolm X's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965). Comparison of jazz autobiography (Armstrong) with non-jazz (X) will enable further peculiar qualities of the former to come to light.

Post-emancipation, black autobiographers, according to Schultz (1975) faced two choices: 'testimonial' autobiography, in the manner of W.E.B. DuBois and Malcolm X, or 'blues' autobiography, under which classification she places Mingus' *Beneath the Underdog*. Brief examination of these types reveals some of their major characteristics and facilitates further examination of readership politics. The former, the 'testimonial', can be seen to follow directly on from the slave narrative as exemplified by Frederick Douglass, who saw himself not as an individual, but rather as 'a

representative man' of the African American ex-slave community.⁷¹ With the cause of abolition inherent in their belief system and ever-present in their text, most slave narratives pre-empted the testimonies against racism which flourished during the mid-twentieth century. Rather than suggesting the importance of the individual life, these texts placed most emphasis on the need to modify their readership's viewpoint and thus effect social change. Many narratives, for example, try to convince their reader of the relationship between abolition and Christianity, attempting to influence those who held religious and political power. One of these is *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789). Equiano, a convert to Christianity, urges 'nominal Christians' to consider the cruelties of slavery with an impassioned plea for justice: 'might not an African ask you, learned you this from your God?' (Equiano, 161) At the end of his *Life*, he has two aims: to become a Christian missionary to Africa and to fight for abolition. His personal life, like that of Frederick Douglass, is never as important as this mission to which he assigns himself.

Black female slaves take up a slightly different position. In a similar manner, Harriet Jacobs fights in her narrative to highlight the problems of slavery, in this case specifically for black women. Seemingly, her personal life is only useful to the reader as part of a cause, for, as she claims, 'it would have been more pleasant to me to have been silent about my own history.' (Jacobs, preface) Despite this apparent desire to keep secret what is to Jacobs a 'painful' life, she nevertheless allows the reader to witness shocking and disturbing images of sexual manipulation which clearly embarrass and distress her. As a black Christian writing and appealing to a mainly white readership, Jacobs is forced to distance herself from white heroines in admitting her use of sex as a

⁷¹Stowe, xi

tool to procure her freedom, and, in the following passage, reveals the necessity of her quest for abolition:

And now reader, I come to a period in my unhappy life, which I would gladly forget if I could. The remembrance fills me with sorrow and shame. It pains me to tell you of it; but I have promised to tell you the truth, and I will do it honestly, let it cost me what it may. I will not try to screen myself behind the plea of compulsion from a master; for it was not so. Neither can I plead ignorance or thoughtlessness. For years, my master has done his utmost to pollute my mind with foul images, and to destroy the pure principles inculcated by my grandmother, and the good mistress of my childhood. The influences of slavery had had the same effect on me that they had on other young girls; they had made me prematurely knowing, concerning the evil ways of the world. I knew what I did, and I did it with deliberate calculation. (Jacobs, 219)

Jacobs thus refuses excuses, and in presenting her situation, reveals the full horror of slavery for an attractive young black woman, appealing not to pity but to an understanding of her utter despair. 'I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South,' she writes in her preface, 'I want to add my testimony to that of abler pens to convince the people of the Free States what slavery really is.' (Jacobs, 'Preface') For Jacobs and for others, their 'testimony' is vital to this cause, and the 'cost[ly]' confessions of their individual plights, dilemmas and embarrassments are secondary to achieving a communal result.

The testimonial autobiographical text is evidenced at a later stage in its development in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, written 'with the assistance of' Alex Haley, and published in 1965. Haley's foreword to the autobiography recalls the first conversation he had with X about the possibility of a book: the latter agrees on the proviso that 'my life story may help people to appreciate better how Mr Muhammed salvages black people...I don't want my motives for this misinterpreted by anybody - the Nation of Islam must get every penny that might come to me.' (X, 14) However much this allegiance may have altered after X's estrangement from Elijah Muhammed, Haley reports that he did not ask to reedit the text: it stands as a testimony to a life motivated

almost entirely by the desire for equality, however much the autobiographer's assessment of that desire might change over time. Thus X's disenchantment with Muhammed is expressed only in terms of what he believes to be the book's overall success:

For the freedom of my 22 million black brothers and sisters here in America, I do believe that I have fought the best that I knew how, and the best that I could, with the shortcomings that I have had. (ibid., 498)

A further example of the testimonial autobiography is W.E.B. DuBois' *Dusk of Dawn* (1940), in which he suggests 'I have written then what is meant to be not so much my autobiography as the autobiography of a concept of race, elucidated, magnified and doubtless distorted in the thoughts and deeds which were mine.' (DuBois, xxx). Here, as Schultz's general theory claims, 'the personal voice is subsumed by the writer's desire to minimise himself because of the urgency of his theme.' (Schultz, 83) In testimonial autobiography this theme was nearly always politically and, in the case of Malcolm X, religiously motivated, representing a complete and evolving testimonial against black oppression. These writers believed that as representatives of a wider community their writings could massively impact on that community: as DuBois claims, 'my life is significant for all lives of men.' (DuBois, 4)

Schultz's concept of 'blues' autobiography forms a contrast to these ideas of confrontation and social responsibility. For her, a more personally-conscious autobiography is evidenced by a lack of concern with outward issues, and a focus on the inner self, and the self's conscious, present development. Although she uses one example from jazz autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog*, her focus is on 'blues' as a representation of oral, improvised culture rather than as a musical form. Her associations appear to stem from the difference between a chronological quest narrative-type

(testimonial) and a more free labyrinthine type (blues): she suggests, for example, that while for the former 'the experiences of the past must affect the future, for the blues autobiographer, the experiences of the past are part of a continuing present.' (Schultz, 85) Having previously discussed the existence of differing narrative structures in jazz autobiography, Schultz's concept of a 'continuing present' will now be discussed, with reference to the lesser importance these texts appear to attach to racial history. This will highlight how they might view their intended readership. For the jazz autobiography does not often seem politically motivated, despite the occurrence of 'Jim Crow' restrictions on touring African American musicians. Occasions of racism within them are usually isolated and brief, and, as has been suggested, can often be attributed to the presence of the ghostwriter or editor. Where wider issues appear to dominate, such as Charles Mingus' obsession with sexuality in *Beneath the Underdog*, these can be seen as representations of individuality. Many other autobiographers specifically seek to downplay ideas of confrontation with the white community, seeking rather to assert their personal sense of equality.

A direct comparison: Armstrong and X

A reading of the openings of Louis Armstrong's *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* (1954) and Malcolm X's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) facilitates a final comparison between testimonial and blues autobiography.⁷² Following on from Alex Haley's extensive foreword, Malcolm X begins his autobiography with a chapter

⁷²Both texts appeared at crucial moments in the history of African-American civil rights: 1954 saw the momentous *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision to outlaw segregation in schools, and in 1965 the Voting Rights Act was passed, marking the end of a turbulent phase of the struggle for equality.

entitled 'Nightmare', of which the first paragraph immediately introduces political themes: 'When my mother was pregnant with me, she told me later, a party of hooded Ku Klux Klan riders galloped up to our home in Omaha, Nebraska, one night.' He explains the reason for this: his father, a Baptist Minister, is deeply involved in the fight for equality: "'spreading trouble" among the "good" Negroes of Omaha with the "back to Africa" preaching of Marcus Garvey.' (X, 79) Thus not only are political themes covered in the first paragraph, but influential names are also mentioned, and X's family are implicated. For X, everything is politicised, from religion to fashion: he describes, for example, the black practice of straightening hair ('getting a conk') thus: 'I don't see how on earth a black woman with any race pride could walk down the street with any black man wearing a conk - the emblem of his shame that he is black.' (ibid., 139) Thus, as Schultz suggests for testimonial autobiography, X uses his past experiences to try to influence the reader's future.

Armstrong, in contrast, declines to title his chapters, and his opening number contains simply biographical details. Despite his poverty-stricken beginnings, in stark contrast to the middle-class lifestyle of X's family, here there are no politics, just an image of the street, James Alley, in which he grew up⁷³. Armstrong simply tells the reader his story, and appears much less interested in influencing his or her political views on racial equality, and much more interested in painting a picture of the exact geographical location of his birth:

When I was born in 1900 my father, Willie Armstrong, and my mother, May Ann - or Mayann as she was called - were living on a little street called James Alley. Only one block long, James Alley is located in the crowded section of New Orleans known as Back o' Town. It is one of the four great sections into which the city is divided. The others are Uptown, Downtown and Front of Town, and each of these quarters has its own little traits.' (Armstrong, 1954, 9)

⁷³The name of this street is contested: Robert Goffin, for example, claims it to be 'Jane Alley'. (Goffin, 8)

Armstrong maintains this relaxed, factual approach throughout the book; when racial incidents occur, such as here, in his realisation of the segregation of streetcars in New Orleans, they are presented as a joke:

There is something funny about the signs on the streetcars in New Orleans [they read 'For Colored Passengers Only']. We colored folks used to get real kicks out of them when we got on a car at the picnic grounds or at Canal Street on a Sunday evening when we outnumbered the white folks. Automatically we took the whole car over, sitting as far up front as we wanted to. It felt good to sit up there once in a while. We felt a little more important than usual. I can't explain why exactly, but maybe it was because we weren't supposed to be up there. (ibid., 16)

This presentation is in many ways far more complex than the equivalent testimonial text, in which the ideals of the protagonist are displayed and concretised in his or her actions. While both autobiographies were clearly highly influenced by their intended readership, and quite possibly also by the wishes of the editor(s), Armstrong, writing in a period when the fight for black equality was pressing, seems to ignore prime opportunities to influence these readers politically. His writing is much more concerned with the presentation of an appealing factual self. What Schultz is suggesting in her categorisation of 'blues' autobiography is the type of autobiography exemplified by Armstrong: a black autobiography focused not on confrontation with the reader, but rather on presentation and identification with him/her. Schultz calls this 'the discovery of consciousness, with the reader implicitly being engaged in this process' (Schultz, 84): a process, therefore, which asserts a developing individual consciousness over a politically motivated and representative polemic.

A further effect of hybridity: performance personas

Some of the ways in which the narrated protagonist is portrayed to the reader of jazz autobiography, through racial content issues, have already been suggested. The critic

Crispin Sartwell offers a view of these identity issues as fragmentation based on what he sees as a choice, present for all African-American autobiographers, between two conditions. African-American identity is always fragmented, and is consistently portrayed thus, from DuBois' 'two worlds within and without the Veil' (DuBois. 134) to Charles Mingus' three-fold self at the opening of *Beneath the Underdog*. Sartwell suggests that the identity of the self is either accepted as being fragmented, ever-changing and unlikely to unify into a concrete persona, or, in other cases, a persona is created in which a new self is fashioned from the fragments of the old. The template for this latter model, Sartwell claims, rests on a dialectic of race, in which black equals good, and white equals bad: 'a unified self out of fragments...by racial construction.' (Sartwell, 23)

Although Sartwell does not investigate it, this theory can be applied with some success to jazz autobiography. The racial emphases discussed above are indicative of an acceptance or otherwise of fragmentation. If it is accepted, as in the case of Count Basie, who, as seen earlier, describes the two selves (musical and literary) which his autobiography has created, then racial issues appear in some sense less important to the narrated protagonist. Basie's text contains few racial incidents, and those that appear are consistently dismissed as unimportant. If, on the other hand, the self is consistently defined as meaningful and unfragmented, as is evident in *Miles*, racial issues do form an integral part of the text. The apparent racial confusion which critics such as Crouch attach to the book is a manifestation not only of Davis' self-obsession, as has already been discussed, but also of the need to assert the existence of a racial conflict which he can win. Davis, the black male whose identity is constructed through arrogant

dominance over all others, seeks to achieve integrity from his controversial statements on race.

Fragmentation is also evident in the lack of concern with music that some jazz autobiographies exhibit. Charles Mingus, for example, fragments his musical self, in all its intensity, and creates a sexual self, a more recognisable and concrete model of excessive and sensual experience for the reader. Hazel Carby's study *Race Men* (1998), suggests that in *Beneath the Underdog* Mingus 'makes explicit the connections between music, masculinity, and sex in an elaborate fantasy of the power he wanted to wield through his sound.' (Carby, 143) The 'connections' between music and sex are both 'explicit', as Carby claims, and are also implied in the extreme importance he attaches to his sexual prowess.

References to Mingus' status as a musician are very infrequent, and often occur as asides to the main situation. Consider the following conversation, set in the maternity ward with his new son, between Mingus and a nurse:

'The other nurses were saying you're Charlie Mingus, the musician.'

'Not Charlie, please. I'm definitely not a Charlie. Not that Charles is much better. I don't particularly care for any name in this society. Well, we'll all be numbers soon anyway.' (Mingus, 85)

Ignoring the tag 'the musician', Mingus' response is almost a dialogue within itself, with himself. This style of self-referential communication is one which is present throughout the book, as he moves between first and third person; it represents some of the difficulties he has with this new sexual persona, and the challenges of a new identity. The projection of an idealised self submerges fact and reveals the fragmentation which surrounds the narrated protagonist. Indeed, Mingus' conversation with his psychiatrist Dr Wallach at the opening of the book, which begins 'In other words. I am three' (ibid., 1), effectively summarises the fragmentation of the self which allows him to present an

idealist view of his own achievements, specifically of sexual achievements. This presentation of a triple self, as opposed to the 'double' fragmentation traditionally associated with African-American writing is particularly interesting and will be discussed both with reference to gender (in the next chapter) and in terms of Mingus' use of narrative voices (below).

While *Beneath the Underdog* hardly contains mention of music, it is in fact one of the most important representations of fragmentation of the self in African-American jazz autobiography. The importance of the triple fragmentation of Mingus' self at the beginning of the text has previously been remarked upon. Beginning with the following speech, part of a conversation with a fictional psychologist, Mingus establishes the three-fold level of experience on which the book will be based:

'In other words, I am three. One man stands forever in the middle, unconcerned, unmoved, unwatching, waiting to be allowed to express what he sees to the other two. The second man is like a frightened animal that attacks for fear of being attacked. Then there's an over-loving gentle person who lets people into the uttermost sacred temple of his being and he'll take insults and be trusting and sign contracts without reading them and get talked down to working cheap or for nothing, and when he realises what's been done to him he feels like killing and destroying everything around him including himself for being so stupid. But he can't - he goes back inside himself.'

'Which one is real?'

'They're *all* real.' (ibid., 1)

Mingus' appropriation of a second narrative voice besides his own, which enters at the chronological beginning of the text, chapter two, clearly reveals the first man, who will 'stand...in the middle' and observe, a narrative voice, but one which claims the narrative as his own. As an omniscient being which appears to represent his soul, the narrative voice describes the near-death experience of 'Baby' [Mingus] when 'I found myself outside him for the first time since he was born, standing beside him with his Mama'. (ibid., 4) Although the baby Mingus is apparently 'done for - his head split wide open', this presence holds the power to keep 'Baby' alive: the narrator 'materialize[s]' himself

back into his body, and 'Baby' recovers. Despite this complex apparent life-saving experience, it is the tone of Mingus' second narrator which suggests the 'unconcern' he identifies as belonging to the first man, as he prepares to leave the body once more: 'I started to leave again when the family did but Baby had hold of me now and was hanging on for dear life, so I stayed with him and I've been with him ever since.' (ibid., 5) Added to this, Mingus' narrator is distinctively contemptuous of 'God' throughout the text: the association between him and his subject does not appear at all religious. As Charles grows up, the narrator begins to refer to him as 'my boy', then 'my man', and continues to use the present tense in telling his story, maintaining a sense of current and crucial personal involvement. Although his presence in the text gradually decreases, giving way to a primarily dialogue-based text, his judgement remains integral to our view of Mingus himself: even at the close of the text, he suggests 'there's lumps in everything in this life.' (ibid., 218) Mingus, then, suggests the double nature of his personality (one side 'frightened' and the other 'over-loving'), both sides augmented by the presence of this 'middle' man: the third voice.

The complexity of Mingus' narrative voices is echoed in miniature in other autobiographies. While Duke Ellington portrays his early life as fairly tranquil compared to that of Mingus (as discussed in the previous chapter, his prologue 'The Road' has a distinctively Biblical style), he nevertheless begins his first chapter in the third person, with an account of his feelings playing in front of a large audience. The 'grinning fellow' of the first few paragraphs is replaced by 'Duke Ellington' by the end of the first page, an odd transition which seems to be effected by the playing of the piano:

'Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for such a wonderful warm reception...Now I would like to have you meet one of my favorite people, our new, young apprentice piano player!' He gestures expectantly to the wings, but no one enters, so he goes immediately to the piano stool and sits

down...Duke Ellington gets up from the piano, waves to the band and enjoins the musicians to "look handsome." (Ellington, 3)

Written in the present tense, the narrator Ellington assumes a level of distance in this scene, in contrast to the bulk of the book, which is in the first person. past tense. Although there are transitions into the third person, particularly when Ellington is discussing a personal relationship, he maintains a fairly chronological and realistic development in contrast to Mingus.

