The Performance of Jazz Autobiography

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After a long period of critical neglect, the autobiographical writings of jazz musicians have now begun to provoke scholarly interest. While musicians published accounts of their lives and accomplishments as early as the 1920s and '30s,[1] the extensive body of texts we call "jazz autobiography" has generally been dismissed as the literarily insignificant, often ghost-written self-promotion of jazz celebrities trying to further their careers, or as memoirs of marginal figures seeking to cash in on the financial rewards offered by the market value of jazz. To my knowledge, no major study of American autobiography, nor any essay in a collection of articles on the subject, so much as mentions jazz autobiographies, with the single exception of Rebecca Chalmers Barton's *Witnesses for Freedom: Negro Americans in Autobiography*, which devotes a short chapter to blues composer W. C. Handy's *Father of the Blues* (1941). As Mark Sanders acknowledges, the life writings "of numerous African American entertainers and popular figures remain ignored by the critical community," even though they "have much to add to what we understand as American and African American self-portraiture" (456-457).

Christopher Harlos has identified the publication of an increasing number of life narratives by jazz musicians in the 1980s and '90s as evidence of a changed textual field in jazz studies (cf. 132-133). Nearly a decade after Harlos published his essay, at a time when the "battles" over jazz and its role in American culture and history are still being fought, we need to extend Harlos's assumptions and

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[1]The earliest jazz autobiographies are Paul Whiteman's *Jazz* (1926), Louis Armstrong's *Swing That Music* (1936), and Benny Goodman's *Kingdom of Swing* (1939).

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read jazz autobiographies through a complex frame of critical reference. While one side of the present cultural divide on jazz has embraced a coherent and conveniently reductive narrative of democratic and artistic triumphs (as in Ken Burns's recent multi-volume documentary *Jazz*), the "other" side of jazz studies labors against the simplification of jazz's many complexities.[2] Brent Hayes Edwards's description of that "other" type of jazz scholarship guides my own investigation into the politics and performance dynamics of jazz autobiography:

> [I]t is undaunted by the insights of poststructuralist theory into issues of voice and text; it . . . seeks new interdisciplinary approaches to the music; it matches a commitment to revisionary historicization (striving to tell the story of the music beyond anecdotal mystification, without wallowing in the cults of personality and pathology) with a concern for the intricacies of cultural politics—the ways the music reflects dynamics of race, class, sexuality, and gender. (Introduction 5)

The present essay develops a theoretical lens through which jazz autobiographies can be read productively, without either accepting the basic "untruth" of autobiographical narrative, as poststructuralist critics might advocate, or damning the texts to the status of simple eye-witness accounts. I will focus on five major texts and explore the narrative strategies the musicians mobilize to fashion autobiographical selves that echo the complexities and dynamics of jazz practices. Instead of creating stable and fixed selves, Louis Armstrong's multiple autobiographies (1936-70), Mezz Mezzrow's *Really the Blues* (1946), Billie Holiday's *Lady Sings the Blues* (1956), Charles Mingus's *Beneath the Underdog* (1971), and Duke Ellington's *Music Is My Mistress* (1973) invent elusive autobiographical personas that are positioned extra-textually and only signified upon in the narratives, thus creating compelling *public* images. These images render the autobiographical self unstable and shifting, improvised and performed, as musical improvisation is translated into autobiographical narration through the invention of a self that cannot be pinned down and that is conjured as an element of an overall self-mythology. The musicians preserve the popular myth of artistic genius—the elusive nature of improvisatory originality and its display in the fleeting moment—while at the same time becoming "coconspirators in the crafting of their public images" (Gennari, "But Is It Jazz?" 91). As cultural heroes and co-creators of an extensive jazz mythology, they imagine themselves to be

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[2]See also Gabbard and Radano. For a deconstruction of the streamlined version of jazz history, see Gennari, "Jazz Criticism," and DeVeaux.

"beyond category," as Ellington liked to put it.[3]

Four questions center this investigation: Why have so many jazz musicians turned to autobiography? How do they negotiate between the aesthetics of autobiographical realism and the creative possibilities offered by the invention of a literary self? How does the form of autobiography shape the musicians' choices of authorial voice, style, structure, and content? And how do they connect the improvisatory and performative practices we find in jazz with the static form of written text? I discuss the many impulses that compel jazz musicians to publish written versions of their lives in a first section (Autobiographical Impulses[4]); section two assembles a concept of autobiographical performativity (Autobiographical Improvisations). The final section applies the performance paradigm to the autobiographies of Armstrong, Mezzrow, Holiday, Mingus, and Ellington (Autobiographical Practices).

Autobiographical Impulses

The reasons for jazz players' turn to autobiography are manifold. Jazz historians, musicologists, and journalists have long worked to erect a pantheon of jazz masters. Autobiography, capitalizing on the resulting infatuation with heroic tales of musical and personal success, is therefore premeditated as the medium by which jazz musicians tell their stories. Furthermore, since the standard narrative of jazz follows the music's "low" beginnings in New Orleans to its achievement first of popular and then of art status in the 1930s and '40s, autobiographical narration lends itself conveniently to the recounting of memories and experiences of those who lived and played the music. Louis Armstrong, perhaps the most visible and charismatic among jazz's many icons, is a case in point. In the introduction to the music section included in Armstrong's first autobiography, *Swing That Music*, Horace Gerlach, a British musician, opines: "Louis Armstrong's story of the evolution of modern American music has traced its growth from the barbaric phase through to today's refined and developed forms" (125). Gerlach's view recalls Spengemann and Lundquist's assertion of an American autobiographical myth, which, "in its most general form, describes human history as a pilgrimage from imperfection to perfection . . ." (503). This narrative of ascent, from sin to redemption, slavery to freedom, country to city, poverty to

[3]See also Hasse.

[4]I borrow the term from Gunn 12.

wealth, immigrant to American citizen, and "primitive" to modern, is inscribed in traditional jazz history, and it provides an equally common narrative pattern for American autobiography.

Jazz autobiography, then, capitalizes on this myth of personal and cultural ascendancy. The cover of the first Signet paperback edition of *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* shows how Armstrong's publishers appropriated American autobiographical myth. "The riotous story of the ONE AND ONLY *Satchmo*," the caption reads, while the back cover announces: "FROM SLUM BOY TO JAZZ KING! You'll laugh and cry and enjoy every minute of this tender, hilarious, rollicking autobiography of Satchmo—the world's greatest jazz trumpeter—and an all-time great as a man." Apart from functioning as marketing ploy and authenticating documents, the paratexts stand in a tensional relationship to the actual narrative.[5] In his writings, Armstrong demonstrates his familiarity with the myth, but not without creating narrative disruption. His autobiographies project a personality that remains positioned outside of the text; because it is not accepted as part of the myth, it is unable to unfold within the confines of the mythological patterns sanctioned by American popular ideologies.

