

Ralph Ellison's Righteous Riffs: Jazz, Democracy, and the Sacred

I am not particularly religious, but I am claimed by music. —Ralph Ellison, “Living with Music” (1955)

I don't know what it was, some kinda church song, I guess. All I know is I *ends up* singin' the blues. —Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)

We were rebirthed dancing, we were rebirthed crying affirmation of the Word. . . . We stamped our feet at the trumpet's sound and we clapped our hands, ah, in joy! And we moved, yes, together in a dance, amen! —Ralph Ellison, *Three Days Before the Shooting* . . . (2010)

A recent public service advertisement from Americans for the Arts speaks suggestively to contemporary understandings of jazz music's cultural value. Confronting a putative pandemic of American musical ignorance, the full-page print ad wonders rhetorically “Why Some People Think Duke Ellington Is a Member of the Royal Family,” then proceeds, in prose surrounding a portrait of Ellington in white tie and top hat, to address the composer's “royal” status in remarkably ambivalent ways. “Kids don't get enough art these days,” it begins. “They don't have enough access to theater, poetry or jazz. So you can see why some kids might confuse a jazz legend named Duke with royalty named duke. But it's time to set the record straight.” This lumping-together of jazz with poetry and theater under the rubric of High Art suggests already the gains and losses sustained by classic jazz in the age of its entrenched canonization, what we might call its “Ken Burns era.” It also paves the way for the royal treatment Ellington subsequently receives—or would receive, if not for the ad's rhetorical inconsistency:

HEAR YE, HEAR YE. HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS, SIR DUKE. . . . He didn't wear a crown. He didn't rule over a small English state. Instead he ruled with an orchestra that blew the roof off the joint. He reigned over jazz institutions like Harlem's Cotton Club. . . . By the time he was telling folks to “Take the ‘A’ Train,” Duke Ellington and his orchestra were sitting on the throne of jazz royalty.

“HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS”—not to be confused, remember, with “royalty named duke”—nonetheless “ruled,” “reigned,” and occupied “the throne of jazz royalty.” But if such a throne exists, then aren't the uninitiated correct in supposing what the ad elsewhere implies is a false assumption, namely that Ellington belongs to a royal family?

This apparent self-contradiction betrays the often false and always slippery dichotomies in jazz discourse between the inertly iconic and the violently iconoclastic. Which, after all, is the true nature of the Ellington orchestra—did it lounge on its throne, or did it “blow the roof off the joint”? How can one square the ad's praise of Ellington's “nontraditional approach to jazz” with its offering of Ellington as jazz tradition incarnate? At stake here is the relation between the sacred (transcendent, authoritative, pure) and the profane (pedestrian, improvised, corrupt), categories that have long informed the reception of jazz, and which a careful study of the music can help to clarify. For what this ad does, finally, is to hail jazz's profane, un-aristocratic status as a way of exalting and re-crowning a neglected jazz deity. Counterintuitively, its unabashedly secular status makes the music of Ellington and

his ilk culturally sacred; somehow *not* being a duke makes Ellington the Duke, his iconoclasm sealing his status as icon. His ethereal “throne” rests securely among the “gritty sound” of “growling trombones” and “sultry saxophone chords” that distinguish his music, which is still profane enough to be hip—Ellington appreciators, the ad assures us, make for “well-rounded, finger-snapping members of society, daddy-o”—yet so sacred that ignorance of Ellington constitutes a kind of sacrilege, a woeful blindness to the divine Word of jazz: a Word made flesh in the jazz pantheon where Duke sits, presumably, at the right hand of Louis Armstrong.