There are, then, essentially three areas of jazz autobiography by which this fragmentation reveals itself. The accent (or lack of) on racial matters is the first. The others are, respectively, the form of the narrative voice (first, second or third person), and the text's view of the performance process, and the persona(s) created by that process. While this latter point will be examined in chapter six with reference to audience perceptions, it is also important to consider the perspective of the performer. This latter point can actually be clarified by a Philip Larkin article, 'Funny Hat Men', which appeared in the Daily Telegraph on 12/4/67:

I sometimes wonder whether, despite all evolutionary claims, Negro jazz men do not constantly divide into crowd-pleasers and conservatory men - Bolden and Jelly Roll Morton, Armstrong and Ellington, Gillespie and Miles Davis. And the distinction is always cropping up, sometimes unexpectedly: take the business of hats, for instance. Wearing a funny hat is surely the essence of Uncle-Tommery, yet what else unites Dizzy, Monk, and now Archie Shepp? (Larkin, 202)

While he concentrates purely on what he must have known of their musical performances and public personas, Larkin's insightful pairings are in fact a fine basis for analysis of the autobiographies, particularly the latter two pairs. Although comparatively little is known about Buddy Bolden, it may be assumed that he was the 'conservatory' man of the two, as Morton is consistently recorded as the man who claimed (falsely, but loudly) that he had invented jazz. Larkin sees black performance as intrinsically related to racial stereotypes: those men who are 'crowd-pleasers' (Morton, Armstrong and Gillespie) as distinct from those who prefer to hide in the 'conservatory' (Bolden,

Ellington and Davis). He suggests that the former group is less proficient than the latter, utilising the phrase ‘the essence of Uncle-Tommery’, which refers to the mimicking of the placid Uncle Tom in Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, who had by the Sixties come to stand for black servitude and submission, often in the context of comic performance. Although Larkin’s example is the wearing of a ‘funny hat’, there are various other styles commonly associated with the former group, particularly Armstrong and Gillespie.

Writing concerning Armstrong, Ellington, Gillespie and Davis is replete with references to, and opinions on, their performance styles. The jazz commentator Whitney Balliett, writing in 1957, suggested that ‘Armstrong has recently begun offering in his public appearances little more than a round of vaudeville antics - clowning, bad jokes - and a steadily narrowing repertory.’ (Balliett, 2001, 34) Ellington and Davis, alongside other jazz musicians, consistently disassociate themselves with this style, sometimes vehemently. Davis’ autobiography, for example, draws a strong distinction between his own performance style and that of Gillespie, claiming

I love Dizzy, but I hated that clowning shit he used to do for all them white folks...I decided right then and there that I wasn’t ever going to be part of no bullshit like that. When people came to hear me, they were going to be coming to hear my music, only. (Davis, 153)

As always, Davis suggests his integrity and strength as a performer and as a man: not only does he spurn someone he had previously called his ‘idol’ (ibid., vi), but he also suggests that Gillespie’s ‘clowning shit’ is intrinsically related to his racial insecurity. He takes a similar stand against Armstrong, whose wide smile appears in almost every publicity photograph of him, suggesting that, in comparison, ‘I wasn’t going to do it [grinning] just so that some non-playing, racist, white motherfucker could write some nice things about me. Naw, I wasn’t going to sell out my principles for them.’ (ibid., 73)

Essentially, Davis suggests that he possesses a unified, African-American self, making no compromises, and doing no deals to negate this. Armstrong and Gillespie, however, appear fragmented in Davis' perception, performing in a stereotypical style in order to achieve a stereotypical response: 'sell[ing] out' on their African-American status. As with his controversial racial opinions, Davis' virulent attitude towards stereotypical performance may well be responsible for his alienation from various critics. Later on in the text, discussing performance style, his tone becomes intensely arrogant as he refuses even to speak to the audience:

I wasn't about to kiss anybody's ass and do that grinning shit for nobody. I even stopped announcing tunes around this time, because I felt that it wasn't the *name* of the tune that was important, but the music we played. If they knew what the tune was, why did I have to announce it? (ibid., 170)

The repetition of 'anybody/ nobody' here is indicative of Davis' need to assert himself over everybody and everything: by this stage, Gillespie and Armstrong are no longer enough. 'Nobody' must be allowed to prove themselves greater and everybody must be submissive to him.

Other narrated protagonists do discuss the appearance of particular performance styles, Bechet, for example, suggesting that '[i]f you can blow a note and perform at the same time - if you can do that, you're entitled to all the personality they'll give you; but it's got to be the instrument that comes first.' (Bechet, 85) Here Bechet accepts the presence of an on-stage personality as inevitable, but suggests that its importance is minimal when compared to the music. Essentially, Davis echoes these exact views: music takes greater precedence than speaking. However, unlike Bechet, he makes himself the exception. Indeed, while later in his autobiography Bechet criticises those who highlight personality during their performances, he neither refers to specific names nor specifically exempts himself:

Even the musicianers [sic] themselves get carried away by it. Either they get to feuding for a name for themselves or they get to thinking up some personality thing which has nothing to do with the music. (ibid., 163)

Some others admit that they did adapt their concert performances on a racial basis, either for financial gain or because they had little choice. Danny Barker claims, for example, that his five-piece band added a tambourine when playing to white audiences 'because people threw money in the tambourine to hear the jingles ring.' (Barker, 1986, 38) In the same way, Cab Calloway highlights conditions for touring black artists, his most illuminating descriptions being those of the white-owned, whites-only clubs which flourished in Harlem during the twenties and thirties. Furnished 'like an old Southern plantation, with slaves' log cabins and so forth', the Plantation Club's surroundings were typical of one of these establishments. (Calloway, 82) Perhaps the most famous of all clubs, the Cotton Club, is described in full, although it is unclear whether or not Calloway is presenting a cynical view of the situation:

The bandstand was a replica of a southern mansion, with large white columns and a backdrop painted with weeping willows and slave quarters. The band played on the veranda of the mansion, and in front of the veranda, down a few steps, was the dance floors, which was also used for the shows. The waiters were dressed in red tuxedos, like butlers in a southern mansion, and the tables were covered with red-and-white-checked gingham tablecloths. There were huge cut-crystal chandeliers, and the whole set was like the sleepy-time-down-South during slavery. Even the name, Cotton Club, was supposed to convey the Southern feeling. I suppose the idea was to make whites who came to the club feel like they were being catered to and entertained by black slaves. (ibid., 88)

Although Calloway does not consider the implications of his own participation in such role-playing, he does suggest that jazz would not have survived 'if musicians hadn't gone along with such racial practices there and elsewhere.' (ibid., 90) The intense competition for paid work, especially in the thirties, meant that African-American musicians were forced to compromise, and the Cotton Club was one of the more prestigious venues in which they were allowed to play. In briefly admitting his discomfort with the situation, Calloway also accepts the reality of life as a black artist.

and avoids overtly shocking the reader: his aim in both music and text, he claims, was 'to stimulate an audience, not so much from a musical aspect as from an entertainment aspect.' (ibid., 66) His persona was as an entertainer, and his aim was to entertain.

Whatever the views held by African-American performers, there is no doubt that clear segregation took place, both on stage and on the dance floor. Lionel Hampton, a vibraharpist with the Benny Goodman quartet, formed part of one of the first racially integrated bands to play live: although mixed groups had been in the recording studio, this was seen as acceptable because, as he claims, '[y]ou didn't have to worry about who was black or white.' (Hampton, 60) His autobiography *Hamp* (1989) is a strong record of racial difference in live performances. Gigs were either always at 'all-white hotels and at all-black dances', or ropes were used to segregate the white audience from the black. (ibid., 74) Although Hampton claims he 'cut the ropes down on the dance floor more than once' (ibid., 98), this segregational form of entertainment offers some insight into the need for black musicians to cater for highly differentiated audiences. Indeed, he sees clowning as an integral part of black performance, associating it with racial pride rather than submission: 'I used to study drummers who clowned around,' he claims in *Hamp*, 'because there was a long, honourable tradition of clowning in black performing that I wanted to carry on.' (ibid., 36) Rather than suggest that music and performance style are separate, as Davis does, Hampton attributes his success to his combination of the two: '[t]he audiences wanted good music, but they also wanted a show. I gave it to them.' (ibid., 82) While critical attention to *Hamp* has been somewhat lacking, focussing, for example, as Sudhalter (1991) does, on the factual errors of the text, it does portray an interesting view of racial politics. The formation of a positive self-image

from the history of black performance is evidence of Sartwell's dialectical model, whereby a new self is fashioned from the remnants of African-American racial history.

Chapter Five: Femininity and Masculinity: Aspects of Gender in Jazz

Autobiography

‘An image of Billie Holiday-as-all-purpose-victim began to fill the view-finder. Today she is part Romantic martyr, claimed by feminists and civil rights campaigners, and part heroine of excess whose details of self-extinction threaten to obscure her genuine achievements in jazz.’ (Nicholson, 234)

‘the next step is to find ways of imagining jazz history that include both women and men.’ (Tucker, 470)

Angela Davis, in her study *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (1998), comments on the exploration of sexuality in song by both black men and women in the post-slavery years. She evaluates the position of the black artist post-emancipation, and identifies within blues’ lyrics ‘sexuality as a tangible expression of freedom’. (A. Davis, 8) Davis’ study of the blues lyrics of Gertrude ‘Ma’ Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday suggests that, for blueswomen, conventionally defined women’s roles such as housewife and mother were less important than defining themselves in terms of romantic relationships, often sexual. While her focus on the influence of these blues songs as both redefining attitudes towards women and expressing women’s sexual freedom is interesting, there are problems of authorisation involved. Lyrics are taken to be representations of the performer’s ideological impulses, and analysed without reference to questions of authorship or authentication. While occasional songs are noted as, for example, ‘composed and recorded by Gertrude “Ma” Rainey,’ (ibid., 47) countless others remain unattributed in terms of composition. Davis even admits that ‘the great majority’ of Holiday’s repertoire was ‘produced on the Tin Pan Alley assembly line

according to the contrived and formulaic sentimentality characteristic of the era.' (ibid., 165)

This paradox would be less problematic if Davis did not dismiss Holiday's autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues*, as essentially 'transcribed by William Dufty' (ibid., 186). Davis does not allow a hybrid authorship here, while that behind the blues songs is simultaneously accepted and ignored. Surely both as an expression of ideologies and as containing suggestions of sexuality and power relations, *Lady Sings the Blues* should form a similarly, if not more significant chapter in Davis' investigation as the blues songs themselves. The sexuality evident in the text will be explored later in this chapter. Its authorship is perhaps no more or less problematic than the lyrics, but it clearly reveals many of the themes which Davis locates and discusses. Interestingly, Davis' suggestion regarding the expression of sexuality can also be applied to texts by bluesmen, such as those by Charles Mingus and Miles Davis.⁷⁴

The positive nature of the joint authorship of much jazz autobiography through the maintenance of a hybrid perspective has previously been suggested. The self is authorised from a multifaceted viewpoint, and the construction of the text from various parts and voices is taken into account. The term 'narrated protagonist' has also been introduced, in order to establish the particular qualities of the jazz autobiographer. Here, a further and fairly extensive aspect of this persona, that of gender, will be examined. Identifying and analysing specific aspects of gender in autobiography requires a focus not on the outward accuracy of the texts, but on the narrated protagonists themselves. It has been shown that the study of jazz autobiography necessitates the consideration of many strands, including the dialogue between the public and private self of the musician

concerned. This dialogue is complicated by many critics who search for facts (for example, dates of concerts) to confirm or deny the narration of the protagonist. While the search for historical information is useful in terms of factual representation, in terms of narration, what is invaluable is not fact, but the presentation of a narrated protagonist, whether factual or not. A focus on the narrated protagonist in terms of gender includes questions of what constitutes black masculinity and femininity, and how this is represented. As has been suggested, these issues may seem at first private to the protagonist, and markers within the text may suggest further insights to be gleaned from reading outside it, but it is vital to remember that these are public texts, and public protagonists, whose lives are narrated for a reason. Gender issues will be discussed below with reference to *Lady Sings The Blues*, *Beneath the Underdog*, *Miles*, and Nina Simone's 1991 autobiography *I Put A Spell On You*. Feminist autobiographical theories such as those of Jane Tompkins will be considered alongside a close reading of the texts.

The problematics of female autobiography and authorship

Jane Tompkins' 1987 essay 'Me and My Shadow' articulated a growing problem for female autobiographers, that of merging the public self with the private. Written from a personal perspective, Tompkins asserts the doubleness of her own experience as a writer: '[t]here are two voices inside me answering,' she suggests, 'the voice of a person who wants to write about her feelings' and the voice of the literary, and inherently academic, 'critic'. Tompkins suggests that this doubleness stems from the oppression of women, a 'public-private *hierarchy*,' as she terms it, which assigns an emotional role to women in private but does not allow authority in public to emerge from this. (Tompkins.

⁷⁴The differences between 'jazz' and 'blues' are remarked upon in the introduction

1110) Thus while women may be able to, and indeed are expected to, articulate their feelings within the domestic environment, as public, academic writers they feel unable to transfer these emotions onto their texts. There is a reason for this disparity of emotion. Tompkins suggests that because women who work in the domestic sphere are often viewed with some condescension by both male and female scholars, acceptance of the private characteristics which make them 'domestic', such as familial emotions, cannot be made public. The two selves, public and private, must maintain polarised positions, and as such the female autobiographical self, supposedly a combination of the two, often mirrors these confusions. While the female writer may experience emotions towards her family and home, she must not allow these to appear in her work, for fear of condescension.

This problematic also translates to female jazz autobiography, where the emotive domestic self often seems to be erased, leaving a public, unemotional portrayal of the musician. As has been shown, the public persona of the narrated protagonists of these texts is magnified by their celebrity status, as their performances are, literally, to a public audience. Any examination of emotive issues such as romantic relationships within these texts often appears whimsical, and not necessarily factual. The private female self in the celebrity autobiography is consistently merged with the public character of the text: in many ways, there is no private woman to discern outside the public persona. Female jazz autobiographies do admit a feminine self to appear, if only briefly, but this self is not necessarily at odds with the narrated protagonist who has appeared to the public. It is not necessarily an emotional self; there is no conflict involved.

Tompkins' double self, then, is evident in these autobiographies. In the sheer difficulty involved in locating any kind of opposition between public and private. The non-emotive self empowers these autobiographers and their editors. Thus while, for example, Billie Holiday does suggest her awareness of the importance of women in the jazz world, she recalls their achievements in terms of public success and not of private, emotional support. In *Lady Sings the Blues*, Gladys Hampton, the wife of the celebrated vibraharpist Lionel, is credited with achieving his financial success, watching 'Lionel's every move and plann[ing] the next one' (Holiday, 55), while Lionel is portrayed by Holiday as a drunken and fairly pathetic individual, 'cuddling a big-assed bottle of champagne.' Yet while she chronicles Gladys' success as publicly and financially motivated, it is in terms of 'two-hundred-dollar hats' that Gladys the public woman reveals her feminine self: '[s]he's a hat freak, that girl,' declares Holiday.

Holiday's narrated self, as told in *Lady Sings the Blues* has only rare moments of privacy, always shrouded by a manifest public self which seems to demand emotive repression. When her mother dies, she deals with the experience in practical terms, contending,

I couldn't cry. When I die people can maybe cry for me because they'll know they're going to start me off in hell and move me from bad to worse. But wherever Mom was going, it couldn't be worse than what she'd known. She was through with trouble, through with heartache, through with pain. (ibid., 110)

There is no need to cry, Holiday claims, because there is no need for sorrow: on a purely logical level, her mother has at last achieved peace. But it is in the sentence which relates her mother's situation to her own that she reveals her private self: an innate fear of death and hell combined with the knowledge that her own fame is only tentatively constructed: 'maybe' people will cry for her, but maybe they won't. Yet while possibly the best Holiday-as-protagonist can hope for is 'hell', does this really offer all we as

readers need to know about her? The detached, nonchalant Holiday of the text almost necessitates questions about her private life which cannot be answered by her public persona. Or can they? Is there really such a thing as Billie Holiday's 'private life' to discover at all?