As part of the Western, modern, secular, capitalist, male mythos, autobiography narrates a process of singularization, an affirmation of an already existing significant persona. "The writer's singularity is at once a premise and an end of autobiography," John Sturrock notes. "The autobiographer already has a proper name that is known to others as a result of the public achievements that entitle him to come forward as an autobiographer; he is singular to start with. The function of the account he will give is to reaffirm his singularity from within, by justifying it not as an original given but as a lived process" (27).[6] Duke Ellington's *Music Is My Mistress* demonstrates jazz autobiography's double allegiance to autobiographical politics and poetics. The autobiography's opening lines establish a fairy-tale version of predestination and thereby affirm and mock the process of singularization: "Once upon a time a beautiful young lady and a very handsome young man fell in love and got married," the story begins. "They were

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[5]William Kenney writes: "*Swing That Music* offers a sort of conversation between whites that frames the black jazz star's narrative, recreating the structural characteristics of the nineteenth-century former slave narratives that were similarly surrounded by the comments of white abolitionists" (40).

[6]This view has been criticized for its narrowness and focus on the canonical works of the Western male tradition. See also Smith and Watson.

a wonderful, compatible couple, and God blessed their marriage with a fine baby boy. . . . 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" (x). These sentences code Ellington's narrative of success ironically in "white" terms. The "Duke" is the son of a beautiful lady and a handsome young man; in this Americanized fairy tale, the black musician invents himself as the chosen one, a visionary destined to change the course of American music.

Sturrock's emphasis on autobiography as the representation of an important life in process also holds significance for jazz autobiography because the musicians enter into the public negotiation over their personal images at moments when their names and faces are already associated with expectations shaped by preceding acts of presentation (magazine articles, reviews, novels, poems) and self-presentation (album covers, live performances, the music itself, interviews). Billie Holiday's public life, for instance, had already been dissected in the press by the time *Lady Sings the Blues* was published in 1956, and Armstrong had been recognized as the musical hero of the Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings of the mid- to late 1920s when *Swing That Music* was published in 1936.

The autobiographical recounting of the process of singularization is frequently motivated by a crisis, personal or cultural, that initiates a search for answers about the self and its position in the surrounding culture (cf. Hornung 70). For writers routinely forced to the margins of American culture—African Americans (Mingus, Ellington, Holiday, Armstrong), Jewish Americans (Mezzrow), women (Holiday), and jazz musicians in general—the notion of crisis is self-evident. Jazz autobiographies frequently address pre-existing images, myths, and misrepresentations of "blackness" and "jazz." But instead of simply refuting these images, the musicians utilize the creative and liberating potential inherent in the writing of their life stories; thus, they frequently seize the opportunity to re-mythologize themselves. Craig Hansen Werner demonstrates how racial mythology and subversive counter-mythology are linked through W. E. B. Du Bois's notion of *double consciousness*: "A particular myth," Werner argues, "simultaneously imposes a particular interpretation/understanding of experience and points to the more complex history behind that understanding. A comprehensive understanding therefore demands awareness of both the system that imposes the myth [*gift* as poison] and the history it veils from sight" (64-65), the gift of double vision. Jazz autobiographies, I would suggest, narrate cultural myths and counter-myths at the same time. They "unfix" pre-existing myths

about jazz by rejecting what Barthes calls the "*already* complete[ness]" (117) of myth and by reinstating alternative versions of self and music.

The personal or cultural crisis Alfred Hornung identifies as the starting point for autobiography finds a parallel in the artistic processes involved in jazz performance. For one, Ralph Ellison's definition of the blues as "an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically" (129) locates Hornung's autobiographical crisis within African-American musical experience. In addition, Roger Porter has described how autobiographers seek "an informing plan that gives meaning to their lives even as they acknowledge a certain formlessness in them. If the life is fragmented, autobiographers seem to say, then writing the self into coherence testifies to an ability to remake oneself" (xiv). Jazz autobiographies, however, occupy a more complicated position. Armstrong, Mezzrow, Holiday, Mingus, and Ellington certainly engage in remaking themselves, but they continually undermine, question, and trouble the very coherence Porter's assessment implies. In *Beneath the Underdog*, for instance, the narrative frame of the therapy session signals the text to be a mode of soul-searching. But when Mingus's therapist notes, "'That sounds like the happy ending of a romantic novel, Charles. Hero escapes life of vice and corruption and takes up with new love,'" Mingus replies sardonically, "'Nope, the hero didn't escape, Dr. Wallach, I guess endings don't come that easy'" (305). The fragmentation and formlessness of life, though transformed into an autobiographical narrative, never ceases to gravitate back to the fluidity more typical of life and the aesthetics of jazz.

Besides the urge to assemble unique and fluid autobiographical identities out of the cultural materials available to the musicians, a second element of crisis initiating the turn to jazz autobiography is the musicians' desire to correct what has been written about the music by journalists and critics, who are often regarded as colonizing outsiders. Harlos thus maintains that "the turn to autobiography is regarded as a genuine opportunity to seize narrative authority" and "deconstruct the label *jazz*" (italics in the original; 134). Mingus, for instance, rejects *jazz* and accents issues such as misrepresentation, economic exploitation sanctioned by racism, and a racially restricted musical topography. In a letter to his friend, the jazz critic Nat Hentoff, he complains: "I am a good composer with great possibilities and I made an easy success through jazz but it wasn't really success—jazz has too many strangling qualities for a composer. . . . If I want it

right, Nat, guess I'll have to leave jazz—that word leaves room for too much fooling" (*Beneath* 340).[7]

Since most musicians express dissatisfaction with "jazz" as a label for their music, autobiographies provide discursive space for reassessment and reconfiguration. Questions of authority lie at the center of debates over jazz, and they are of substantial concern in autobiography studies, as well. Who is authorized to "set the record straight" and supplant conventional historiography's objectification of experience with personal narrative? Who can legitimately speak or write of personal experience and history? And can we award special authority to "insider" perspectives, to the narratives of jazz musicians, who, after all, were "there" and can recount what they thought, felt, heard, and played? According to one view of autobiographical theory, which operates by what G. Thomas Couser labels a "metaphysics of presence," "autobiography is non-fictional, since it records the experience of a historical person, not an invented 'character.'" A related assumption, Couser continues, "is that the author is present in the text, that a pre-existent unique personality can be conveyed through—or despite—literary mediation." However, autobiography should rather be understood "not *as produced by* a pre-existing self but as *producing* a provisional and contingent one[,] . . . bound and (pre)determined by the constraints of the linguistic resources and narrative tropes available to the 'author'" (italics in the original; Couser 15, 19).