Certainly her portrayal as a public persona was always consistent. Billie Holiday, a talented yet tragic woman, victim of racism, victim of drug abuse, African-American female role model. This persona is most clearly evident in the Motown film biography of Holiday's life, also entitled 'Lady Sings the Blues', which stars Diana Ross in the much-maligned starring role. The film was clearly made for financial reasons. Mark Anthony Neal's study of the relationship between black popular culture and the record industry, *What The Music Said* (1999) reveals something of the process by which black stars of the music industry came to be seen as 'cultural commodities'. (Neal, 86) During her most successful period, Holiday was undoubtedly an extremely valuable asset to the recording industry, and after her death, this value would have increased because of the tragic aspects of her life. Holiday also seems to lack any desire to achieve personal identification with her reader, compounding the difficulty of viewing her as anything other than a public commodity. The stories surrounding the popular Holiday song 'Strange Fruit', exemplify this.

'Strange Fruit', still one of the most memorable of Holiday's songs, is often held to be related to her own death from drugs, despite being concerned with lynching in the American South.⁷⁵ John White's biography of Holiday, for example, claims that 'Strange Fruit' 'came to have more personal and profound meanings for her' (White, 50)

⁷⁵The lyrics can be found in appendix two, and a recording may be found in Excerpt Six of the accompanying cassette (see appendix three for details).

and goes on to link her directly with the victims of the song, explaining 'her savage attachment to the brutalities exposed in 'Strange Fruit'.' (ibid., 56) Ambiguous familial relations are ever-present in *Lady Sings the Blues*, and these are linked, this time by Holiday herself, to 'Strange Fruit'. 'It seemed to spell out all the things that had killed Pop,' Holiday suggests, '[and]...I have to keep singing it, not only because people ask for it but because twenty years after Pop died the things that killed him are still happening in the South.' (Holiday, 84) Indeed, although the lyrics describe a lynching scene, lines such as 'Pastoral scene of the gallant South' evoke not only a nineteenth century antebellum South, but also a more general anger, augmented by the quiet emphasis Holiday always places on the descriptor 'gallant' in any recording available.

Whether or not we can really decide on the level of Holiday's personal involvement with the lyrics, it is certainly true that critics, and, indeed, the public persona portrayed in her autobiography, want to believe that they reveal private angst. A further example of these indicators towards a private self can be found in Holiday's ambiguous relationship with her mother, apparently encapsulated in her song 'God Bless the Child', which, according to *Lady Sings the Blues*, she wrote 'to get even' with her after a fight over money. As she tells it in her autobiography, having given her mother enough money to buy a restaurant, and having watched it become a financial burden due to her mother's over-generous nature, she asks her for money one night and is refused. 'Mom turned me down flat,' she declares, and writes lyrics which suggest the importance of independence over family ties: 'rich relations give/ crust of bread and such/ you can help yourself/ but don't take much'. (ibid., 89-90)

John White's 1987 biography compounds the depressive image he has cultivated throughout of Holiday with a black and white photograph on the final page of the singer with tears in her eyes, which he titles 'Billie's blues'. (White, 135) As autobiography, then, *Lady Sings the Blues*, from its black and white photographic cover of a melancholy Holiday to its depictions of her victimisation at the hands of drugs, fulfils and completes this commercial image. We have seen that the private Holiday, if indeed she existed, is subsumed by the public celebrity of the autobiography, the film, and the constantly appearing biographies. It is perhaps indicative of the editing process that the titles of chapters in *Lady Sings the Blues* are often the most emotive lines in the text. The most recent edition (Penguin, 1992) is without a contents page, and thus the reader's attention is not necessarily drawn to the titles of chapters, but those such as 'If My Heart Could Only Talk' and 'I'm Pulling Through' are Tin Pan Alley song titles; like the lyrics, it seems unlikely she chose them herself.

The impossibility of verifying or locating the gap between private and public Billie Holiday is of course augmented by her death, and the death of her editor, William Dufty. This has unfortunately been compounded by the premature death of Nina Simone in early 2003, whose *I Put A Spell On You* was published in 1991. While *I Put A Spell On You* is an expression of freedom, of the desire to be treated as individual rather than as part of a stereotyped community, and of the need to adapt personal goals to achieve this, Simone's private desires do not always translate well to her public book, and this reveals evidence of a gap between the private and public selves which was simply not accessible in the case of Holiday. Privately, Simone's essentialist goals may well alienate a white readership: she controversially suggests that the violence of some of the

Black Power movements that flourished in the Sixties 'showed young blacks who thought the only means of protest was passive, non-violence that there was another way...they scared the hell out of white folks too, and we certainly needed that.' (Simone, 109)

Although she never articulated the relationship between her music and the violent politics of some parts of the Black Power movement, Mark Anthony Neal suggests that 'many within the movement viewed her music as an aural counterpart to [it]'. (Neal, 48) These associations, never acknowledged by Simone, reveal private desires which, although they were never part of the public self she wished to show, have become public almost by default. Again, a self outwith the narrated protagonist of the texts of both her autobiography and her songs has become inarticulate. Thus we come to accept the narrated protagonist as an assimilation of public and private. The inaccessibility of the private Simone is compounded by the difficulty both black and white readers may have with her back-to-Africa belief system. Identifying as a reader with another's autobiographical self is a subject that Linda Kauffman discusses in her 1992 essay 'The Long Goodbye: against personal testimony, or an infant grifter grows up'. She evaluates the particular problems of women readers identifying with the inaccessible autobiographical selves of women writers, suggesting that this need for self-definition through another's life merely creates competition over community. Kauffman claims that her own poverty-to-academia story is 'fatally alluring' but warns against the glamorisation of this: 'it is only by chance that I am not a welfare mother, a stripper, or a waitress.' 'Suffering,' she claims, 'never ennobles, it only humiliates, and -

if you're lucky - enrages.' (Kauffman, 1156) Thus it appears that identification on a purely objective level is difficult.

Issues of sexuality, which Angela Davis locates in the lyrics of Holiday as positive representations of feminine desire and romantic love, are also present in these texts, but often engage the reader's attention through their shockingly negative nature. Love here is not romantic; it is brutal, sexual and cruel in a similar manner to that portrayed in male autobiographies such as that of Mingus. Both *Lady Sings the Blues* and *I Put a Spell on You* contain forceful expressions of sexuality, often in the context of oppression and violence. Both women are beaten by partners: Simone, after a particularly vicious attack at gunpoint in which, bruised and covered in blood, she is tied to a chair, still marries her attacker, Andy. 'The memory of that brutal night didn't fade,' she claims, 'but it was opposed by the knowledge of what I would lose if I turned Andy away.' (Simone, 78) Holiday suffers at the hands of pimps and prison wardens and is raped at the age of ten by a man she names 'Mr Dick, one of our neighbours.' (Holiday, 15) If Holiday desires any identification or sympathy for her predicament, she does not invoke it. The famous final sentence of the autobiography, neatly summarising the indicators of a private life which has been unfulfilled, suggests that relationships with men enable her to maintain her persona: 'Tired?' she asks, 'You bet. But all that I'll soon forget with my man....' (ibid., 192) With a similar level of dependence, Simone allows a friend in Liberia who 'knew how much I needed' to 'fix up six men for me, all wealthy and single, all prospective husbands'. (Simone, 139)

Hierarchies and frats: 'He's funny that way'

Issues of hierarchy in black women's autobiography are extremely important in understanding their bias and emphasis. Linda Dahl's *Stormy Weather: The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*, one of the few studies of the place of women in jazz to be written, suggests the overt patriarchy which functions within jazz writing, '[f]ull of masculine metaphors, the sense of fraternity or of a male club is everywhere evoked.' (Dahl, ix-x) Male jazz autobiographers rely on its presence to secure their own status in society. It seems that participation in this fraternity is not open to female jazz artists, and, as Dahl illustrates, their place in history has often been confined to brief reference. Writing by women that does exist, of which *Lady Sings the Blues* and *I Put a Spell On You* are two prominent examples, may be evaluated not in terms of their reluctance to participate in this hierarchy, but rather of their desire to maintain an overt individualism. *Lady Sings The Blues*, the earliest complete jazz autobiography to be published with an African-American woman as author, has no time for what Holiday terms 'copying':

Everyone's got to be different. You can't copy anybody and end up with anything. If you copy, it means you're working without any real feeling. And without feeling, whatever you do amounts to nothing. (Holiday, 48)

Holiday echoed her feelings of uncertainty with the so-called hierarchy in a 1950 interview with 'Metronome' magazine. One of a series of articles that appeared, during the interview Holiday was blindfolded and played ten records, each time guessing the musicians and piece. She reveals a view in complete opposition to jazzmen who have participated in the jazz hierarchy, claiming 'Sure, I copied Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong - but not note for note; they *inspired* me'. Again, responding to a record by Ruth Brown called 'So Long', she says 'I can't stand copycats, and this girl copies Miss Cornshucks note for note.' (Holiday in Gottlieb, 636) There is a sense of self-assertion

and belief in her own ability which is certainly missing from many other texts. Holiday also refuses to allow anyone else, especially men, to take responsibility for her drug addiction: although she admits she began taking heroin because her husband was experimenting, she claims later that,

Jimmy was no more the cause of my doing what I did than my mother was. That goes for any man I ever knew. I was as strong, if not stronger, than any of them. And when it's that way, you can't blame anybody but yourself. (Holiday, 106)

Holiday's strength appears to stem from her self-belief: her addiction is a source of shame, but for herself only: a self-motivated act with self-destructive consequences.

In contrast to Holiday, Nina Simone's background is clearly represented in her autobiography as that of a classical musician, whose mother longs for her to be 'the first black concert pianist.' As a young girl she gives piano recitals in Tyron town hall, sponsored by a white beneficiary, but fails to get a scholarship at the prestigious Curtis Institute: 'People who knew - I was told - white people who knew, said the reason I was turned down was because I was black.' (Simone, 42) Her first experiences of racism in mid-twentieth-century America undoubtedly influence her decision to devote much of her life to the civil rights movement: describing them as like being whipped 'raw', she suggests that after each racial setback 'the skin grew back again a little tougher, a little less innocent, and a little more black.' (ibid., 27)

Simone only begins to sing popular music when she gets a job in a bar, and even then admits that 'the only way I could stand playing in the Midtown [bar and grill] was to make my set as close to classical music as possible without getting fired.' (ibid., 51) Unusually, she begins her story before she was born, admitting the existence of gaps in her family history and discussing them in a frank manner: her great-grandmother being 'the result of a plantation relationship my family has never been too interested in

exploring.’ (ibid., 1) Detailing her life from America to Barbados to Liberia, Simone evokes a life dedicated to the civil rights movement, ever-conscious of her racial origins. Her evaluation of the town in which she grew up, Tyron, is as ‘a checkerboard type of living, with areas that were totally white and a few pockets of blacks.’ (ibid., 4) This policy of segregation and separation is one which, like Holiday’s, distinguishes Simone’s autobiography from many other texts of the same genre. While other jazz autobiographers embrace the hierarchy and relationships between jazz musicians in black America, Simone regards her place in American society as essentially flawed. Her realisation of the problematics of this society occurs when she looks in the mirror one day, seeing ‘two faces, knowing that on one hand I loved being black and being a woman, and that on the other it was my color and sex which had fucked me up in the first place.’ (ibid., 118)

In comparison to the male jazz hierarchy discussed in chapter three, Simone’s refusal to completely accept her own self as black and female does not allow her to remain within the boundaries of the U.S. Instead she embraces the concept of Liberia, the failed ‘back to Africa’ project of the U.S. Government, and lives there with her daughter for years, leaving just before the military coup that resulted in the killing and torturing of many of her friends: ‘Liberia did feel like home and I loved everything about it.’ (ibid., 159) Further evidence of her need for a personal, non-communal identity is evident in her refusal to be coupled with, or compared to, other musicians. Simone evidently despises categorisation, preferring to assert her individuality as a black musician, and finds, for example, comparison to Holiday distressing:

Because of ‘Porgy’ [‘I loves you, Porgy’, a popular song in her repertoire which had also featured in Holiday’s] people often compared me to Billie Holiday, which I hated. That was just

one song out of my repertoire, and anybody who saw me perform could see we were entirely different. (ibid., 69)

Notice that Simone concentrates on the visual performance to distinguish herself from Holiday: the song is the same, but it is the quality of her bodily presence on stage which makes her different. She also repudiates her categorisation as a jazz musician by music critics and audiences, claiming it 'was a way of ignoring my musical background because I didn't fit into white ideas of what a black performer should be.' (ibid., 69) Although she eventually admits her status as a popular performer, Simone justifies it as being a result of her desire for civil rights and black freedom: with overtly political songs such as 'Mississippi Goddamn', she claims '[m]y music was dedicated to a purpose more important than classical music's pursuit of excellence; it was dedicated to the fight for freedom and the historical destiny of my people.' (ibid., 91) Here, then, there is further evidence of the difficulties involved in maintaining a private self. Simone's controversial statements cannot possibly represent the views of all her readers and as such she refutes identification with both other jazz singers and with popular music in general.

Male jazz autobiography: Beneath the Underdog?

Other jazz autobiographies do contain themes and images which are particularly shocking and/or distressing for the reader. In black male autobiography these themes are often sexual, portraying a dominant male protagonist who regularly makes sexual conquests of subservient females. The place of the black male in American society has recently been the subject of various book length studies, including those by Richard Majors and Jewelle Taylor Gibbs. While these texts focus primarily on sociological aspects of black masculinity, there are clear parallels between the place of the

protagonist/ author in society and his output in literature/ autobiography. Black males have traditionally been placed, through the terms of slavery, in a subservient position: unable to maintain dominance over their wives while slaves, as they were normally expected to perform the same tasks, in the post-slavery era many found little had changed. With racism inherent in American society for decades after the last slave law was abolished, black men, who as conventional head of the household would have been expected to be the primary wage-earner, failed to find employment. Women, who could maintain their conventional role as domestic matriarch and child-bearer, began to gain dominance; their job applications were turned down for exactly the same reason as those of their husbands: not because they were female, but because they were black. In this way some measure of equality, unthinkable in comparative white society, was maintained. While black feminist criticism has always engaged with the dual problem of sexism and racism inherent in the black female's reception, recently critics have begun to realise the problems which black males also face, for many a culmination of decades of familial unemployment resulting in an anti-work, depressive attitude. Richard Majors and Janet Mancini explore these issues in their 1992 study *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*, suggesting that black males have begun to subvert this lack of power through ritualistic behaviour. Majors and Mancini's title, 'Cool Pose,' is defined as 'the presentation of self many black males use to establish their male identity.' This, according to the authors, is often maintained through 'the use of an imposing array of masks, acts, and facades.' (Majors and Mancini, 4) With reference to *Beneath the Underdog* and *Miles*, this behaviour as evident in the black, male

protagonist will now be explored, and suggestions will be made as to why it is often problematic for the reader.

Charles Mingus faced problems, as we have seen, with the original manuscript of *Beneath the Underdog* (1971). The fact that it *was* 'too dirty' (Mingus, in Balliett, 1986, 326) and now, as it stands, still maintains a fairly high level of obscenity, shows the determination of Mingus to attempt to maintain a dominant sexual self throughout the text, intrinsically tied to his conception of this self. His avowal, 'My music is evidence of my soul's will to live beyond my sperm's grave' (Mingus, 215) is certainly difficult to apply with equal validity to his writing self, which often appears on examination of the text to have little interest beyond sex. Mingus' descriptions within the book of masturbation and kissing (aged four), falling in love (aged seven) and sexual discovery (aged eight) present a childhood preoccupation with sex that is disturbing in its intensity. Although Mingus was clearly was something of an exhibitionist in real life, this intensity could be seen as a literary device with disturbing *intent*; Brian Priestley, for example, suggests Mingus' extraordinary claims to be part of his 'self-*image* which was slightly removed from reality'. (Priestley, xi) This is unlikely to have been an intention of Nel King, whom Mingus credits on the inside front cover as having 'worked long and hard editing this book', due to the obvious attempt to tone down the pornographic element during editing.

The difficulty, then, is in accepting a distorted self-image within what is presented as a factual text (Priestley himself constantly attempts to locate fact in *Beneath the Underdog*, evident in his 'discovery' that 'the order of Mingus' chapters appears to have been deliberately jumbled in the process of being edited for

publication.’ (Priestley, 29)) It is extremely difficult to accept works of autobiography, which obviously contain factual events, as presenting a non-factual protagonist. Gene Santoro’s biography of Mingus, *Myself When I Am Real* (2000), suggests that ‘[h]e put a lot of sex in to sell...[and to titillate the stereotype [of the black male jazz musician]’ (Santoro, 284): one solution, then, is to suggest that the non-factual areas of the book are actually constructed through ‘pornology’, which the critic Margot Norris defines as ‘the hypocritical investment of libido in cultural forms.’ ‘[P]ornology’, she suggests, ‘speaks a devious discourse that purports to repress eroticism and violence while promoting and indulging it in a cultural guise.’ (Norris, 11) Mingus’ ‘cultural guise’ of a ‘removed’ ‘self-image’ is obviously a far easier and more comfortable aspect of his autobiography to criticise. Norris’ definition merely suggests that those who wish to maintain the pornographic elements in their texts often do so with an excuse: that of an opposing culture to the reader or critic. The problem with applying this theory to *Beneath the Underdog* involves Mingus’ apparent lack of concern over his racial and cultural origins, as we will see below. When compared to *Lady Sings the Blues*, *Beneath the Underdog*, despite its title, leaves the reader with a confusing knowledge of the protagonist’s awareness of race.

Clyde W. Franklin’s division of black masculinity into five ‘forms’ (from *The Making Of Masculinities*, quoted in Clatterbaugh) provides a general perspective on the subject of sexuality, suggesting that masculinity may be conformist, ritualistic (conforming ‘without purpose or commitment’), innovative, retreatist or rebellious. (Clatterbaugh, 413) While many jazz autobiographies by black men may be seen as conformist (suggestive, perhaps of the ghost-writer or editor), Mingus’ can be classified

as primarily innovative. Clatterbaugh clarifies Franklin's position by suggesting that '[i]nnovative black masculinity is a form of masculinity that has abandoned conformity or even ritualistic conformity. Often in this masculinity traits of hegemonic masculinity are exaggerated.' (ibid., 413) The authoritative nature of Mingus' presence which surfaces primarily during his relationships with women and prostitutes suggest that his obsession with pornographic detail may be an attempt to maintain this dominance throughout his autobiography. The lack of conformity in the text has been suggested through the structure; while other autobiographies are often strictly chronological, *Beneath the Underdog* is not: Mingus claims in an interview with the jazz critic Whitney Balliett that 'I wrote it in abcdefgh at first, but then I mixed up the chronology and some of the locations.' (Balliett, 1986, 327) He gives no reason for this, adding boastfully and somewhat ambiguously, 'that's just my first book. It's not an autobiography.'

These suggestions of hegemony and pornography are also found by Hazel Carby in her study *Race Men* (1998), whose chapter on jazz discusses Miles Davis' autobiography in terms of its overt masculinity and the relationships it constructs between sex, power and jazz music. Although she makes only brief reference to Mingus, remarking upon the similarity between his autobiography and that of Davis, she emphasises 'the power he wanted to wield through his sound' (Carby, 143) and points particularly to the episode in which he fantasises about 'hypnotiz[ing] all the prostitutes of the world'. Her thoughts on Davis discuss his 'unconventional, gendered vulnerability' in the jazz world, thus stressing his identity not in racial, but in sexual terms. Carby suggests that the portrayal of Davis' exploitation of women in *Miles* 'is integral to his view of himself'. (ibid., 143) Again, this apparent sexism and promotion is crucial to Davis' self-obsessive stance.

Just as his exaltation of himself forced both black and white people into submissive positions, Davis also finds it necessary to assert his dominance over women. His desire for recognition as a sexual male apparently even extends to having sex while coming off a severe heroin addiction: My girlfriend Alice came over, and we fucked, and damn if that didn't make it worse...It hurt the fuck out of my balls and everyplace else.' (Davis, 160) Carby suggests that Davis feels 'he can exercise apparently unlimited patriarchal power, as if it were his right'.(Carby, 143) Indeed, Davis seems to believe in 'his right[s]' unequivocally, and Carby's evaluation of the sexism which flourished in his autobiography is one manifestation of this. Davis' identity is structured in terms of dominance and submission, no matter which party, male, female, black or white, is submissive to him. This is not to suggest that a dominant attitude is justified merely in its consistency, but rather that by viewing *Miles* as concretely possessing these identity structures, we can begin to authenticate the text.

As part of his discussion of black male autobiography, David Dudley offers the following theory of division:

Two voices tell them [black men] that they have failed: the inner voice in every person that accuses...him of...his shortcomings, and the voice of the repressive society that blames...him for being born into a minority group. Black men's autobiography seeks to drown out both voices with the establishment of a third voice, the autobiographer's own, which asserts [itself] over and over again (Dudley, 65)

Charles Mingus' experience of the second voice *was* probably fairly repressive. Frank Kofsky, whose study *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music* was published the year before *Beneath the Underdog*, suggested that the bassist's racial status afforded him the contempt of white booking agents, 'whose ill will had [at the time of publication] denied him work.' (Kofsky, 52) *Beneath the Underdog*, then, is Mingus' third voice, his sexual self. His difficulty in maintaining this self within acceptable social mores,

however, is evident in the manuscript's pre-publication issues, noted above. Mingus' conversations with his psychiatrist reveal his attitude to those who judge him, his audiences and his critics. When Dr Wallach asks 'Which is the image you want the world to see?', Mingus evades the question, using colour-prejudice (his answer to the first two voices) as a defence mechanism. 'What do I care what the world sees...[m]usicians are as Jim-Crowed as any black motherfucker on the street and the...the...well, *they* want to keep it that way.' The failure of this response is indicated by the pauses, which suggest he can find no specific focus for his racial anger, perhaps because he does not want to define himself as a victim. On the next page, the subject of the conversation moves to sexual exploitation. 'I am more of a man than any dirty white cocksucker!' he claims, thus effectively utilising his third voice and answering Wallach's question: I want the world to see me as a *man*. Various theories support this. Philip Harper suggests that 'all debates over and claims to "authentic" African-American identity are largely animated by a profound anxiety about the status specifically of African-American masculinity.' (Harper, ix) Frantz Fanon, recalling childhood experiences of racism, remembers that he 'wanted to be a man, nothing but a man.' (Fanon, 1952, 113)

Indeed, in Mingus' case the suggestion that this need for musical affirmation revealed itself through glorification of his abilities as a dominant and possessive lover is fairly strong. His own comments are augmented by those of his close friend and collaborator, Dannie Richmond, who claims

He [Mingus] wanted to be like a pimp, he wanted to be a gangster, he wanted to be a musician, he wanted to be a great lover. And, you know, he considered himself all of these people. (Carby, 76)

For Richmond, both 'gangster' and 'pimp' are placed in precedence to 'musician', and this echoes the content of the text as a whole. The emphasis on power as directly related to sex is unmistakable, and is confirmed in the text by his reply to Judy's question. Near the close of the book, 'What would you do...if you had your life to live all over again?' 'That's easy', he replies,

I'd become a pimp, bigger and better than my cousin Billy Bones out in San Francisco. I wouldn't get involved with music or women at all, other than what they could do for me. (Mingus, 221)

Rather than merely voicing disillusionment with the musical word, this response suggests some confusion of identity. '[W]hat they [music and women] could do for' him is important, and he is aware of this. Mingus' glorification and self-identity are intimately revealed through his masculinity, perceived through his sexual prowess, and emphasised through naturalisation of his urges and desires. Mingus' apparent sexual obsession projects this same kind of 'gendered vulnerability.' In *Beneath the Underdog*, Charles Mingus does not directly suggest that the problems associated with his light skin colour may have structured the book's glorification of sex and prostitution. Despite this, his early description of living on a 'colourless island' (ibid., 66) illustrates the racial prejudice he encountered from both blacks and whites for his inability to belong securely to either group. To blacks he is a 'schitt-colored halfass yella phony' (ibid., 65); to whites, simply a 'nigger'. Mingus' self-analysis in racial terms is evident mainly in the non-fantastical sections of the work, all from the first or last few chapters. The last chapters, which describe his time 'on the road', place some emphasis on racial persecution, as, for example, Mingus describes to Dr Wallach how he was replaced for a colour t.v. show by a white bassist. In his letters to his final 'free lover' Jane, which are vitally significant in their admittance of a fantasy life, he 'trie[s] to be colourless' (ibid.,

192) but under the pressure of a 'smart young man' who suggests 'the difference in social level is too much' cannot confess his worries to her. However, his fear of insecurity is overtly manifested in most of the text not so much in racial as in gendered terms. This illustrates an important difference in terms of his self-justification and presentation. While his status as a light-coloured African-American is remarked upon only briefly, his sexual ability, as we have already noted, constructs the bulk of the book's content. Like Holiday, Mingus aims to shock, but does not directly admit he is a victim of racial abuse.

In conclusion, then, here a further aspect of jazz autobiography and of the creation of the narrated protagonist has been examined: that of gender. Illustrating the conflict between public and private selves has revealed further problems with which the jazz musician/ author must contend: as celebrity, as black, and as male or female.

Concluding remarks: the social role of the African-American jazz musician

While we have examined how the racial portrayal of the narrated protagonist in the jazz autobiography affected the way in which we, as critics, view the autobiographer, we have not yet considered the effect this might have had on contemporary black audiences. Berry and Blassingame's 1982 critique of the social positioning of black Americans, *Long Memory*, provides a valuable insight into the specific roles played by black musicians during the sixties and seventies. Indeed, the authors view black artists as the expressers of freedom and salvation for the masses, suggesting that '[t]he jazz musician replaced the blues singer as protest leader', and that the songs of various black musicians 'focus[ed] on the black man's historic struggle against oppression.'

(Blassingame, 368) It is important, then, to evaluate how both the style and content of the texts discussed above may have been a factor in this 'historic struggle', and how audience response (both black and white) may have influenced this. The idea of an 'unadulterated call for freedom' to the black population of America, which Berry and Blassingame claim originated from black popular music during the latter half of the twentieth century, is an intriguing and challenging concept to apply to black autobiography from the same period. This application will be effected in the following chapter, which will draw on contemporary media from the period in question in order to complete our view of the twentieth century African-American jazz autobiography.

Chapter Six: Style, Music, Text

'[A] text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation.' (Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p.148)

The previous chapters examined the content of the jazz autobiography: this chapter will focus on the style of the text, and its relationship to the music. Music and literature are crucial strands of jazz autobiography, and the relationship between the two is vital to an understanding of it. Can we in fact say that jazz is to be found not only in the recounted performances, but in the very rhythm of the text, in the repetitions and melodic phrasings of the autobiographical words themselves? And, if so, how does this translate from writer to reader? These questions will be answered with recourse not only to the jazz autobiographies themselves, but also to contemporaneous American literature which appears heavily influenced by jazz. The theory of 'jazzy prose style'⁷⁶ will be examined, and it will be suggested that readings of works of American literature from the first half of the twentieth century allow a complete picture to be formed of the stylistic links between music and text. Whilst critics in the late twentieth century have attempted to find similarities between jazz and prose, their focus has primarily been on late twentieth century African-American writers such as Toni Morrison.⁷⁷ This narrow focus ignores the wealth of early to mid twentieth-century literature, mostly by white American writers which forges links between jazz and prose and independently

⁷⁶This concept was coined by Alan Rice in his 1994 article 'Jazzing it up a Storm: The Execution and Meaning of Toni Morrison's Jazzy Prose Style'

⁷⁷There is much confusion over the relationship between jazz and literature, exemplified by Robert O'Meally's editing of *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture* (1998). His introduction agrees that there is

formulates the notion of a jazz literary style or 'jazz aesthetic'. Jazz and literature, then, enjoy a mutual development over a distinct historical period. The jazz autobiography is one representation of this, carried to its most successful fulfilment in Charles Mingus' *Beneath the Underdog* (1971).

In terms of recent critical writing on African-American literature, there has been a determined focus on the association between music (primarily jazz) and texts (primarily novels). This focus is evident, for example, in a 1994 article by Alan Rice, which, although largely about Toni Morrison, offers insights into what Rice terms the 'jazzy prose style' of much African-American literature. Rice not only suggests that Morrison appropriates jazz as a theme and context, but also locates 'visible stylistic devices that approximate those used in the musical tradition.' (Rice, 1994, 424) While Henry Louis Gates had previously commented on issues of improvisation and double-meaning in his various books on black literature⁷⁸, Rice's close reading suggests that these issues can be found in the very fabric of the text, and in the commas, full-stops and semi-colons that punctuate it. He identifies four main musical structures in Morrison's novels: the riff (a repetitive musical figure which underlines the melody), the pause, antiphony (call and response) and the cut (a sudden return to a previous musical theme). He closely analyses sentences and phrases, and relates, respectively, word-repetition,

'no such thing as a jazz novel or a jazz aesthetic in literature'; part six of the book, nearly one hundred pages long, is then given over to examining this very phenomenon.

⁷⁸See, for example, *Figures In Black: Words, Signs and the 'Racial' Self* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987) and *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988)

unusual punctuation, phrase-repetition (by different characters) and flashback sequences, to the four jazz elements listed above.

Rice calls the application of musical terminology to textual elements an 'approximat[ion]', revealing that there is further work to be done here. One important aspect of this is his assumption that Morrison is writing as part of a 'jazz aesthetic', an African-American idiom which he sees represented in all her novels, from *The Bluest Eye* (1972) to *Jazz* (1992). While the presence of the 'jazz aesthetic' in her novels is clear, it is not a uniquely African-American idiom. While Morrison is undoubtedly familiar with jazz, surely her personal aesthetic is almost impossible to trace. Linden Peach's 1995 study of Morrison, for example, warns that we should 'resist trying to discover a singular source for her aesthetics especially given the development of her experimental, multi-vocal narratives over more than two decades'. Her novels have often been noted for their diversity. (Peach, 114)

There are of course flashbacks in Morrison's 1987 bestseller *Beloved*, and, as Rice claims, '[t]he characters continually cut back to the pivotal incident [Sethe's killing of her daughter], the central riff, and sing their own song of it.' (Rice, 1994, 430) Characters speak of 'rememory' and 'remembrance': stories which are passed on to daughters, lovers and husbands. For Rice, Sethe's repetitive use of 'hummingbird' imagery suggests a motif which it is suggested translates as representing a riff. The prose not only signifies music, but 'posits change and communality', a characteristic which we have seen to be associated with the jazz aesthetic. (ibid., 431)

But what gives *Beloved* a 'jazz aesthetic' yet denies it to any other multi-voiced book with flashbacks by any other (possibly white) American author? Can a link be found in earlier work? Where does Morrison inherit her 'jazz aesthetic' from?

One of the earliest uses of a jazz aesthetic appears in T.S. Eliot's 'Fragment of an Agon', the second half of a poetic drama originally published in the *New Criterion* in 1927. Various aspects of this drama suggest the presence of jazz in the poetry. The following lines, for example, are intoned by the 'full chorus', a clear indication of multiple voices presenting one text, just as a jazz band is formed of multiple instruments and creates one piece, or a single jazz autobiography is composed by an assembly of musician, ghostwriter and editor. Eliot's poem calls to mind the repetition often found in jazz and/ or blues, a repetition which results in a loud musical climax at the close of the piece (indicated here by the capital letters):

When you're alone in the middle of the night and
you wake in a sweat and a hell of a fright
When you're alone in the middle of the bed and
you wake like someone hit you in the head
You've had a dream of a nightmare dream and
you've got the hoo-ha's coming to you.
Hoo hoo hoo
You dreamt you waked up at seven o'clock and it's
foggy and it's damp and it's dawn and it's dark
And you wait for a knock and the turning of a lock
for you know the hangman's waiting for you.
And perhaps you're alive
And perhaps you're dead
Hoo ha ha
Hoo ha ha
Hoo
Hoo
Hoo
KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK
KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK
KNOCK
KNOCK
KNOCK (Eliot, 136)

The unusual spacing of these lines also allows for emphasis on the rhymes, which climax like the structure in the use of the words 'clock/knock/lock' towards the end of

the poem. Flashback is also present here: the question of whether the subject is 'alive' or 'dead' is an important theme throughout the poem, in which the characters Doris and Sweeney debate life and death:

I tell you again it don't apply
Death or life or life or death
Death is life and life is death (ibid., 135)

Even Eliot's use of the vernacular points to the jazz aesthetic: 'hoo ha ha' beats out a syncopated, primitive rhythm, and the imagery of the poem is almost demonic. For 1927, this represents an incredible achievement: just ten years after the very first jazz record had been released in the United States⁷⁹, here we see Eliot's very own jazz aesthetic.

The jazz aesthetic is continued in the poetry and prose of other white Americans: Gregory Corso, E. E. Cummings, and Jack Kerouac all maintain and celebrate this link between music and prose.⁸⁰ It seems, then, that Rice's 'jazzy prose style' and the 'jazz aesthetic' in general date from far before Toni Morrison, indeed that they go right back to the beginning of jazz itself. It may perhaps be thought that the merger of literature and jazz in jazz autobiography would represent the clearest example of the 'jazz aesthetic'. Surely musicians who have grown up in the world of jazz, and are now writing about it, would have immediate recourse to this style? However, the fact is that few jazz autobiographies do embrace such a style. As will be shown, there are glimpses of orality in some texts, but only two really achieve a true amalgamation of prose and music: Charles Mingus' *Beneath the Underdog* and Hampton Hawes' *Raise Up off Me* (1974). These two have never been, unlike Morrison's *Beloved*, bestselling works. The

⁷⁹The *Original Dixieland Jazz Band* released 'Livery Stable Blues' in February 1917 for the Victor Talking Machine Company.