If we acknowledge the pitfalls of autobiographical memory and historical "truth," then why is there, as Harlos reminds us, "an overarching sentiment that a good deal written about the music does not necessarily correspond with the sensibility or even lived experiences of the musicians themselves?" And why do readers and scholars reach for jazz autobiographies as "a significant alternative to 'mainstream' jazz history" (137)? Answers to these questions, I believe, involve the opportunity for jazz autobiographers to create narratives that can be regarded as works of art, which incorporate not only the musicians' take on such issues as composing, performing, practicing, soloing, recording, and touring, but

[7]Mingus's aim had been "to write about the true jazz scene that has made our *masters* millions and taken the most famed to their penniless graves they had awaited as the only escape from the invisible chains on black jazz as an art" (italics in the original; qtd. in Santoro 175). For Duke Ellington, "'Jazz' is only a word and really has no meaning. We stopped using it in 1943. To keep the whole thing clear, once and for all, I don't believe in categories of any kind" (452).

which also convey a specific self-image of the player and provide political and social commentary on their reception by jazz audiences.

Mingus's romantic (and often pornographic and misogynist) tale of sexual conquests and his search for true artistry and self-expression moves the text from potential musical analysis to a controversial self-portrait. Like Holiday's *Lady Sings the Blues* and Armstrong's writings, this work forgoes musical analyses and detailed descriptions of musical performances. Indeed, the significance of such literary works of jazz musicians lies exactly in the realization that music cannot be translated into writing but gains its energy from the same artistic impulses that inspire their autobiographies. McNeilly argues accordingly that in *Beneath the Underdog*, "[j]azz music, unrepresentable in established semantic or syntactical forms, is overwritten in the text by conversations, verbal exchanges among musicians on the stand, whose voices tend to meld into a multitextured, indeterminate polylogue" (66). The music is represented by ellipses, and the conversations embracing these ellipses illuminate Mingus's autobiographical goal. His readers are encouraged to pay attention to the *literary* vision dramatized by the autobiography; the text thus goes beyond Mingus's music and thus represents more than a mere footnote to the musicians' "real" art, jazz.

Autobiographical Performances

The "performance" theorem, as employed here, is made up of different but related meanings. Feminist Judith Butler's understanding of identity as "acts, gestures, enactments . . . [that] are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications*" (italics in the original; 136) introduces the notion of identity as a performance that must be reaffirmed, or improvised, within the "normative and/or regulatory discourses" through which we "produce . . . the appearance of substance and the illusion of origins" (Christian 16). Autobiography, as a literary form that foregrounds identity construction, lends itself well to musicians whose public image stands in dialogic relation to a variety of demands (self-perception, audience appeal, institutional pressures). Identity, Karen Christian observes, becomes "a spectacle requiring an audience for interpretation" (16).

Reading jazz performance as a spectacle of self-presentation means acknowledging the parallels between the social formation of identity and the practices of jazz. As music shaped by interaction and invention, jazz obviously takes place within "normative and/or regulatory discourses" that condition each perfor-

mance and its reception. Ajay Heble elaborates: "[I]mprovisation's link with processes of identity formation and struggles for self-definition has less to do with a creative actualization of the self as a stable origin of meaning than it does with unsettling the very logic of identity" (95). That is to say, jazz improvisation engages in a negotiation of identity (in a multilogue with other players; for and in front of an audience; in a dialogue with the musical material itself) and in a constant rephrasing of identity: instead of expressing an essential identity through musical statement (reaching the core of the self at the climax of the solo), the jazz improviser's interest in creating original and exciting music troubles critics' and fans' notions of fixity and essence. The reflexive and collective dynamics of jazz and the dialogic construction of identity connect improvisatory qualities with "the slipperiness, mobility, and inventive flexibility of the speaker's discourse" (Heble 91). Jazz autobiography thus serves as a medium for musicians to transform personal aesthetics to written discourse, not by simple translation of musical principles, but by reconfiguring the artistic, social, and political impulses that also inspire and influence their music.

Heble's approach supports Sidonie Smith's notion of autobiographical performance as a means of resisting socially mandated models of self. Smith argues that autobiography is the performance of a performance, the reiteration of a self already produced and assembled in the social realm through continuous acts of narrating "historically specific identities" that gain "narrative coherence and meaning" in the social interaction with others (17). The complicated relation between interiority and exteriority, the feelings and thoughts of the individual composing the autobiography and their translation onto the written page, attains special significance because a prime interest in jazz autobiography is the search for the wellspring of identity fueling the musician's work. The jazz autobiographer negotiates between the wish to present a unique self that rivals his/her uniqueness in music and the demands of an audience of implied readers "for whom certain discourses of identity and truth make sense" and "who expect a certain kind of performativity that conforms relatively comfortably to criteria of intelligibility" (Smith 19-20). Therefore, the bourgeois notion of "soul," of an interior landscape in need of examination (through autobiographical self-questioning and "soul"-searching), is transformed in jazz autobiography to the (usually) black, elusive "soul" that drives the musician's playing and improvising.

In *Beneath the Underdog,* for instance, Mingus suffers from a divided "soul" and seeks to integrate his selves into a unified whole untroubled by the racism

and economic exploitation that dominate his life. He fails, of course; his "split" personality's explicit function is to emphasize the performative dimension of the autobiographical narrative and, in the tradition of the romantics, to locate the tortured "soul" as the source of musical creativity and compositional originality. "It is as if the autobiographical subject finds him/herself on multiple stages simultaneously, called to heterogeneous recitations of identity," Smith states, but "[t]hese multiple calls never align perfectly. Rather they create spaces or gaps, ruptures, unstable boundaries, . . . limits and their transgressions" (20). These ruptures and transgressions explain the selves that Armstrong, Mezzrow, Holiday, Mingus, and Ellington position outside of the world of their autobiographies. Aware of the constructed nature of self and identity, these musicians self-consciously manipulate the tensions between what can be portrayed in a static text and what can only be evoked through writing.