⁸⁰In particular, Corso's *Elegiac Feelings American* (1970), Cummings' *Selected Poems 1923-1958* (1960) and Kerouac's *Doctor Sax* (1959) continue the jazz aesthetic through the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies.

content of the former, published in 1971, has been considered as pornography, a deviant device which allows Mingus to construct and maintain his abusive form of masculinity. The latter, published three years subsequently, has been out of print for many years, republished only in 2001.

American readers of Mingus' and Hawes' autobiographies in the early Seventies would have recognised the style in which both musicians describes their exploits, and, in Mingus' case, primarily sexploits. Containing numerous obscenities and sexual offences, Mingus emulates the style of William Burroughs, whose controversial book *Naked Lunch* had been published in 1959, and who is also clearly influenced by the jazz aesthetic. Whether or not Mingus actually read Burroughs is difficult to determine, as there are no references to the author within Mingus' published works. However, the fact that Mingus produced over one thousand pages of original manuscript proves that, unlike other jazz autobiographers, he fully participated in the process of writing.

Crucially, *Beneath the Underdog* describes the experience of accompanying text with music: 'I worked with a poet named Patchen...We improvised behind him while he read his poems, which I studied ahead of time.' (Mingus, 207) Kenneth Patchen (1911-1972), a poet known for his interest in the relationship between jazz and poetry, performed with Mingus in New York in March 1959. Patchen had been a major influence on the Beat aesthetic, his poetry appearing, for example, in Jack Kerouac's novella *Orpheus Emerged* (1945). Unfortunately no recordings of the Mingus and Patchen performances are available. *Beneath the Underdog* describes Patchen as a 'real artist', a rare accolade in a generally disparaging book. In reporting this collaboration in a book elsewhere devoid of reference to music, Mingus not only suggests his

appreciation of poetry, and willingness to study literature, but also forges a crucial link between text and sound. The importance of poetry to Mingus, quite possibly revealing the influence that Patchen exerted on him, is evident in the fact that during one of the lowest periods of his life, whilst incarcerated at Bellevue mental hospital, he places great emphasis on writing down his thoughts, including a 'Hellview of Bellevue'. (ibid., 212)

Mingus' relationship with Patchen certainly suggests that he was involved in and influenced by the Beat aesthetic, and this is clear from his autobiography. While *Beneath the Underdog* projects an almost tame level of sexual obscenity when placed alongside *Naked Lunch* (although it is important to note that the former was edited heavily before being accepted for publication), similarities of style are nevertheless evident. The scenes in both texts which depict sexual deviancy, whether Burrough's mass orgies or Mingus' pool parties, are dealt with in a snapshot style so that no individual is under focus for long:

BLAM! BLAM!
There's the door again...seven more!
This Ming ain't kidding! He invited the all [sic] of Mexico up here!
Vasserlean, mister? (ibid., 111)

While Mingus makes no mention of his writing and compositional style, Burroughs' 'cut-up- technique' is very similar to this improvisational style. Using dots to represent pauses (...), the lack of structure and seemingly random actions of *Naked Lunch* promote a similarly confusing effect:

Mark flips the switch and the chair vibrate...Mark tilt his head looking up at Johnny, his face remote, eyes cool and mocking on Johnny's face...Johnny scream and whimper... (Burroughs, 93)

The informal style and the coarse language which the characters of Mingus' autobiography use in speech, contrasted with the style of the narrator's voice, show clear links with Burroughs. It is obvious that Mingus gained, both from his experiences with

Patchen and quite possibly also from reading contemporaneous novels such as *Naked Lunch*, an insight into fragmentary styles of writing. Whatever his motivation for writing the autobiography, it is almost certain he was aware that a female readership for the text already existed. Interestingly, a 1971 review of the autobiography suggested that not only would his female readership be assured, but that publication of his sexploits would ensure his continued success in attracting women. Barry McRae, writing in *Jazz Journal*, proposes that

the general circulation of the book will serve to add to his [Mingus'] success in the physical department. His intimate descriptions of the words used during these sexual frolics sound very credible and certainly would lead female readers to believe that Mingus was more than passingly skilful at the art. (McRae, 14)

Dan Morgenstern remarks of *Beneath the Underdog* that '[i]n all but a few bland passages, it is Mingus one hears, and he is a real writer - no doubt about that. And a real man, not afraid to let us see his flaws.' (Morgenstern, 1971, 41) He goes on to make an interesting observation regarding the relationship between *Beneath the Underdog* and what he terms 'contemporary "literature"', suggesting that '[t]here is a great deal of explicitly descriptive writing dealing with sex, which hardly sets the book apart from [it]'. (ibid., 41) Mingus, then, embraces what we may term the 'jazz' or 'beat' aesthetic, focusing on the overall shock effect which ensured him a readership. Hampton Hawes' *Raise Up Off Me* is a more measured, approachable autobiography. It can be successfully examined in terms of the following stylistic devices, which Rice identified as integral to 'jazzy prose style': the riff (evident in word-repetition), the pause (evident in unusual punctuation), antiphony (evident in phrase-repetition) and the cut (evident in flashback sequences).

Raise Up Off Me is written in a colloquial style which Hawes does not find it necessary to explain to the reader. He describes, for example, a Japanese prostitute as

'some high-pitched female cussing through a doorway' (Hawes, 60), his unusual collocation of 'cussing [cursing] through' suggesting a vague image of the one thing not mentioned in the sentence: the woman's voice. Hawes writes in a repetitive style: he takes pleasure in individual words, exemplified in the following sequence:

Negroes were niggers to both whites and themselves, and whites were peckerwood trash to Negroes and themselves. The Mexicans kept to themselves and ate tacos; the Negroes kept to themselves and ate collard greens.' (ibid., 2)

Here, the repetition of 'themselves' allows Hawes to build up a picture of mid twentieth-century, working class society, above a riff which suggests that each member of that society had both an individual and a communal identity. He suggests that Negroes, poor whites and Mexicans were not only part of a group called 'themselves', but that they also had a 'self' within it. Hawes is also, like Louis Armstrong, fond of the dash (-) as a substitute for the semicolon. His use of these represents the 'pauses' that Rice locates in Morrison, as Hawes often noticeably pauses in the middle of a story to give the reader more information. For example, here, in the midst of recounting his memories of Charlie 'Bird' Parker, he suddenly stops to allow the reader to form a more complete picture of the situation:

If someone were to ask him [Bird] who he liked better on alto, Henry Prior or Sonny Criss - it was the sort of thing a young player starting to come up would ask - he'd shrug and say, both. (ibid., 15)

Hawes not only makes use of riffs and pauses, then, but he also, particularly at the beginning of his autobiography, introduces sudden flashback sequences into the main plot of the text. While these past memories are generally related to present happenings, it is sometimes difficult (as with Hawes' language) to determine their exact import. Here, he describes his time as a Reverend's son ('the years when it seemed like everyday was Sunday')

[it was] Reverend Hawes this and Reverend Hawes that, broads in their stiff white dresses jumpin' up and down. "We see the light, Reverend, and the light is radiant!" (*Shun the weed*,

keep idle hands out of your pockets.) “Tell it all, Reverend!” (*Don't lift the little girls' dresses.*)
(ibid., 10)

The italicised sections are clearly Hawes' memories of another sermon, given not from the pulpit but perhaps at Sunday School, or at home; as the cut in jazz recalls a previous melody, here the cut takes place between a past and present (or past and further past) moment of his life. Rice's fourth stylistic feature, antiphony, or call and response, is also evident in *Raise Up Off Me*, as Hawes describes how he buys his drugs late at night:

if the bell wasn't working or you didn't want to jar the Man [sic] out of a sound sleep or there might be someone uncool on the premises, you went *Bb-G-D* [the beginning figure of Charlie Parker's 'Parker's Mood'] in that fast, secret way and the cat would pop his head out the window. (ibid., 12)

Here, then, music becomes a subversive form of communication, requiring a physical response in order to be completed, representing a call and response gesture which crosses the boundary between music and another area of Hawes' life, namely drug-taking.

It was suggested in chapter four that some jazz autobiographies make use of techniques of orality in order to suggest a link between music and prose. This represents a further, more subtle aspect of the 'jazz aesthetic'. Kathy Ogren, writing in 1991, suggests that jazz autobiographers 'are conscious of a variety of story-telling methods that help communicate their persona...many of their techniques are drawn from African-American oral performance traditions'. (Ogren, 119) An 'oral' style or performance can be defined as a book in which the text is mainly oral/dialogue-based, containing either significant accounts of aural experiences, or discussing the nature of orality/aurality directly. 'Oral' refers to that which is spoken or sung, 'aural' to that which is heard or listened to. The text itself can therefore be classified as the former, in that it is a one-way communication from writer to reader, but the content of the text may include both oral *and* aural experiences on behalf of the protagonist.

Experiences of sound, whether musical or not, which are included within the body of the text suggest the oral nature of the text in their structure and emphasis. Added to this, the rendering on paper of aural and oral events suggests a content emphasis on that which is perceived, rather than known. Such oral styles are not without problems, primarily due to the difficulties involved in merging an aurally-perceived medium (jazz) with a visual, written medium (the text). These techniques, and associated problems, will be examined alongside theories of signification and black English by Henry Louis Gates and Geneva Smitherman. This will point to the possible constructions of performance personas in the autobiographies, particularly with reference to *Miles* and *Beneath the Underdog*.⁸¹ Firstly, however, some examples of orality within the content of the texts will be examined.

There are various techniques which facilitate the presence of orality in jazz autobiography. Some autobiographies, for example, suggest orality in presenting the text as a conversation between musician and reader. *Miles*, for example, begins 'Listen', demanding the reader's aural attention. Four hundred pages later, it ends with the single word 'Later', completing the experience and signalling to the reader that his conversation is over. Sidney Bechet insists that the very format of the book is alien to the oral experience: 'you got to hear it for yourself, you got to *feel* that singing, and I got no way to make that possible for you in a book way.' (Bechet, 107) Davis also suggests, as do others, that recognition and knowledge of other musicians within the jazz world primarily occurs through sound. When he first meets Gillespie, he fails to recognise him, until 'he started playing, [and] I knew who he was.' (Davis, vi) In a similar way, Count

⁸¹This concept was suggested in part by Kathy Ogren's essay 'Jazz Isn't Just Me: Jazz Autobiographies as Performance Personas' (1991)

Basie's *Good Morning Blues* begins with Basie remembering an aural experience: music wakes him up in the morning after an all-night gig: he cannot see the producers of the sound: he follows it to locate them:

I pulled on my pants and went groping past two or three rooms and didn't see anything and didn't seem to be getting any closer, and that's when I started calling out, asking who was playing that new record, and somebody said it wasn't a record. (Basie, 16)

The added importance of the event is that this is Basie's first experience of the Blue Devils, a group with whom he played for some months. His confusion as to the source of the sound intensifies the experience as sensual rather than visual, and this carries through onto his perception of the band as a whole. Basie's first chapter focuses on his months with the Blue Devils, between 1927 and 1929, and his memories of being in the band, while often devoid of actual fact, are primarily sensual:

I was with the Blue Devils for some months. I don't remember exactly how many, and I'm not very certain about any of the actual dates, whether it was August or October, but I do remember that at first it was warm, and that when it got cold I was still with them for a while.' (ibid., 36)

A further technique to maintain orality is to suggest that jazz musical talent is largely a natural ability, disassociated from Western styles of classical music education, and connected instead with an aural ability. Emphasis on this factor within these texts reveals a further desire to present them as oral creations. Bill Broonzy, for example, does not even suggest that aural learning took place, but rather that the knowledge was already present: '[n]obody gave us lessons, it was just born in us to sing and play the blues,' he claims. (Broonzy, 3) In a similar mode, refuting the myth that Freddie Keppard⁸² was so obsessed with others copying him that he placed a handkerchief over his hand when playing, Bechet suggests that '[y]ou learn by hearing; there's no other way - not if you're a real musicianer [sic].' (Bechet, 112)

⁸²Keppard (1890-1933) was the first jazz musician to be offered a recording deal, in 1916, but turned it down, and the deal passed to a white band.

In addition to presentations of oral learning/ natural ability, other autobiographies suggest the internalisation of musical ability, a factor which almost precludes communication through text, and highlights the importance of oral transposition. Bechet suggests that

[t]here ain't no-one can write down for you what you need to know to make the music over again. There ain't no-one can write down the feeling you have to have. That's from inside yourself, and you can't play note by note like something written down.' (ibid., 81)

The difficulty of writing about musical experience 'in a book way' has also been suggested by Bechet. Count Basie echoes this suggestion in *Good Morning Blues*, accepting that

There was so much going on all around Harlem during those days. I wish I could get myself together about more of it. But I'll never be able to do justice to what it all meant to me. (Basie, 113)

'Do[ing] justice' to the experience of music obviously represents a barrier between the jazz autobiographer and his text. Vernacular language is essential in maintaining an oral style of writing. Henry Louis Gates' theory of signification is again of relevance here. Gates, for example, suggests that signification functions as the basis of much African-American linguistic style, incorporating phenomena such as 'playing the dozens', a type of linguistic combat which utilises several levels of meaning, both figurative and literal, and which 'turns on insults of one's family members, especially one's mother.' (Gates, 1988, 99) This latter phenomenon can, of course, only occur when linguistic understanding is the same on opposing sides, and is generally applied to street conversations between African-Americans; it is notably important in those texts with a vernacular style.

Vernacular style can be defined by the presence of 'Black English', a term first discussed in detail by Geneva Smitherman, in her study *Talkin' and Testifyin': The Language of Black America* (1977). 'Black English' is now commonly referred to as

'Ebonics'. Smitherman details the development of standard English in America into a form commonly used by the black population, involving the coining of new expressions, and their frequent association with double or triple-meaning. She briefly considers the relationship of black musicians to this development, and notes that new Black English expressions are often to be found 'in their lyrics or in their general speech.' (Smitherman, 52) Although Smitherman views the development of Black English as a primarily oral experience, it is also undoubtedly present in African-American jazz autobiographies, some of the most noticeable being in Charles Mingus' *Beneath the Underdog*, which is primarily a dialogue-based text. Consider, for example, the following conversation between the members of Charlie Parker's band: they are deciding what to play as an opening number.

'Okay Bird. Something everybody knows.'

""Billy's Bounce""?"

'Don't know that, Bird.'

'It's just the blues in F. Buddy, gone...take four, Dodo...blow, Miles.'

'I done blew, motherfucker. Now you got it, cocksucker. Blow, Lucky.' (Mingus, 97)

The conversation continues in a similarly crude style. In passing on Parker's comment 'blow' to Lucky Thompson (a junior tenor saxophone player), Davis indulges in linguistic combat, a continuous repartee with his bandmates. It is only when he tries to pass the signifier on to the audience ('Ladies and gentlemen, will you all shut up and just listen to this motherfucker blowing!') that the play concludes ('Miles! Careful, man, you can't say that.') Wordplay changes from figurative to literal, and into final admiration for each other, Mingus himself revealing his real feelings about Parker: 'Sounds like millions of souls all wrapped up in that old ragged horn of his.' (ibid., 98-9) Combat and vocal exchange is accepted within the group, but an attempt to involve an outsider, the audience, to whom the language will be exclusive, fails. Although

applied to a different exclusive medium, that of the black novelist. Gates' theory suggests that African-American literary tradition 'exists because of these chartable formal relationships, relationships of signifyin(g).' (Gates, 1988, 122) The ability of black musicians to maintain equally structured and inclusive relationships is evident in these autobiographies, and the hierarchies previously discussed in chapter three are undoubtedly a manifestation of this. The creation of a hagiography by, for example, Duke Ellington in his autobiography *Music is my Mistress* (1973) denotes formal relationship and inclusivity within the jazz world.

The inclusive language in these dialogues is not only augmented by the presence of vernacular phrases and street grammar, but Mingus, for example, also begins them without any warning, scene-setting, or explanation, often starting a new chapter with what seems to the non-accustomed reader like a random piece of dialogue. It has already been suggested that there are larger issues for the non-African-American reader than for the African-American reader of African-American texts. Indeed, they may completely misunderstand the intention of the writer. These difficulties may be compounded by the presence of barriers between the 'I' and 'you' of the text. The development of a more inclusive form of writing and reading, then, facilitates a solution. It is also important, however, to recognise those areas of the actual text content which may aid or impede this solution. What, then, are the constructions which may be used to overcome this, if, indeed, the author wishes to?

The crises of identity from which many jazz musicians appear to suffer mean that a fragmented and detached style of writing is almost *necessary* for the achievement of their linguistic aims. These can be achieved in different ways, of which the most

common in black jazz autobiographical texts is a resort to wordplay and vernacular language. Writers approach the use of vernacular language in a variety of ways: those texts which are exhaustively edited include footnotes explaining the meaning of slang phrases; others include some explanation within the body of the text. In some cases there is no translation, and it is in these cases that the greatest distance of signification between reader and musician is effected. This use of vernacular language is also linked to a developing oral style, which will also be discussed below in reference to its impact on the reader.

Miles Davis uses exclusive terminology from the opening page of *Miles* (1989), exploiting an oppositional meaning common to extreme adjectives in African-American vernacular speech and writing. Hailing the experience of listening to the music of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker as ‘the greatest feeling I ever had in my life - with my clothes on’, he exclaims, ‘Man, that shit was so terrible it was scary.’ (Davis, v) Accustomed to a certain meaning of the word ‘terrible’, although Davis’ technique is fairly simple to understand, it requires the reader, unless he/she commonly uses this style, to become immersed in a new form of signification, in which the signs are in opposition to those he/she recognises. One of the first popular manifestations of this particular idiom for the American public would undoubtedly have been Michael Jackson’s ‘Bad’ album, released in 1989, the same year as Davis’ autobiography. Davis’ continual use of slang could represent a similar problem of recognition and understanding for some readers: his use of the word ‘motherfucker’ in particular is constantly subject to change, as he uses it to refer to both enemies and friends, often

within the same passage or scene. Consider the following two examples, which are to be found within a few lines of each other:

‘I used to think to myself, What the fuck these motherfuckers scared of, bad as they are?’

‘...the shit sounded good as a motherfucker...’ (Davis, 266)

While it is fairly obvious from the context of the scene that the former ‘motherfuckers’ are actually *good* composers whom Davis is mocking, and that the latter phrase is an expression of enjoyment, we are required to suspend our own linguistic system in favour of Davis’ own. Stanley Crouch’s remarks on the text are evidence of the difficulties involved in this suspension. Crouch, for example, considers *Miles* to be ‘an outburst...of profanity’, suggesting that he cannot cope with the level of exclusivity. Yet while it is undeniable that *Miles* does contain countless obscenities and crude language, their presence in the texts does not, in my opinion, amount to an ‘outburst’. The language is exclusive, but as such is typical of Davis. Instead it represents a controlled attempt to define himself, in a similar manner to Mingus’ attempts to define himself through sexual terminology. But as we saw in the short extract from *Beneath the Underdog*, Davis’ attempt to extend the dialogue into the audience is a failure. While, generally, the combat dialogues with fellow musicians are fairly trivial games, Davis, as is suggested above, is obsessed with the constant promotion of himself at the expense of others: his own self-importance results in many supposedly racist remarks against both white and black people. His vernacular, exclusive style, then, may well represent another manifestation of this: either an attempt to impress upon others his disregard for polite language, or, more simply, a desire to embellish past conversations and to make his own words appear more potent.

Compare, for example, the two sides of an argument with Jackie McLean, a tenor saxophone player with whom Davis had been recording:

[McLean]: 'Miles, that wasn't right, man, embarrassing me like that in front of Duke, man, who is my fucking musical daddy, you motherfucker!' He was crying!

So I [Davis] said to him, 'Fuck you, Jackie, you ain't nothing but a big, fucking baby! Always talking about some shit that you're a young cat and so you can't learn that old music. Fuck that and you too! I told you, music is music. So you'd better learn your music or you ain't gonna be in my fucking band for much longer, you hear me?' (Davis, 144)

Davis' tirade continues for some time, uninterrupted and containing seven instances of the word 'fuck' in comparison to McLean's two. After this, McLean is apparently 'stunned' and says 'nothing' (ibid., 145), a reaction which leaves Davis in complete control of the situation, augmented by the obscene language which overpowers his opponent. In contrast to the conclusion of *Beneath the Underdog's* 'playing the dozens' conversation which involves Davis, here there is only one winner, and no compromising admiration. Whether or not Davis' level of linguistic exclusivity was at all affected by the presence of Quincy Troupe, his editor, is impossible to ascertain with any conviction. It is likely that Davis, whose arrogance and refusal to accept criticism is evident in *Miles*, was fairly unwilling to compromise his weighty view of himself. If this stance causes exclusion and alienation of some readers, he is ready to accept it. In comparison, consider briefly Cab Calloway's 'Hepster's Dictionary', which was published from 1938 to 1944: an example is included at the back of his 1976 autobiography *Of Minnie the Moocher and Me*. Calloway's 'dictionary' reads like a lesson in a new language: he includes 'translation' exercises and, within the body of the text, advises readers 'if you want to get hip, turn to the back of the book.' (Calloway, 182) Here can be found translations of African-American street slang, in the form of a dictionary, for example 'BLACK AND TAN (n.): dark and light colored folks. Not colored and white folks as erroneously assumed.' (Calloway, 253) Obviously designed to appeal to white readers with little knowledge of the black vernacular. Calloway thus attempts to transform exclusivity into inclusivity.

Interestingly, for other autobiographers, their use of vernacular speech causes them to *become* excluded. Sidney Bechet highlights the problems inherent in exclusive language when recounting an incident in *Treat It Gentle*. He relates that while on trial in an English courtroom on matters of immigration, he uses the phrase ‘all balled up’, meaning, in American English slang, ‘something confused...like a ball of twine that’s wound up around itself.’ (Bechet, 132) In British English, however, there is no meaning attached to the phrase, aside from a vague smutty use of ‘balls’ as a sexual swear word. The British judge is unimpressed with Bechet’s linguistic ability, and he is deported, finally realising ‘you just don’t use’ the phrase in England. Danny Barker has a similar experience, but this time within his peer group. Not a classically-trained musician, Barker finds himself excluded from certain conversations due to his inability to understand terminology:

[Milt] Hinton and Diz [Gillespie] would go into serious discussion, analysis, which was beyond my knowledge, using musical terms that I had seen on manuscript paper but paid no attention to. (Barker, 1986, 164-5)

The autobiographies of Bechet and Barker maintain a fairly conventional, inclusive style, although as we have seen there is an interesting shift to the vernacular in the latter, and neither portrays the arrogance of Davis nor the slightly haphazard nature of Mingus.

In discussing jazz autobiography, then, it may well be possible to draw more concrete links between music and other areas of communication, including text. Drawing together the historical context with the aesthetic context may aid understanding. One route into this challenging area is provided through discussion of improvisation, widely accepted as an integral mode of composition and performance for jazz. Hazel Smith and Roger Dean’s study *On Improvisation* suggests that this technique is also present in more general terms:

[i]mprovisation can be seen to be consistent with the theories of Derrida, Barthes and Foucault in challenging the notion of the creator as sole and immediate focus of meaning...the emphasis in much improvisation on collaboration, or on the projection of multiple selves, radically interrogates traditional notions of subjectivity. (Smith and Dean, 35)

This theory allows us to directly relate musical presentation to autobiographical presentation. Having discussed the hybrid text and the presence of the ghostwriter in the previous chapter, Smith and Dean's theory facilitates consistency between the musical self and the written self. Thus while, as we have seen, barriers to understanding and acceptance of hybrid texts can easily appear, these barriers may be seen as 'improvisation'. In jazz autobiography, then, as indicative of an improvisatory mode, the collaborative and hybrid nature of the text challenges the ability of the readers to construct their view of a singular author. The relationship of jazz music to jazz autobiography is perhaps not merely sociological, but also engages us in questions of aesthetic and perceptual similarity.

Further to a close examination of jazz autobiography as reflecting jazz structures, we can also look to the thoughts of the writers on their audiences at performances, and their relationship to, and dependency on, these people. These assertions can then form the basis for a more thorough application of the 'jazz aesthetic', not only in terms of actual jazz texts and audiences, but also within the context of the jazz history evaluated in the first chapter. Albert Bergsen's 1979 study of musical codes, 'Spirituals, Jazz, Blues, and Soul Music: The Role of Elaborated and Restricted Codes in the Maintenance of Social Solidarity' suggests two distinctions in African-American music, between those types which utilise 'restricted codes' (during slavery: worksong and spirituals) and those which utilise 'elaborated codes' (post-slavery and free expression: blues and jazz). This distinction, if rather simplistic, nevertheless highlights aspects of communality and response mechanisms which may well also be applicable to jazz texts.

Bergsen suggests that the restriction of slavery imposed communal rather than individual music onto the musician, and that individual ‘elaborat[ion]’ was only possible post-emancipation.

This is a similar idea to those put forward in the first chapter, that social conditions heavily influence the structures and performances of African-American music. Add to this Schultz’s terminology of ‘testimonial’ and ‘blues’ autobiographies, which suggests that social conditions are inherent to their structure, and, looking simply at jazz autobiographies, an illuminating dialogue is suggested. ‘When one speaks or makes music in a restricted code,’ Bergsen proposes, ‘one is contributing to the solidarity of the community, whether one is conscious of it or not.’ (Bergsen, 349) Clearly autobiographies composed during so-called ‘restricted’ social conditions are almost always testimonial, offering a representative for the people, who will speak and change the situation. On the other hand, jazz autobiography has been viewed under Schultz’s ‘blues’ banner, representing Bergsen’s ‘elaborated’ codes, those of an assertive individual talent. A link between the improvisatory nature of free ‘elaborated’ jazz and the ‘continuing present’ (Schultz) of jazz autobiography is evident. It becomes important here, then, to evaluate just how far the performance of jazz music to audiences can be said to be a representation of the performance portrayed in the corresponding jazz autobiography to critical readers. We will now look at the figure of the reader in more detail.

It is undoubtedly true that all readers of jazz autobiographies would have been familiar, if only fleetingly, with the ‘spoken word’ (in this case, music) of the authors they were reading: their status as aural audiences would have already been established.

Early jazz periodicals appeared between 1930 and 1950, and a large majority of those were published by Greenwood Press, which collected them on a series of microfilms in 1977. These microfilms not only allow now-vanished publications to be preserved, but also contain an editorial essay by J.R. Taylor which offers some insight into the audiences of the time. Taylor constructs the jazz magazine as a forum for ‘enthusiasts with serious intentions, working in their spare time with little in the way of financial resources,’ thus suggesting a readership and editorial board whose primary aim was pedagogy.

As part of this thesis, correspondence was undertaken with John Chilton, the author of biographies of Holiday, Bechet and Coleman Hawkins, who revealed something more about the jazz fan base. Chilton suggested that most of his readers ‘were jazz fans and record buyers, although a small minority were interested principally in the social/ economic side of performers’ lives.’ (personal correspondence, 10/6/02) The heightened popularity of jazz magazines and fanzines between 1950 and 1980 coincided with the publication of many autobiographies, and an examination of the former reveals much about the ‘jazz fans’ to whom Chilton is referring. While actual reviews of the autobiographies are fairly scarce, those that do exist are unfailingly positive, and reveal the relationship between the music and text as seen by the record-buying public. Thus a review of Bechet’s *Treat it Gentle* in the June 1960 edition of *Jazz Monthly* describes the autobiography as follows:

Just as every phrase in a solo of his serves to intensify the impact of the performance as a whole, so does each anecdote in this book help to strengthen the central theme, which is none other than the relation of his life to his music. (James, 25)

The relationship of style to the readership

In possessing a hybrid authorship, jazz autobiography's language becomes, as Barthes suggests, the most influential medium for the reader. As it is difficult to pinpoint the exact relationship of the authors to the texts, it is true here that '*writing* can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, "depiction"'. (Barthes, 145) Reference to music by necessity entails reference to audience, and due to the complex nature of jazz autobiography, this audience can be split into two groups. These are the readership of the autobiographies and the audiences at the performances. The former constitutes the main focus of our investigation, as the latter has previously been monitored successfully.⁸³ The two terms 'audience' and 'readership' will thus be used here, to refer to, respectively, those listening to music and those reading a text. This distinction is, however, not followed by all critical material, and therefore the terminology will be modified accordingly when referring to such material.

This section will also, through the work of audience theorists and examination of fanzines, examine the relationship between the readership and the authors (including ghostwriters and editors) of the text. It will suggest the autobiographers' sense of an intended readership, and that of their editors and/ or ghostwriters. We have seen the importance of this in investigations into the seeming disparities between some autobiographies and the extraneous presence of their ghostwriters (for example, in the case of Dizzy Gillespie and Al Fraser). In examining the wider contexts of these texts and relating them to the music which is said to infuse and surround their style and content, the impossibility of viewing these autobiographies in isolation is revealed. They

⁸³A 1992 survey of jazz audiences in North America found that they were 'strikingly male, well educated, well off, and black, in comparison with the general adult population.' (DeVeaux, 1995, 391)

are not only representations of individual lives, but also of wider issues which come together in the unique blend of jazz, blackness and self-representation which is the jazz autobiography. The problem in locating the readership for this genre is that these texts, with one or two exceptions, have never been bestsellers. E. J. Hobsbawm reminds us that 'this paucity and poverty of jazz literature is all the more extraordinary since, as we have seen, the world of jazz is, at the very least, fantastically good 'copy' for any writer with an interest in human beings.' (Hobsbawm,140) Despite Hobsbawm's view, this 'fantastically good "copy"' seems to have eluded many critics. Perhaps ghostwritten or heavily edited autobiography is difficult enough to discuss without the added complexities of both jazz and the African-American literary tradition. It is clearly easier to dismiss such texts: jazz autobiographies have received far less critical attention, than, for example, biographies or autobiographies which deal specifically and consistently with racial issues.

Negative perceptions of these texts has resulted in a lack of knowledge about the corresponding music, for the influence of jazz, both on stage and within the autobiography, is vast. This fact is in some ways aided by Schultz's categorisation of 'blues' autobiography which we examined in chapter four. However, she makes reference to only one jazz autobiography, that of Mingus, and does not examine how efforts to present this individual self were both referred to by Mingus himself, and also commented on by both critics and readers. It has hitherto been important during discussion of jazz autobiography to frame the author, but it is just as vital to frame the reader, especially when questions of intent such as these are being discussed. Whether or not jazz autobiography as a genre is indeed non-confrontational and non-testimonial

becomes irrelevant if there is no reader to confront. The thoughts of jazz musicians on the readership for their autobiographies will now be considered alongside their more general remarks on performance audiences for their music. In this way the primary concerns of the writers can be articulated through their appearance to audiences and readerships.

This discussion is framed by the recognition of jazz autobiographies as non-testimonial texts which seek to portray an individual life and character not necessarily representative of anything communal. While this proposal may be applied to any particular text, it is perhaps most clearly evidenced in *Miles*, whose outspoken protagonist has caused numerous problems of reception for black and white critics alike. Although biographers of jazz musicians rarely mention their autobiographies, Ian Carr's 1999 *Miles Davis: The Definitive Biography* does offer this insight into Davis' portrayal of the period 1975-1980, when he took a break from music due to his continual drug use, alcohol dependence and illness: 'Miles' pride was such that he hated to be thought of as a victim, and his account of this period in his autobiography...has an air of bravado.' (Carr, 330) Following Carr's suggestion, and examining the actual autobiographical text, it becomes clear that here Davis' normally arrogant, carefree tone is replaced by a deeper need to recognise the importance of maintaining his credibility within his readership: 'It [music] just went out of my mind because I was involved in doing other things; other things which mostly weren't good for me. But I did them anyway and, looking back, I don't have any guilt about doing them.' (Davis, 323) Effectively, Davis is legitimising drug use, which reflects the time of publication, 1989, when drugs such as ecstasy were becoming more and more popular with clubbers and

musicians alike. Crucially, Carr notes that ‘the majority of the book’s readers would be already converted Miles Davis fans or young potential fans’, quite possibly already involved or intending to become involved in the drugs scene.

Stanley Crouch has heavily criticised *Miles* for the failure to moralise in his autobiography, and for placing his ever-changing individuality, full of what Crouch terms ‘self-inflation’, above any apparent need to define either his racial or sexual standpoint. (Crouch, 1997, 910) Carr assigns testimonial meaning to Davis’ violent and often abusive language, asserting that ‘[i]t is absolutely certain that Miles Davis’ anger was caused by the inhumanity and injustice of racial prejudice.’ (Carr, 528) While this ‘certain[ty]’ that Carr holds cannot be unfailingly disproved, it seems fairly evident that Davis had no desire to assert himself as representing either positive or negative results of racial prejudice. He portrays himself, rather, as a man who does not wish to influence young musicians to stay on the straight and narrow, but rather wishes to parade himself and all his doings. Carr also suggests that ‘[t]o educated and highly literate people, the style and language might seem unappetizing, offensive, or even impenetrable.’ (ibid., 516) Yet, as has been previously suggested, the style and language are only inaccessible if they are taken as representative of anything but Miles himself: if they are, for example, taken to be a communally-applicable political statement. As Schultz suggests with reference to this type of black autobiography, there is a ‘discovery of consciousness’ here: not of social issues but of Davis’ own consciousness, which the reader can choose to accept or disavow. Miles is certainly a clear representation of ‘blues’ autobiography, in which the reader and his or her social inclinations assume secondary importance to the narrated protagonist and his bravado.