The extra-textuality of identity underscored in jazz autobiography raises questions of how the process of "literalization" can be equated with musical improvisation and performance. In this context, Richard Poirier's assessment of the "performing self" in literature is invaluable. Poirier defines "performance" as the opportunity for human beings to "release . . . energy into measured explorations of human potentialities" (xiii). Instead of looking at the text itself as the exclusive performance, he shifts the view to the actual performance/composition of that text: "The gap between the completed work . . . and the multiple acts of performance that went into it is an image of the gap between the artist's self as he [or she] discovered it in performance and the self . . . discovered afterward in the final shape and the world's reception of it" (88). In that sense, the autobiographical text becomes, not unlike a musical recording, the *result* of a performing self that has been brought into existence by the energy, the drive of the musician/writer that compels him/her to create representations of self. And if "any self-discovering, self-watching, finally self-pleasuring response to . . . pressures and difficulties" (Poirier xiii) is part of the performance, then being self-conscious about the autobiographical format and the discourses that legitimize or de-legitimize the self-presentations of jazz musicians also unveils the performative nature of the autobiographical text. That is, it signals a difference between the energy manifested in the initial occasions of writing and the published work as a fixed textual product containing residues (or clues) of the original performance.

According to Roger Porter, the performative dynamics of autobiography can thus be found in "a writer's energy that projects an ego and expresses a self through, in, or against the chosen form" (xi). Analyzing Homer's use of autobiographical form in Odysseus's tales of travel, Porter determines an "essential shiftiness" ("eluding those who seek to appropriate him for their ends [4-5]"). Placing this notion at the core of jazz autobiographical discourse, we can extrapolate that the tension between eluding and facing the audience creates an energy in jazz and jazz autobiography that produces music and text: it recreates the performativity of the music (audience involvement, self-reflexivity, writing as action) and mimics musical improvisation by constantly inventing new layers and eclectic versions of self.

Autobiographical Practices

Louis Armstrong employs two major techniques to perform as his autobiographical self. The first is a form of "versioning," an ongoing production of autobiographical narratives that generates an array of stories and anecdotes that recount a similar pattern (the myth of racial uplift; the American success story) while providing room for shifts in emphasis and voice. Such changes include the difference between the statement, "I have always loved my white folks" in *Satchmo* (152) and the much grittier tone of his interview with Richard Meryman for *Life* magazine: "'Always keep a white man behind you that'll put his hand on you and say, 'That's my nigger'" (27-28).

As early as the 1920s, Armstrong began evoking his New Orleans childhood in letters, essays, and interviews, shaping the particulars of the narrative according to audience and occasion. Standard elements are his family's poverty, his relationship to his mother and the moral lessons she taught him, New Orleans musical traditions, his love of legendary players such as Buddy Bolden and King Oliver, and the time he spent in a home for boys (where he learned to play the cornet). The autobiographies following this pattern create Armstrong's self-mythology; but instead of inserting himself into the already existing body of myths surrounding his life and career by authorizing a fixed version of his life, Armstrong mobilizes Barthes's "double function" of myth, "authorizing" several versions of his life that capitalize on the stories and legends that have grown around his persona. He invests these narratives with enough variation to call their individual authority in question, thereby rendering them instable and all the more intriguing.

The continuing impulse to narrate his life is connected to the politics of representation that reigned over the construction of Armstrong's public image. *Swing That Music* and *Satchmo* are shaped by the control the trumpeter's editors and publishers wielded over the end product.[8] Joe Glaser, Armstrong's manager, enforced an image of the all-American icon and good-will jazz ambassador and therefore suppressed the publication of a sequel to *Satchmo.* A look at the manuscript, published only after Armstrong's death, explains Glaser's concern: "This whole second book might be about nothing but gage [marijuana]. . . . Of course there'll be a lot of sore heads who'll probably resent this," Armstrong had announced (*Own Words* 114).

Editorial anticipations of audience tastes and the concern with marketing Armstrong as the smiling face of jazz encouraged a flexible autobiographical approach. Thus Armstrong accommodates his readers' interests while still shaping an ambiguous life. He accomplishes this by recasting himself as "Satchmo," a public figure assembled from the cultural echoes of Sambo, the notoriously simple-minded and accommodating minstrel character, and a "New Negro" awareness of self-reconstruction in popular entertainment. The tensions between Sambo and self-awareness (expressed mainly through irony and jive) release Armstrong's autobiographical self from fixity and signal a self that remains elusive: he is both Sambo *and* the artist playing Sambo's role; he is both accommodating and subversive.[9] Imagination and referentiality, autobiographical mask and historical being, textual self and extra-textual self: we confront an elusive autobiographical identity, a musical "genius" we can sense in the music but cannot arrest in textual form.

These ambivalences, the multiplicity of messages delivered through autobiography, rewrite jazz history and Armstrong's personal history as myths. While jazz myths abound—his invention of scat singing when he dropped the lyric sheets in the studio; his stories about the parades, funerals, whorehouses, exotic characters, and communal mores of black New Orleans, irretrievably gone by the time of his writing—Armstrong's obvious glee in reiterating these myths and his disregard for a strict script further substantiate the notion that the jazz musi-

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[8]For a detailed discussion of the editorial restrictions to which Armstrong had to submit, see Kenney.

[9]Houston Baker's concepts "mastery of form" (the "narrator's self-conscious adoption of minstrel tones and types to keep his audience tuned in" [30]) and "deformation of mastery" (the "ability to give the trick to white expectations, securing publication for creative work that carries a deep-rooted African sound" [49]) apply here.

cian's playing with biographical material and his/her distinct style of telling lies at the heart of jazz autobiography. Armstrong mobilizes improvisatory and performative impulses in every new instance of autobiographical telling; he produces a string of improvised, provisionary selves, constrained by the language and narrative tropes culturally available. There is no pre-established autobiographical model for the black jazz musician, so Armstrong assembles his own.