If the reader is not then to be viewed as a vehicle for the jazz autobiographer's social testimony, a more complex aim becomes apparent. Recently published texts are both easier to find than older autobiographies, and have the added advantage that their ghostwriters and editors are often still alive. Correspondence was entered into as part of this thesis which allowed a valuable insight to be gained into the aims of some of the jazz autobiographies discussed here. Their revelations on the relationship between the jazz autobiographer and his reader have much to say about contemporary critical response to such texts. Such an insight into the autobiographies of Danny Barker and Doc Cheatham⁸⁴ was provided by a personal interview conducted with Alyn Shipton, the editor of both these texts. This facilitated an invaluable examination of intentions relating to the musicians' view of the readerships. Shipton, for example, suggested that Barker 'had a very firm view of the audience he intended to reach', which, although not racially specific, was 'analogous to the visitors to the New Orleans Jazz Museum where he worked in the 1960s and 70s.' In assuming that Shipton is correct and Barker *was* targeting a specific section of the general public, it thus appears that he did not intend his autobiography to be in any way influential on those in political power. In fact, although there was some suggestion of, as Shipton puts it, 'politicking' at the publication of the text, Barker had tried to avoid any confrontation, and was 'extremely worried...that some people (e.g. the La Rocca family⁸⁵) would see it as settling old scores.' Shipton's comments suggest that it is non-testimonial and non-confrontational. In a sense, then, Barker was merely giving those who were already interested in the

⁸⁴Respectively, *A Life in Jazz* (1986) and *I Guess I'll Get the Papers and Go Home: The Life of Doc Cheatham* (1995)

subject a chance to share the articulation of 'a life in jazz' with him: a personal history from which fans and friends could learn more. In no way was it intended to be anything but representative of Barker himself; it did not approach the level of engagement with social concerns which Malcolm X, for example, believed to be crucial to his autobiographical voice.

Doc Cheatham's *I Guess I'll Get The Papers*, a shorter text whose often-criticised length was, according to Shipton, 'deliberate', seems to have been similarly motivated. Although Shipton suggested that Cheatham 'had a less clear-cut view of his readership,' he admitted that the text appears to have stemmed from Cheatham's need to answer 'the many questions he was badgered with on his gigs, and [to] set out a consistent view of his life in a way that meant he didn't have to tax his memory to remember all the answers.' There is little political or testimonial motivation here and the aim is seemingly both to aid those who wish to know more about this by now famous musician, and to avoid any further work himself. The book seems to be a reaction against performance audiences and motivated by a desire to turn a series of oral questions into a passage of written text. While it was unfortunately not possible to interview Quincy Troupe, who edited Miles Davis's *Miles*, Ian Carr's biography of Davis suggests that the book may have had a similar motivation to those of Barker and Cheatham. '[H]e had timely things to say in reply to his critics and a desire to put the record straight,' claims Carr, and so 'he decided to take on this massive task'. (Carr. 486) While this suggests a slightly more assertive role for Davis in answering back to previous criticisms, it nevertheless maintains a personal angle rather than a political one.

⁸⁵Nick La Rocca was a member of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, a white band who were the first jazz band to be recorded. There was often controversy over whether or not they were truly representative of

In any case we should not be surprised that Carr credits Davis with a more confrontational impulse: the latter's ability to confront anyone and anything is clearly evident in his autobiography and has already been remarked upon here.

'[I]t might not have been a literary masterpiece, but every word of it was my own'
(Louis Armstrong on *Swing That Music*)

While musicians may have aimed for a particular response from their readerships, it is certainly true that the performance given on stage can vastly affect how the musician is seen socially. The case of Louis Armstrong is an extreme example of this. Famed for his 'grinning' and 'Uncle Tommery', which we have seen denounced by Miles Davis in *Miles*, he was perceived by audiences as a passive individual, as witnessed by Philip Larkin in his article 'Funny Hat Men' (see chapter four). As in Larkin's article, other musicians are often placed in contrast to him, both positively and negatively, the latter evident in a posthumous article on Sidney Bechet, which laments that 'only his physical gestures backed up the music, and there was none of the singing, clowning or joking which were the basis of Louis Armstrong's success with the general public.' (Lambert, 10)

Many jazz musicians faced the reality of a double life, especially when touring: as Scott DeVaux remarks,

Black musicians often found themselves in an uncomfortably ambiguous position. On the one hand, they were celebrities of a sort, having appeared on radio and recordings, and they carried with them the unmistakable swagger of show business. But at the same time, they were, in effect, servants, subject to peremptory commands underlaid with the implicit threat of violence. (DeVaux, 1999, 250)

jazz, and over statements which suggested they were the first jazz band to *exist*

Armstrong's first autobiography, *Swing That Music* (1936), in many ways allows this ambiguity to be expressed in words: the spelling, for example, is clumsy ('Sydney Bachet'; 'Emmanual Perez') and Armstrong makes brash references to 'Africa before we were civilised'. (Armstrong, 1936, 6) He describes his adoption of the nickname 'Satchmo' on account of 'a pretty big mouth' and suggests that even as the first 'colored' orchestra to play in St Louis, '[t]he people learned to like us right away.' (ibid., 51) The text appears to represent everything that the white American critic of the 1930s might say about Armstrong: no problematic racial incidents coupled with a lack of concern with literary skills in favour of a happy-go-lucky persona. These traits are augmented in his second autobiography, *Satchmo* (1954), in which he suggests that '[n]obody in my family had a trade, and we all had to make a living as day labourers. As far back as I can see up our family tree there isn't a soul who knew anything that had to be learned at school.' (Armstrong, 1954, 84) His words suggest contentment with what he has been given, and a complete lack of academic intelligence, not just for him, but for his family. As the jazz critic Nat Hentoff notes, however, public acceptance of stereotyped images caused problems:

when Louis Armstrong had long since been comfortably established in the public mind as a most genial and wholly uncontroversial minstrel, millions of Americans were shocked at Armstrong's reaction [to Arkansas resisting school integration]... "The way they are treating my people in the South," Louis told the press, "the government can go to hell!" (Hentoff, 1978, 73)

As audiences then, we are given a public performance which does not necessarily reflect the private self. Particularly in the case of Armstrong, this situation adversely affected publication and reception of his written works. Not only were his first two autobiographies taken to be a true and unedited reflection of his character, but the two other narratives which he wrote or helped to write were completely dismissed. Louis Armstrong in fact wrote much of the critically discredited biography *Horn of Plenty*.

published in 1947 by Robert Goffin. Manuscripts held by the Louis Armstrong Archives, the majority of which have now been published by Oxford University Press, show extensive correspondence with Goffin, and reveal the existence of 'notebooks' which Armstrong sent to him, full of information which Goffin then transcribed to print. This is not to suggest that Goffin did not alter Armstrong's words: reading *Horn of Plenty*, it is clear both why the text has been held in contempt and that it is attributable to a hybrid authorship. The language throughout is highly emotive, and much of this emotion hinges on the juxtaposition of black and white, giving the text a distinctly uncomfortable racial tone. Describing, for example, the street in which Armstrong was born, 'Jane Alley,' Armstrong/ Goffin writes that it was 'hung between night and day, beast and man, Africa and America: a short passageway from the Congo forests to the white man's house.' (Goffin, 8) Such clear racial stereotyping is unfortunate, and was too visible even for critical readers of the forties and fifties. But surely this should not necessarily result in complete dismissal of the text. The fact that Armstrong himself contributed to what finally became an overly-stereotyped representation of his publicly accepted self should not deter those attempting to learn more about him. Indeed, in his letters to Goffin, Armstrong always appears in control, sending him section by section of the story and assuring him at one point that 'you can look for the rest of my story in a few days.' (Armstrong, 1999, 78)

The fate of *Horn of Plenty* in some ways mirrors that of 'Gage', Armstrong's never-published provisionally-titled third autobiography, which exists only in part, and has been published as part of the collection mentioned above. 'Gage', whose title reveals Armstrong's nickname for marijuana, also purported to reveal something about

Armstrong which did not quite tally with his public persona. According to Armstrong's biographer Laurence Bergreen, it was simply denied publication by his manager at the time, Joe Glaser, 'who was understandably horrified by the prospect of his star client going on record advocating the use of an illegal substance.' (Bergreen 283) In the manuscript pages which still exist, Armstrong celebrates the healing powers of 'gace' in his recognisable fluid, oral style, evident in this extract:

I am different...I smoked it a long time...And I found out one thing...First place it's a thousand times better than whiskey...It's an Assistant - a friend a nice cheap drunk if you want to call it that...Good (very good) for Asthma - Relaxes your nerves...Great for cleanderness [sic]' (Armstrong, 1999, 114)

Certainly there is no ghostwriter here, the lack of punctuation and oddly-placed capital letters signifying for once to a correctly-attributed manuscript (all Armstrong's manuscripts contain these idiosyncrasies). Yet this manuscript, along with what have been termed 'The Goffin Notebooks', both signifying to a private Louis Armstrong who undeniably writes with his own pen, were only published as recently as 1999. These texts, along with various other autobiographical and socio-cultural writings in the same collection, reveal a self which was not made public, and clearly show the gap between Armstrong's revelations to his readers, and those which he made privately to himself. Just as his public statements against white racism shocked those whites who believed in his 'grinning' persona, Armstrong's thoughts on internal relations in black society reveal a man who feels he has been failed by the very people he sought to defend. 'Negroes *never* did stick together,' he writes from a hospital bed in 1969, 'and they *never* will. They hold too much *malice - Jealousy* deep down in their heart for the *few* Negroes who *tries*.' It is clear that Armstrong regards himself as one of those 'who tries': 'I think,' he goes on, 'that I have always done *great* things about *uplifting* my *race* (the Negroes, *of course*) but *wasn't appreciated*.' (ibid., 9)

The expectant audience

Added to the expectations which must have been produced in audiences by the existence of the jazz aesthetic, we have seen that jazz audiences and critics, particularly of black musicians, seem to find an objective response hard to articulate. While Bergreen notes that Armstrong's publicly musical self merged well with his publicly written self, 'neatly complemet[ing] his musical outpouring,' the difficulty of articulating a private self, surely the purpose of autobiography, is clearly evident. The roots of these pre-defined, often stereotypical images which exist in many contemporaneous responses to Armstrong can be traced to the nature of his performance. Yet this problem is not confined to jazz music and texts. Reader awareness of the social and historical background of African-American writers of all genres often overrides their personal response, and this lack of individual reaction is facilitated by the level of communal engagement readers are expected to show with such texts. Isaac Julien's 1992 essay 'Black Is, Black Ain't' discusses the problems inherent in the expectations of difference in black criticism, that it must always reflect an essentially black experience shared with the essentially black audience. In particular, Julien remarks on the difficulties faced by gay and lesbian black writers, who cross the borders set up by this essentialism, and do not participate in a communal heterosexuality. He comments on the fact that 'Langston Hughes' queerness was a widely kept secret,' and reasons that '[t]he repicturing of an ironic figure like Hughes trespassed across the essentialist battle lines of blackness.' (Julien, 259)

Thus the communality of black performance and cultural theory does not always reflect the reality of the individual, yet this issue is often side-stepped in favour of an essentially stereotypical response. This stereotyping is also present in black performance theory, which generally concentrates on a call and response mechanism: the historian Lawrence Levine's study *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, for example, suggests that

Within Afro-American culture, then, the relationship of performers to their audience retained many of the traditional participatory elements, the give-and-take that was so familiar to nineteenth-century black storytellers and their audiences. (234)

Levine suggests a relationship based on that of the preacher-congregation, with jazz musicians maintaining the same dynamic with their audience. dependent on each other for sacred inspiration and support. These ideas of antiphonal (call and response) movement between musician and audience can be found, according to the jazz commentator Nat Hentoff, in the performances of some of the greatest jazz musicians. The fact that Hentoff sees an equal relationship between audience and performer reveals something of that antiphony which Rice attempted to locate in Morrison, here present in the fabric of Duke Ellington's relationship with his audience: 'you get real contact when you play a phrase and somebody sighs', claims Ellington in a Hentoff interview. (Hentoff, 1978, 36)

Yet this generalisation is not without problems, which occur when the 'contact' fails to achieve an individual response, and merely maintains a distanced, communal participation. Such dependency on audience participation thus carries with it both positive and negative aspects: an antiphonal performance may well be more inclusive, but it also chances the appropriate response from those who may feel excluded. One musician who comments on this response is Nina Simone, whose career in popular

music only began, as she claims in her autobiography, 'to raise money for proper [i.e. classical] tuition'. (Simone, 65) Throughout her story she insists on her allegiance to classical piano music, suggesting that there was much that she 'hated' about the popular music industry, giving examples of 'the cheap crooks, the disrespectful audiences [and] the way most people were satisfied by dumb, stupid tunes.' (ibid., 65) In this way, then, we can see that the celebrated call and response style of audience engagement assumed by so many critics to apply universally to African-American musicians is not necessarily without fault. The ghettoisation of jazz music and musicians into a performance type which expects a particular audience response causes similar problems to the expectations of single, authoritative authorship encountered in the previous chapter. Jazz, like these autobiographies, is a hybrid creation which demands a hybrid response from its readers. Both individual and communal response are necessary in order to respond effectively to an author whose private self cannot be confused with his public stage presence.

The self-titled pianist Willie 'The Lion' Smith suggests a similar response to Simone when playing to unappreciative audiences. He recalls in his autobiography walking in one evening to a gig and finding that '[t]hat crowd was there to be heard, not to listen.' Immediately unhappy with this unanticipated response, he makes an announcement and leaves: 'The Lion's here, but this ain't his lair.' (Smith, 2) In contrast, later on in the text he remembers a positive experience of an audience, when he 'used to chat with the patrons at nearby tables in order to get their immediate moods.' (ibid., 91) Here, then, a communal, interdependent relationship is nurtured between performer and audience, something which may well not translate well onto the printed

page. Certainly in terms of jazz autobiographies, an expected response has caused much of the negative critical attention they have received. While questions of authorship have formed the bulk of these criticisms, some critics also seem to expect a level of engagement with the audience of the text similar to that received through the music. A fine example of this occurs in James Lincoln Collier's response to Duke Ellington's *Music is my Mistress*, of which he claimed 'there is nothing...[in the text] to suggest that Ellington was in any way the wise and ultimately sophisticated man he actually was. Worse, they [the book and various interviews] are entirely empty of human feeling. There is no passion in them anywhere.' (Collier, 295)

There has been some suggestion that the jazz record-buying public whose presence ensured the success of many jazz journals and fanzines also expected a certain relationship between the music and the text. While fan-based criticism of these texts (criticism to be found in fanzines) is always positive, this positivity tends to rely on the assumption that the autobiographies are a direct product of the autobiographer, and are not ghostwritten. Thus those texts which are clearly of the latter variety, such as Alan Lomax's biography of Jelly Roll Morton, *Mr Jelly Roll*, is dismissed not because it fails in its expression of fact, but because 'the print loses all the colour and beauty of Morton's prose.' (Locke, 15)

Arguments such as Collier's and Locke's are evidently examples of unfulfilled expectation regarding the autobiographies, that they would in some way reflect jazz itself. An obituary of Count Basie, who died a few months before his autobiography was published, suggests that it will reveal a hitherto unknown Basie, for 'the man who made such eloquent use of space in his music had little to say in interviews . either about his

pain or his good times. Hopefully, much of the latter will be revealed in the autobiography he began before handing it over to that fine writer, Albert Murray, who's now nearing completion.' (Sheridan, 6) Thus critical expectation seems to demand a testimonial self from Basie's text, a self which he quite clearly refutes, refusing to discuss racial matters and commenting only, as we have already seen, that 'life's a bitch, and if it's not one damn thing, it's going to be something else.' (Basie, 474)

Conclusion

This thesis has considered the place of the jazz autobiography in American culture from an interdisciplinary perspective within an American studies context. Questions which underpinned the research include how to approach both the history of jazz and the jazz autobiography, both of which have previously been overlooked, simplified and dismissed. This thesis, through its findings as detailed below, will allow for further academic research in the areas of jazz and jazz literature, specifically a more detailed study of the relationship between jazz and text, and of the jazz aesthetic in American culture. It illustrates the importance of the jazz autobiography as a sub-genre in African-American literary development.

The conceptual framework of the thesis was that jazz autobiography is crucial to understanding the jazz aesthetic in American culture. The first two chapters illustrated the importance of approaching jazz history from both a sociological and an aesthetic perspective, and formed a basis for discussion of the texts themselves. During discussion of the autobiographies, new terms were explored, which included 'jazz autobiography' itself, and 'narrated protagonist', which refers to the musician within the text. The theory of 'performance personas' was also explored, and applied to jazz autobiography. The importance of these texts in fully understanding the history and literature of jazz has been established, and I have suggested the relationship between jazz music and text in American literary culture of the twentieth century.