As a second way to evade textual stasis, Armstrong annotated his manuscripts with a multitude of markings that surround the text and seem to communicate meanings beyond the words. These markers (dashes, ellipses, apostrophes, parentheses, interjections, rhetorical questions, underlinings), which were edited out of *Swing That Music* and *Satchmo* but can be studied in Brothers's recent publication of unedited manuscripts, have been interpreted persuasively as a visualization of performative excess. Edwards's theory of "scat aesthetics," in which scat singing is said to represent an "excess of meaning, a shifting possibility of a multitude of meanings" ("Syntax" 624), demonstrates how Armstrong's autobiographical self is always in flux. Through its semantic flexibility, which Edwards and Nathaniel Mackey call a "[d]eliberately 'false' vocal production . . . supplementing the sayable"—sometimes playfully and humorously engaged in, at other times signifying emotions deeper than words—scat "creatively hallucinates a 'new world' . . . [and] indicts the more insidious falseness of the world as we know it" ("Syntax" 625). As Edwards argues, Armstrong's autobiographies transpose the indeterminacy of scat to written form: the reader has no reliable means of deciphering the rules that govern the generation of meaning. Like Armstrong's musical innovations (growls, slurs, and buzzes), his writing produces an "excess of signification" (Edwards, "Syntax" 641) that signals the musician's sense of self but that places access to that self outside of the reader's grasp.[10]

Mezz Mezzrow's *Really the Blues,* which seeks the origins of a "black" excessive expressiveness found in Armstrong's performances, is also an important

[10]Charles Keil has labeled this phenomenon "participatory discrepancies"; it includes many of Armstrong's musical trademarks, such as "inflection," "creative tensions," "groove," and "swing" (275). The trumpeter's graphic additions to, and narrative variation of, his autobiographies would constitute a "swing" or "groove" approach to literature: the annotations signal that in order to get audiences to feel the groove (or readers to respond positively to the autobiographical narrative), a performance must contain dissonances, fissures in narrative coherence that enlist audiences as decoders and invite them to take part in the performance.

specimen of jazz autobiographical performance.[11] Attempting to unveil the mystery of "black" jazz and the improvisatory genius of Mezzrow's heroes, the narrative aims to translate the mythical aura surrounding jazz and its players for a predominantly white readership, with the Jewish Mezzrow serving as interpreter. His self-proclaimed goal is "racial conversion": "I was going to be a musician, a Negro musician, hipping the world about the blues the way only Negroes can" (18). But if Mezzrow wants to become "black," wants to overcome skin color through cultural learning, then his autobiographical quest already begins as a performance. The identity captured in writing is rendered unstable and elusive from the start.

The son of Russian-Jewish immigrants, Mezzrow was known in the jazz world as a somewhat obscure figure and minor player, a "flamboyant clarinetist and sometime saxophonist, prolific weed pusher, self-professed opium eater, and prototypical 'white Negro' hipster" (Wald 53). Mezzrow taps into the debates over New Orleans jazz, Dixieland, swing, and bebop raging in the early 1940s, when he was working on the autobiography.[12] Entering these discourses, Mezzrow places the autobiographical interest in his life on his "cross[ing] the color line" (320) and on the uniqueness of his experience. On the final pages of the autobiography, he is told by journalist and co-writer Bernard Wolfe that his life is "a chunk of Americana, . . . and it should get written. It's a real American success story, upside down: Horatio Alger standing on his head" (334). This self-conscious employment of American autobiographical patterns, cast as a reversal of the Alger myth, in fact uses the prototypical success story and manifests Spengemann and Lundquist's autobiographical myth: readers identifying as hipsters and jazz fans can embrace Mezzrow's rejection of the "square" white world

[11]Mezzrow's narrative, like all other autobiographies discussed in this essay, is not the exclusive product of the jazz musician. Armstrong was edited all his life; *Lady Sings the Blues* is assembled from interviews and articles by William Dufty; *Beneath the Underdog* was shortened and edited by Nel King; *Music Is My Mistress* was put together by Stanley Dance. One could argue that the very collaboration between musician and editor/co-writer constitutes yet another element of performance in which the text is shaped interactively. Count Basie and Albert Murray declare this to be the aesthetic principle of Basie's autobiography. Basie says: "I finally decided to bring in a co-writer and see if I could work things out with him, the same way that I've spent all of these years working up materials for the band with my staff arrangers. . . . [Murray] comps for me pretty much as I have always done for my soloists" (xiii).

[12]For further analysis of these debates, see Gendron. Mezzrow also appropriates patriarchal structures by celebrating the masculinist ethos of jazz. For a critique of this position, see Wald and Monson, "The Problem with White Hipness."

and take the musician's attainment of quasi-mythical status in New Orleans jazz to be the narrative's expression of success.

Mezzrow's declaration of racial conversion points to an essential conflict in *Really the Blues.* While his transformation can never be complete in the world outside of the text, it can be narrated as a successful performance. As Wald notes, "Mezzrow stakes the authenticity of his narrative on his ability to compel the reader's belief in the naturalness of his own performance" (72). Like Armstrong, whose extra-textual markers and ambivalent presentations of self create participatory discrepancies, Mezzrow asks his readers to rescue the text from stasis. His striving for "blackness" and his conversion to jazz, as Wald correctly points out, "can be interpreted as a set of narrative variations on a single, but never exhausted, theme: Mezzrow's life-long pursuit of a standard of cultural or racial 'realness,' which, because it derives from his own idealized constructs of 'black authenticity,' he can never really achieve" (63). His readers, then, are asked to judge his improvisations on that theme and marvel at Mezzrow's skilful handling of his life.

Part of *Really the Blues*'s innovation lies in Mezzrow's use of language, an exaggerated hipster argot and jazz jive cast as representative of African-American expressive practices and identified as the source of "authenticity." This verbal appropriation locks the autobiography into a complex position. As a "bordered" text, one that negotiates between "racial" worlds demarcated as mutually exclusive by socially and politically enforced norms, *Really the Blues* derives its performative energy from an oscillation between Jewish hipsterism and the "black" world of jazz. Mezzrow improvises his "word jazz" in an extended jive section and then explains how the performance is structured; the relation between orality and text becomes the subject of examination: "[Y]ou don't get the full flavor of this street-corner poetry. This lingo has to be heard, not seen, because its free-flowing rhythms and intonations and easy elisions, all following a kind of instinctive musical pattern . . ., can only hit the ear, not the eye" (italics in the original; 220). This insight is paradigmatic for Mezzrow's autobiography and can be applied to jazz autobiography in general. That is, the life narratives' main contribution to our understanding of jazz discourse is the notion that music and identity cannot be easily represented in writing. As Fritz Gysin has argued, "it is exactly the anxiety of voice that seems to be at the core of . . . texts preoccupied with Jazz [sic]." Applied to the performative dynamics in autobiographical writing, the "problematic of voice" (Gysin 277) also becomes the problematic of self:

Mezzrow's obviously stylized and overdetermined use of jive marks identity as a series of improvisations and the text as a performance. Verbal style, the improvisation with materials by altering and personalizing them, substitutes in the text for the elusiveness of music and suggests the existence of a self that resides in the performance, is activated through the performance, and temporarily erases the modernists' distinction between life (*Lebenswelt*) and poetic practice (cf. Ostendorf 524).[13]

Myths of blackness and the mythical potential of jazz as a life force close to the human spirit, able to salvage the lost modern self from alienation, underscore Mezzrow's investment in jazz mythology. Rejecting swing music as inauthentic and commercial, Mezzrow realizes that by 1927-28, "Storyville was fast becoming just another chapter in the jazzman's storybook, a fable about some mythical land-of-dreams" (138). The aim of the autobiography is to soak up the legendary power of New Orleans jazz. At the end of the narrative, Mezzrow falls into a trance induced by the powerful spirit of the music and the energy released by the interaction with his band mates. He is finally able to speak "the ageless language of New Orleans" and metamorphoses into a list of black New Orleans jazzmen: "I was Jimmy Noone and Johnny Dodds and Sidney Bechet, swinging down Rampart Street and Basin Street and Perdido Street, down through Storyville, . . . blowing all the joy and bounce of life through my clarinet." Mezzrow unites the magic of these players and dreams that he is "back in the great days when jazz was born, back at the throbbing root and source of all jazz, making it all fresh and new." Issues of identity, ethnicity, and class dissolve into the autobiography's self-mythology: Mezzrow becomes "authentic," becomes Other, and solves the riddle of self-knowledge while performing jazz. He can finally "speak [his] piece" (322-323).

I would argue that the passages quoted above express a keen understanding of jazz that captures a fundamental ambiguity characteristic of the music. If, as Ostendorf suggests, jazz performance is the coexistence of ecstasy and fleeting-

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[13]Mezzrow's quest for self-knowledge is ultimately connected to the possibilities implicit in the jazz player's perception of America, the opportunity for re-inventing and remaking oneself. "I was . . . a Chicago-born Jew from Russian parents, and I'd hardly ever been south of the Capone district, but I sounded like I arrived from the levee last Juvember," Mezzrow boasts (111-112). This juxtaposition of inherited Jewishness with chosen "blackness" indicates ways in which the world of entertainment promises discursive space for self-construction. The son of Jewish immigrants improvises a new identity that shuttles back and forth between cultural allegiances. Mezzrow's identity of choice utilizes the appeal of black culture but retains the possibility of returning to "whiteness" or "Jewishness"—the performance can be turned on and off.

ness/elusiveness (cf. 525), then Mezzrow's trance-like state gives shape to the ecstatic element of jazz as well as its existence in the moment. Once the music ends, Mezzrow will be himself again. Therefore, the autobiographical self is released from fixity by the act of finding itself in the musical performance, in the fleeting sounds of jazz and in the interaction with other players: For a few moments, Mezzrow is able to shed his provisional self (the Jewish hipster longing to be "authentically" black) and become a mensch, someone no longer defined by the normative/regulatory discourses that stigmatize Jewishness, blackness, *and* jazz, but someone defining himself in and through his music.[14] Identity, autobiographical and Other, Mezzrow is telling us, can never exist without continuous negotiation.

Billie Holiday's *Lady Sings the Blues* echoes the sensationalism of Mezzrow's autobiography in its portrayal of a persona audiences and readers already knew from the popular press. The narrative never ventures beyond this bandstand persona but only indicates the existence of an extra-textual self that precedes the autobiographical act and that appears in the text only as a trace. Robert O'Meally has pointed to substantial incongruities between Holiday's life and its appearance in the autobiography. But instead of merely "correcting" myths or lamenting Holiday's infatuation with, and perpetuation of, her own self-mythology, O'Meally situates the original impulse for autobiographical self-invention within Holiday's overall artistic impulse: her public faces "were among her compositions" (21) and part of the "shining identity as an artist" (10) she claimed for herself. In other words, the jazz musician's art is generated through the embrace of a multiplex public image (or mask) that allows her to elude appropriation while producing a series of satisfactory performances. This is an essential lesson taught by jazz autobiography: every writer examined in this essay creates a public stand-in, a figure that diverts the audience's gaze from the artist's private self. This elusiveness is understood as essential to the act of musical creation because musical performance derives much of its power from the veil that separates audience and performer and clothes the act in an aura of "geniality."

Lady Sings the Blues simultaneously obscures and reconfigures Holiday's life story. In fact, we are reading William Dufty's biography of Holiday, but it is told

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[14]His father reminds him to "sei a mensch" (italics in the original; 188). Mezzrow translates the phrase from Yiddish as "to be human." *Menshlichkayt* signals, in the words of Irving Howe, "a readiness to live for ideals beyond the clamor of self, a sense of plebeian fraternity, an ability to forge a community of moral order even while remaining subject to a society of social disorder. . . ." (645).

from Holiday's perspective and is based on a series of self-portraits Holidays had made public in interviews throughout her career. This fact troubles our common understanding of *auto*biography and complicates the analysis of Holiday's authority regarding how she was represented in print. But instead of rejecting *Lady Sings the Blues* as a ghost-written and sensationalized celebrity biography, I want to adopt O'Meally's and Farah Jasmine Griffin's position toward the text. Even though it is impossible to tell exactly how much of the autobiography is Dufty's invention and how much of it goes back to his personal knowledge of, and his many conversations with, Holiday, Griffin is right to conclude: "So much of the autobiography repeats information appearing in interviews given years before its publication" that we can assume that Holiday "had some role in constructing the way her story would be told" (51). This transference from autobiography (the conflicting life stories Holiday told to the press) to biography (Dufty's interpretation and assembling of these stories) is significant—the autobiographical "Holiday" emerges only as a textual construction, and Holiday's apparent willingness to let Dufty's narrative stand as authoritative and keep herself hidden behind the autobiographical mask evoked in *Lady Sings the Blues* is in itself symptomatic. Thus, whenever we speak of Holiday as the implied author and protagonist of *Lady Sings the Blues*, we are speaking of a textual construct influenced by Holiday herself but controlled by Dufty.

After delving into her history as a troubled child (she grows up without a father; her family is poor; she gets raped when she is only ten years old), Holiday "tries on" different identities, such as maid, prostitute, dancer, and singer. Although these autobiographical personas satisfy the popular interest in the tragedy and drama in Holiday's life, they also provide her with significant narrative space to sanction a public self-image. Poirier's observations on the nature of the written self are worth recalling here: he distinguishes between "the completed work" (here: *Lady Sings the Blues*) and "the multiple acts of performance that went into it" (Holiday's self-mythology). In Holiday's case, the artist presenting herself in a series of original performances and the editor/writer who assembled and rewrote these performances are different individuals acting at different times and with different agendas. While it is Dufty's job to turn her story into appealing form, Holiday's interests lie elsewhere: the slipperiness and inventive flexibility of Holiday's self-inventions undermine the autobiography's claim to authenticity and thereby reinforce the elusiveness with which she invests herself in the public eye.

Farah Jasmine Griffin offers a compelling reading of Holiday's projection of a calculated self: "In many ways, this is not the life story of Eleanora Fagan [Holiday's birth name]," Griffin maintains, "or maybe not even the story of Billie Holiday [the name on the cover], but it is the story of Lady Day [the name given to her by Lester Young]" (50). Changing her family history, for instance, and investing her life as a teenager with the stuff of jazz legend (listening to Armstrong and Bessie Smith recordings in a whorehouse), Holiday focuses on her own innocence and the abuse she suffered from others. She improvises, as Heble suggests, "a narrative of origins" (108) that not only reshapes experience into compelling form but also arrives at the past by way of the present. While her professional history was more or less known (an *Ebony* feature article in 1949 had told her story), her childhood years were not. Holiday thus forces Dufty to improvise her life story: she provides him only with a general framework of "facts" and invented events and lets him shape them into autobiographical form. However, by manipulating the public knowledge about her life—the stuff of the autobiographical narrative—she also takes a major role in constructing, and simultaneously deconstructing, her own public face. The autobiography can therefore be read as a testament to the complexity of the singer's self image and her desire to escape fixed expectations of what it meant to be a black woman in the 1930s-50s.

Since Heble, O'Meally, and Griffin provide instructive readings of Holiday's autobiography, I will confine myself here to a brief analysis of a narrative dissonance that confirms Heble's connection between the fluidity of identity formation (social and autobiographical) and the jazz player's push to reinvent herself over and over again. Dissonance occurs when Holiday's story opens itself to interpretations that trouble a one-dimensional understanding of the singer's life. A first crack in *Lady Sings the Blues* appears only a few pages into it, when Holiday remembers her great-grandmother. Having lived as a slave on an Irish slaveholder's plantation in Virginia, the great-grandmother "used to tell [Holiday] how it felt to be a slave, to be owned body and soul by a white man who was the father of her children" (8). Relating this passage to the complaints about economic exploitation Holiday associates with jazz, we can see that the white man not only owns her body (through rape and drugs) but also her children (her music: "Body and Soul" is a popular tune Holiday used to sing). And if her "body and soul" are controlled by the white man, if she is just a slave on the music plantation, then Holiday's insistence on obscuring Eleanora Fagan and

letting Dufty feature *Lady Day* can be seen as an act of self-protection as well as an act of resistance and defiance.

Troping slavery and the literary accounts of the black self shaped in and by the writing of slave narratives enables Holiday to document the struggle involved in telling her story. *Lady Sings the Blues* reiterates the tension between repression and the desire for freedom, mobilizing it as a commentary on her life as a black artist in America as well as on the politics of autobiography, which rule over the presentation of her literary self. Using her great-grandmother as an alter ego, Holiday is "just a slave on [the master's] plantation" and can only use subversive techniques to evade his control. But while her great-grandfather, the white man who owned her great-grandmother, may have known about the life of his slaves (and "mingles" with them both socially and sexually), jazz fans in the 1930s never see the world of black folk:

> Sure, some of them patronized the after-hour joints; they came to the Cotton Club—a place Negroes never saw inside unless they played music or did the shakes or shimmies. But these were just side shows specially set up for white folks to come and pay their money for kicks. These places weren't for real. The life we lived was. But it was all backstage, and damn few white folks ever got to see it. (42)

Distrusting her audience, Holiday spread stories about herself that kept intact the boundaries between stage, backstage, and off-stage. O'Meally explains how "women are often fiercely protective of their life stories. Sometimes, their stories are virtually all they have, and even if they have manufactured them (perhaps *especially* if they have manufactured them), they try hard to permit no one to tell their tales except themselves."[15] While this view seems to clash with Holiday's willingness to let Dufty tell her story, it in fact emphasizes her wish to preserve control over the representation of her life: by changing "facts" about herself, Holiday keenly distinguished between her own sense of self and *Lady Day,* the singer in the musical and literary spotlight. Her music, not her life and autobiography, O'Meally argues, was "all that really mattered"; the "story . . . was in her music" (197), and it showed a self-conscious and masterly artist whose stories expressed craft and musical command and were not a simple vehicle for voicing the blues singer's lament.

In Mingus's *Beneath the Underdog,* self-performance becomes self-composition. The subtitle, *His World as Composed by Mingus,* aptly captures the intrica-

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[15]O'Meally bases his argument on Rose's *Jazz Cleopatra.*

cies of the work. By conflating biography ("his world") and musical autobiography ("composed by Mingus"), it announces a "running commentary on the function of artifice within the act of self-inscription" (Harlos 141). Mingus self-consciously violates conventions of autobiography—the composer must follow his vision and break conventions in his search for originality and innovation. A disclaimer signals an acute awareness of autobiographical poetics, the tension between imagination and referentiality: "Some names in this work have been changed and some of the characters and incidents are fictitious" (*Beneath* n. pag.). From the start, we are told that, for the jazz musician/composer, the imagination is an integral part of the autobiographical performance. Questions of narrative composition and literary voice thus lurk behind Mingus's autobiography, as they do over (jazz) autobiography in general.

Myself When I Am Real, Gene Santoro's biography of Mingus, echoes the popular perception of *Beneath the Underdog* as Mingus's "quest to become a legend" through the creation of an extensive self-mythology: "His autobiography . . . distorts, rearranges, and frames facts. . . . [H]e composed his life as a work of art, just like he did his music, from a nourishing diversity of raw thematic materials" (6-7). While Santoro's claim fits comfortably within the argument of jazz autobiography's self-conscious performativity, the likening of musical processes to narrative self-representation and self-invention requires further exploration. Suggesting that Mingus composed his life in the same way he wrote his music assumes a musical drive that precedes its translation into autobiographical text. But identity, whether musical, autobiographical, or social, is always subject to the pressures of self-performance. Autobiography, as we have seen, is not so much the production of a self preceding the autobiographical telling as it is the construction of a provisional self subject to a variety of discursive constraints.