Conceptually, the progression of the African-American self can be linked through music and text. I have discussed the development of African music into African-American music and this can be linked to the development of the African-

American self, as revealed in the autobiographies themselves. The most crucial finding of this thesis was this: the relationship between music and text, and the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach to the genre of jazz.

In placing this thesis firmly in context, as I have attempted to do with jazz autobiography itself, it is important to note those more concrete factual conclusions which have been drawn. From my research into the history of music-making among African-Americans during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, I found that religion, specifically Christianity, played a crucial role in its development. Added to this, as I have shown, the unique social situations surrounding African-Americans also contributed greatly to the progression of the self in music. This sense of self-awareness and self-discovery in music leads clearly to a similar awareness in autobiographical texts by jazz musicians.

Factual conclusions regarding the autobiographies themselves are perhaps more challenging. Yet this thesis has certainly suggested the importance of not underestimating the musicians own skills with language and text. While autobiographies such as those of Charles Mingus and Miles Davis do stand out, others, such as the trio of books narrated by Louis Armstrong, have been shown to feature unique and highly subjective styles. These individual styles suggest a far greater input from the musician than has previously been thought. Examination of jazz autobiography in terms of gender revealed the gap between the public and private self in female texts, and the sexualisation of the self in male texts. The complexities of the representation of the jazz autobiographical self, and the lessons which can be learned from this regarding text.

music, history, literature and culture, form the factual basis around which this thesis turns.

In conclusion, then, we return once more to analysis of the identity of the jazz autobiographer. From the necessity of defining and concretizing the history of jazz, to discussing the written text, we have come again to the problem of the African-American jazz autobiographical self, who has hitherto been termed the 'narrated protagonist', and who cannot be seen as simply the 'author'. Expected to write as eloquently as he or she performs, he or she is judged by the same standards as those whose sole occupation is literary writing, performing in text. Added to this often unfair comparison is the continual drama of the racial self, who is so often compared and evaluated only through difference. In judging jazz autobiography as solely a work of literature, it is easy to bypass the music; it is necessary to focus on both concurrently in order to begin to comprehend these texts. We have discussed and expressed in detail the difficulties of defining and authorising the character and focus of the jazz autobiography. These reflect not only the protagonist but also the society that has both surrounded and nurtured him or her. For if, as Lawrence Levine claims, 'jazz too remain[s] a communal music,' (Levine, 238), then the narrated protagonists of jazz autobiographies are participating in a communal, not an individual task. Here, the hybrid and multi-faceted text transcends expectation. Here, elements of African-American music and literature combine, in the presence of a unique social situation, to produce the jazz autobiography.

Appendix One: Short Biographies of Musicians and Autobiographical Material

Louis Armstrong (1901-1971)

Trumpeter, singer and entertainer. Primarily known as a soloist who also led his own bands from the early 1930s to 1950s.

Autobiographies: *Swing That Music* (1936); *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* (1954)

Danny Barker (1909-1994)

Guitarist and banjoist. Rhythm guitarist for Cab Calloway and solo guitarist/ banjoist.

Autobiography: *A Life in Jazz* (1986)

Count Basie (1904-1984)

Pianist. Known for developing 'stride piano' technique and as leader of a number of big bands during the Thirties and Forties.

Autobiography: *Good Morning Blues: The Autobiography of Count Basie* (1985)

Sidney Bechet (1897-1959)

Clarinetist and soprano saxophonist. Solo performer who toured Europe extensively.

Also well-known as a teacher to younger musicians.

Autobiography: *Treat It Gentle: An Autobiography by Sidney Bechet* (1960)

Albany 'Barney' Bigard (1906-1980)

Tenor Saxophonist and Clarinetist. Well-known for playing in bands led by Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong.

Autobiography: *With Louis and the Duke: The Autobiography of A Jazz Clarinetist* (1985)

Art Blakey (1919-1990)

Drummer, whose band pioneered 'hard bop' style of jazz, combining gospel and blues harmonies and rhythms.

Autobiographical Material: in 'Interview', in Wayne Enstice and Paul Rubin (eds.) *Jazz Spoken Here: Conversations with Twenty-two Musicians* (1992)

William 'Big Bill' Broonzy (1893-1958)

Violinist, guitarist and singer. Merged blues with jazz and became a popular soloist touring Europe and America.

Autobiography: *Big Bill Blues: William Broonzy's Story as told to Yannick Bruynoghe* (1955)

Garvin Bushell (1902-1991)

Clarinetist, bassoonist, flautist and oboist. Pioneer and first performer of many bassoon and oboe solos in jazz.

Autobiography: *Jazz From The Beginning* (1988)

Cab Calloway (1907-1994)

Singer and bandleader. Developed 'scat singing' style and wove Harlem 'jive' language into his performances.

Autobiography: *Of Minnie the Moocher and Me* (1976)

Ray Charles (1930-present)

Pianist and singer. Developed 'Rhythm and blues' style of jazz and maintains a diverse musical style, incorporating country and western, blues, gospel and jazz.

Autobiography: *Brother Ray: Ray Charles' Own Story* (1978)

Adolphus 'Doc' Cheatham (1905-1997)

Trumpeter and singer. Worked both as a soloist and in small groups. Best-known records are those recorded when Cheatham was in his seventies and eighties.

Autobiography: *I Guess I'll Get the Papers and Go Home: The Life of Doc Cheatham* (1995)

Buck Clayton (1911-1991)

Trumpeter. Worked with various bands, most notably with those of Count Basie and Jimmy Rushing.

Autobiography: *Buck Clayton's Jazz World* (1986)

Lee Collins (1901-1960)

Trumpeter. Well-known for playing on blues records, accompanying singers such as Victoria Spivey.

Autobiography: *Oh, Didn't He Ramble: The Life Story of Lee Collins* (1974)

Eddie Condon (1905-1973)

Banjoist and guitarist. Soloist who played in various groups including, at one time, that of Louis Armstrong.

Autobiography: *We Called It Music* (1947)

Miles Davis (1926-1991)

Trumpeter. Developed jazz in new directions, including those resulting in free jazz and fusion. In 1959, recorded most popular jazz record of all time, 'Kind of Blue'.

Autobiography: *Miles, The Autobiography* (1989)

Harry Dial (1908-1987)

Drummer. Accompanied various singers, including Ella Fitzgerald.

Autobiography: *All This Jazz About Jazz: The Autobiography of Harry Dial* (1984)

Duke Ellington (1899-1974)

Composer, pianist and bandleader. Began his career in the 'Cotton Club', and went on to compose film scores and sacred music, bridging the gap between classical and jazz music.

Autobiography: *Music is my Mistress* (1973)

George 'Pops' Foster (1892-1969)

Tuba player and bassist. Played with various bands including those of Mezz Mezzrow and Sidney Bechet.

Autobiography: *Pops Foster: The Autobiography of a New Orleans Jazz Musician* (1971)

Bud Freeman (1906-1991)

Tenor Saxophonist. Session musician who played with, amongst others, Eddie Condon and Benny Goodman.

Autobiography: *Crazeology: The Autobiography of a Chicago Jazzman* (1989)

Dizzy Gillespie (1917-1993)

Trumpeter. Pioneer of bebop who toured extensively and led his own quintet.

Autobiography: *To Be Or Not To Bop: The Autobiography of Dizzy Gillespie* (1979)

Babs Gonzales (1919-1980)

Vocalist. Successful scat singer who composed and promoted jazz singing.

Autobiography: *I Paid My Dues: Good Times - No Bread* (1967)

Lionel Hampton (1908-2002)

Vibraphonist and drummer. Well-known for being a member of the Benny Goodman quartet, one of the first multi-racial groups to perform on stage in the United States.

Autobiography: *Hamp* (1989)

W.C. Handy (1873-1958)

Composer and pianist. Credited with composing countless well-known blues songs and spirituals.

Autobiography: *Father of the Blues* (1941)

Hampton Hawes (1928-1977)

Pianist. Developed bebop style of piano playing; suffered from what became a fatal drug addiction.

Autobiography: *Raise Up Off Me* (1974)

Woody Herman (1913-1987)

Clarinetist, saxophonist and bandleader. Well-known for fronting a series of big bands known as 'herds'. Spent periods as a vocalist. Toured extensively.

Autobiography: *The Woodchopper's Ball* (1990)

Milt Hinton (1910-2000)

Double bassist. Played with Cab Calloway's band for many years and was one of the most recorded jazz artists of all time.

Autobiography: *Bass Line: The Stories and Photographs of Milt Hinton* (1988)

Billie Holiday (1915-1959)

Singer. Holiday is most famous for her interpretation of the song 'Strange Fruit', which described lynching scenes in the American South. Also suffered from a fatal drug addiction.

Autobiography: *Lady Sings the Blues* (1956)

Max Kaminsky (1908-1994)

Trumpeter. Session musician and member of various bands, including those of Eddie Condon and Mezz Mezzrow.

Autobiography: *My Life in Jazz* (1965)

Mezz Mezzrow (1899-1972)

Clarinetist. Wrote one of the most famous and controversial jazz autobiographies, in which he claimed he had physically turned his skin black.

Autobiography: *Really the Blues* (1946)

Charles Mingus (1922-1979)

Bassist, composer and bandleader. Worked with many famous musicians, including Ellington and Gillespie; made his name composing in an improvisational and constantly developing style.

Autobiography: *Beneath the Underdog* (1971)

Jelly Roll Morton (1890-1941)

Pianist, bandleader and composer. Morton was a colourful musician of Creole origin who famously claimed to be 'the inventor of jazz'. His recordings are seen as essential examples of New Orleans style.

Autobiographical material: in Alan Lomax, *Mr Jelly Roll* (1991)

Art Pepper (1925-1982)

Alto and tenor saxophonist. Famously played in multi-racial groups.

Autobiography: *Straight Life: The Story of Art Pepper* (1979)

Sammy Price (1908-1992)

Pianist and composer. Worked as a session musician, soloist, and formed his own band.

Autobiography: *What Do They Want? A Jazz Autobiography* (1989)

Nina Simone (1933-2003)

Singer and pianist. Well-known for new vocal interpretations of popular songs.

Successful classical pianist before becoming involved in jazz; was politically active.

Autobiography: *I Put A Spell On You* (1991)

Willie ‘The Lion’ Smith (1897-1973)

Pianist. A regular in Harlem clubs, an exponent of the ‘ragtime’ style of piano playing, and an extensively recorded soloist.

Autobiography: *Music On My Mind: The Memoirs of An American Pianist* (1965)

Rex Stewart (1907-1967)

Cornettist. Played in Duke Ellington Orchestra for eleven years and toured Europe extensively.

Autobiography: *Boy Meets Horn* (1991)

Dicky Wells (1907-1985)

Trombonist. Developed distinctive style which characterised the ‘Swing Era’.

Autobiography: *The Night People: The Jazz Life of Dicky Wells* (1971)

Mary Lou Williams (1910-1981)

Pianist and composer. One of the few women to be famous for jazz piano, playing in the first half of the twentieth century. Wrote and arranged for Duke Ellington, and also led her own bands.

Autobiographical material: ‘Autobiography, 1954’ in Robert Gottlieb (ed.), *Reading Jazz: A Gathering of Autobiography, Reportage and Criticism from 1919 to now* (1997)

Teddy Wilson (1912-1986)

Pianist. Pioneer of the Swing era. Worked with, among others, Billie Holiday and Benny Goodman.

Autobiography: Teddy Wilson Talks Jazz (1996)

Appendix Two: Musical Texts

A) Spirituals

1) 'Don't Talk About Suffering' (quoted in Charlton, Lewis, *The Life of Lewis Charlton, A Poor Old Slave, Who, For Twenty-Eight Years, Suffered in American Bondage* (New Brunswick: Pitts and Crocket: c.1865) pp. 21-22

Don't talk about suffering here below
But talk about love like Jesus
My Saviour smiles and bids me come.

Don't talk about suffering here below
But talk about love like Jesus,
I hope to shout and never stop
Until I reach the mountain top.

Don't talk about suffering here below
But talk about love like Jesus,
Oh! Satan leave me for I must go,
The Lord has called me from here below.

Don't talk about suffering here below

But talk about love like Jesus,
Jesus, my all, to Heaven has gone
Whom I fix my hopes upon.

Don't talk about suffering here below
But talk about love like Jesus.

2) 'How long' (quoted in Charlton, Lewis, *The Life of Lewis Charlton, A Poor Old Slave, Who, For Twenty-Eight Years, Suffered in American Bondage* (New Brunswick: Pitts and Crocket: c.1865) p. 23

How long, how long, how long,
Good Lord shall I suffer here,
Jesus my all to Heaven has gone,
How shall I suffer here.
Whom I fix my hopes upon,
How shall I suffer here.
How long, how long, how long, Good Lord shall I suffer here,
The ship is about to enter,
See how I suffer here
Sailing from earth home to glory,
See how I suffer here.
Oh! How long, how long shall I suffer here?

A few more days in sorrow,
See how I suffer here,
Then to glory I will go
And be done suffering here.

B) Minstrel Songs

1) 'The Voodoo Man' (quoted in Jones, LeRoi, *Blues People* (1963) (Edinburgh: Payback, 1995) p.85

I've been hoodooed, hoodooed
Hoodooed by a negro voodoo;
I've been hoodooed, hoodooed,
Hoodooed by a big black coon.

A coon for me had a great infatuation;
Wanted for to marry me but had no situation.
When I refused, that coon he got wild.
Says he, "I'm bound for to hoodoo this child."

He went out and got a rabbit's foot and burned it with a frog

Right by the road where I had to pass along.

Ever since that time my head's been wrong.

2) 'Whistling Coon' from *The Songs and Ballads Sung by the Moore & Burgess Minstrels At the St James's Hall, London* (London: Moore & Burgess, c.1885)

I've met in my time some very funny fellows,

But the funniest of all I know,

Is a coloured individual, as sure as you're alive,

He's as black as any black crow.

You may talk until you're tired but you'll never get a word

From this very funny, queer old coon;

He's a knock-knee'd, double-jointed, hanky-panky moke,

And he's happy when he whistles this tune. (whistle)

He's got a pair of lips like a pound of liver split

And a nose like an india-rubber shoe.

He's a lumpy happy chuckle headed muckle larry rug,

And he whistles like a happy killaroo.

He's an independent, free and easy, fat and greasy ham.

With a cranium like a big baboon.

I never heard him talk to anybody in my life,
But he's happy when he whistles this tune. (whistle)

He'll whistle in the morning, thro' the day and thro' the night.

He'll whistle to the children in bed,

He'll whistle like a locomotive engine in his sleep,

He'll whistle and stand on his head.

One day a fellow hit him with a brick in the mouth,

His head swelled like a balloon.

How he goes around shaking like a monkey in a fit,

And this is how he whistles his tune.

C) Blues

1) Billie Holiday 'Strange Fruit'

Southern trees bear a strange fruit

Blood on the leaves and blood at the roots

Black bodies swinging in the Southern breeze

Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant South

The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth

Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh

Then the sudden smell of burning flesh.

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck.
For the sun to rot, for the tree to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

Rec. 12 Feb. 1945. *Ultimate Billie Holiday* (Polygram, 1997)

Appendix Three: Details of Musical Excerpts

Excerpt One: the worksong

‘Rosie’ (Traditional)

Performed by inmates of the Parchman Farm Penitentiary in 1947: C.B. Cook (lead singer), Andrew Harris, Willie Heardon, Dan Butler, Clarence Alexander, and six others. (2:50)

From: Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, eds., *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature* (London: Norton, 1997), Audio Companion

Excerpt Two: the spiritual

‘Steal Away to Jesus’ (Traditional)

Performed by Bernice Johnson Reagon in 1945. (3:41)

From: Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, eds., *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature* (London: Norton, 1997), Audio Companion

Excerpt Three: the blues (1)

‘Good Morning Blues’ (Ledbetter)

Performed by Huddie Ledbetter in 1940. (2:55)

From: RCA LP - LPV-505 (1964)

Excerpt Four: the blues (2)

‘Black Snake Moan’ (Spivey/ Johnson)

Performed by Blind Lemon Jefferson (vocal, guitar) on March 14, 1927. (3:00)

From Columbia CD 4689922 *The Story of the Blues* (1991)

Excerpt Five: Jazz

‘It Don’t Mean a Thing (If it Ain’t Got That Swing) (Ellington)

Performed by Duke Ellington with Ivie Anderson in 1932 (3:04)

From Columbia LP - C3L27

Excerpt Six: Billie Holiday

‘Strange Fruit’

Performed by Billie Holiday on April 20, 1939 (3:07)

From BUD Music CD3005

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