Beneath the Underdog begins with an account of a psychoanalytic session with Dr. Wallach, Mingus's Jewish psychoanalyst, which introduces a fragmented autobiographical subject:

> In other words, I am three. One man stands forever in the middle, unconcerned, unmoved, watching, 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 realizes 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. (3)

Insisting that all three selves are real, Mingus constructs the autobiography as a series of "self-divided and self-critical performances" (McNeilly 53) that dramatize Porter's notion of performance by locating the origins of creativity in the ongoing struggle for self-definition within and against one's social environment. The multiracial jazz composer, confused by conflicting demands on his personality, does not project a single ego, nor does he express one self through, in, or against the chosen form of autobiography. Rather, he invents a three-fold self, signaling to the reader that autobiography is only the form through which Mingus stages his public self-analysis, his journey into the abyss of the composer's mind. Trying to find a structure in the events of his life and yet reinventing himself in his own textual world, Mingus utilizes the discourse of psychoanalysis to enlist both himself and the reader in the search for his identity. The act of coming to terms with himself and his position in the world is a process Mingus invokes as a parallel to the composer's creative motivation and quest for innovation.

Philipe Lejeune's autobiographical pact—that congruity of author, narrator, and protagonist—undergoes a complicated treatment in *Beneath the Underdog.* Mingus's use of narrative perspective, his separation of narrator and protagonist through third-person narration, forces the reader to ask questions about literary and performative agency. The distinction between a grammatical person, to which an autobiographical "I" or "he/she" refers, and "the identity of the individuals to whom the aspects of the grammatical person refer" (Lejeune 6) indicates that *Beneath the Underdog* emphasizes the discrepancy between the Mingus outside of the autobiography and the self-image of the composer developed in, and through, the text. We might say that the third-person narration "draws attention to itself in a provocative way: the procedure comes across as being artificial because it shatters the illusory effect of the first person" (Lejeune 35). This division of narrator and protagonist documents an awareness of the fact that unity—of the autobiographical self in the text and of the author's identity in the world outside of the text—is always a fiction. As Lejeune concludes, "we witness the . . . performances in front of a three-way mirror, of . . . another person who remains locked in his identity, even if he sets all its elasticity in motion" (44).

The fractured Mingus of *Beneath the Underdog* performs Mingus's life for a reading audience. Mingus's acceptance of an identity in need of constant renegotiation within an array of normative and/or regulatory discourses thus links autobiographical and musical practice: elasticity can be achieved (in improvisa-

tion with available materials), but must be presented within the frame of musical composition or literary structure. This tension between textual stasis and imaginative flexibility creates the energy that renders the autobiographical self a performance and the jazz musician a compelling subject for autobiography.

Mingus's aspiration to be accepted as a leading American composer and his investment in the multiplicities of self connect *Beneath the Underdog* with Ellington's *Music Is My Mistress.* The epilogue to Ellington's narrative, titled "The Mirrored Self," is perhaps the most explicit instance of the Duke's play with the politics of autobiographical self-portraiture:

> Let us imagine a quiet, cozy cove. . . . Nearby is a still pool, so still that it resembles a limpid mirror. If we look in it, what we see is the reflection of ourselves, just as we thought we looked, wearing the identical clothes, the same countenance . . .
>
> Ah, this is *us,* the us we know, and as we savor the wonderful selves-of-perfection we suddenly realize that just below our mirror, there is another reflection that is not quite so clear, and not quite what we expected. This translucent surface has a tendency toward the vague: the lines are not firm and the colors not quite the same, but it is us, or should we say me, or rather one of our other selves? (italics in the original; 451)

The scene goes on; Ellington writes of a third and fourth self located below the second reflection. Baffled and unsure which one of these selves to love, he asks what this proliferation of selves is doing to him. Significantly, these many selves can be seen only until ripples in the pool make them disappear. The instability signaled by the epilogue substantially troubles the autobiography's otherwise prevailing tone of self-assurance.

Ellington's benign, quasi-aristocratic authorial voice and his adherence to upper-class sensibilities advance a view of the composer as seeking to cast himself beyond race, politics, and sexuality in ways almost directly opposed to Mingus's angry stance toward these issues. Ellington's proud reports of socializing with the agents of the very power formations that traditionally looked down on jazz, that favored classical composition over Ellington's "jungle music," and that controlled the economic exploitation of black artists are routinely placed within a narrative of achievement, both musical and social. However, what Ellington ultimately accomplishes has to do with the complex dynamics within which musical and textual performance gestate. *Music Is My Mistress* not only reinforces the notion of elusiveness, a sometimes cynical reduction of the musician's life to his celebrity status; it also links the improvisation and performance of a personal self to the writing of Ellington's music. Like the textual Ellington, the

person outside of the text carved out a niche within American institutions and cultural economies by inventing a kind of music able to satisfy many, often conflicting, demands. It is based in the blues and therefore distinctly African American, but it equally appeals to musical tastes of those who perceive themselves as "refined" and "classical." As an elegant and suave performer, Ellington appeals to notions of respectability and musical class that made him a success with more conservative listeners and critics.

Edwards speaks of a "literary imperative" behind Ellington's music, a "'story-telling' impulse behind the very process of creating music" ("Literary" 4). This impulse, not musical but performative in nature, lies behind the autobiographical telling. Ellington writes that musicians used to "send messages in what they play[ed], calling somebody, or making facts and emotions known. Painting a picture, or having a story to go with what you were going to play, was of vital importance. . . . The audience didn't know anything about it, but the cats in the band did" (47). In other words, readers of the autobiography are invited to consume the performance and witness the display of facts and emotions, but they cannot "know" the underlying story, Ellington's private sense of self.

Readers and critics seeking to discover a musician's inner self, his or her "true" character and source of musical "geniality," are confronted with autobiographical self-performances that do not revoke the layers of social and musical self-invention that the jazz performance so forcefully veils but never fully denies. Music and autobiography are the result of a creative evocation of identity, of a temporarily arrested self that heeds audience demands but always rescues the self from stasis by demonstrating the musicians' self-conscious investment in the poetics and politics of self-staging. Reading jazz autobiography, we should be motivated to ask questions of narrative and musical agency rather than feel compelled to find answers to the riddles of musical, literary, and social identity.

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