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Of course, the ad’s ambivalent aims—to affirm Ellington’s canonicity and to make him fashionable for a new audience, all on one page—are hardly without precedent. From the beginning, the productive tensions between the canonically sacred and the fashionably profane have distinguished jazz music’s reception from the music itself. In what follows, I argue that the novels and essays of Ralph Ellison engage fruitfully and almost incessantly with precisely these tensions, and that jazz serves, on the strength of those tensions—principally in its big-band, dancehall, Ellingtonian incarnation, though also as its spirit irrupts into the music and preaching of the African American church—as the exemplary sacred-profane model for Ellison’s ambitious democratic vision. To indicate briefly the author’s intricate interweaving of jazz with both the profane and the sacred, it may suffice to observe that his unfinished second novel features at its center a hard-living jazzman who adopts the vocation of a man of God, yet never gives up his ability to sing “like any lonesome sinner” (*Three Days* 261). Nor does he leave his trombone far from reach, keeping it always close to hand, “where at the climax of a sermon he could reach for it” and stand, horn to his preacher’s mouth, as an embodiment of the collusion between jazz and the sacred that is so central to Ellison’s art and thought (314). Reverend A. Z. Hickman, as Ellison remarks in one of many notes on his unfinished novel, is “an artist in the deeper sense,” a man who “formulates the sacred in profane terms” (974-75). His old protégé reflects that Hickman is a “Dialectical Donne”; as worker of the physical and the metaphysical, of the erotic and the spiritual, he is “the dark daddy of flesh and Word” (254, 391).

The questions raised by this character, who can smear his way effortlessly from “St. Louis Blues” into “Listen to the Lambs” as the occasion demands, insist that we consider the cultural semiotics both of jazz and of religion; the nightclub and the church; the public dance and the revival meeting; the jazz soloist and the preacher; and the profane and the sacred. These oppositions, I believe, can help to clarify two enduring Ellisonian mysteries: his enmity toward post-World War II avant-garde jazz, and the racial enigma embodied by Bliss/Sunraider, the second novel’s child preacher-turned-racist senator (347). More broadly, Ellison’s systematic fusing of these oppositions points our way toward comprehending the dreamlike chaos that he spent his life, and his career as a writer, attempting to define: the shape and fate of African America, and the answer to “*the American theme*,” the search for identity itself (*Shadow and Act* 219; original emphasis).

Our exploration will proceed in fits and starts, following the figure of repetition that predominates in African American art and thus also in the broader American culture it ubiquitously informs. “Where we shall go is where we have been; where we

have been is where we shall go—but with a difference,” intones Senator Sunraider, the “we” ostensibly meaning the United States at large but also gesturing, unconsciously, toward the community of African Americans that raised Sunraider (*né* Bliss) and instilled in him the rhythmic repetitional rhetorics of the “dozens” as well as of the church (*Three Days* 239). Through a series of readings interspersed by returns to a resonant textual origin—the performance by Louis Armstrong of “Black and Blue” that both opens and closes *Invisible Man*—this essay emulates the reiterations-with-a-difference that structure not only jazz but also the rich antiphonal tradition of African American sermonizing. Yet the following pages also advance, I hope, beyond mere repetition—as does the music of Armstrong, Ellington, and other performers of pre-World War II jazz, and as does *Invisible Man*, despite postmodern arguments to the contrary. For Ellison, American democracy insists that we strive both artistically and politically to *resolve*, to seek an end that is both aesthetic and pragmatic, transcendent and embodied. Where jazz is concerned, that end takes the form of the tonic, a musical resolution by turns embraced and eschewed by the kinds of jazz Ellison worshipped and loathed. Politically, the desired resolution is the sacred *telos* of Ellison’s unique jazz-theology: the ideal of pluralistic democracy, what Hickman calls “the mystery of the one in the many and the many in one” (*Three Days* 387). Anticipating this choice of words, *Invisible Man*’s narrator declaims, “Our fate is to become one, and yet many— This is not prophecy, but description” (577). Not a threat, one might add, but a promise. Not, for once, a joke, but a very earnest interpretation of America’s jazz-shaped future.

Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you’re never quite on the beat. Sometimes you’re ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around. That’s what you hear vaguely in Louis’ music.
—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

This famous evocation of African American identity as a time-bending, jazz-shaped invisibility relies on the figure of Louis Armstrong, who functions here and throughout Ellison’s writings as a heroic paragon of African American agency and artistry. The “breaks” into which the narrator slips are those moments in a jazz performance when the accompaniment recedes entirely, or nearly, so that it falls to the solo performer both to keep the beat and to transform it, to mark time and to transcend it. Albert Murray, the great jazz writer and a longtime friend of Ellison’s, defines the break as

the moment of truth. It is on the break that you “do your thing.” The moment of greatest jeopardy is your moment of greatest opportunity. This is the heroic moment. . . . It is when you establish your identity; it is when you write your signature on the epidermis of actuality. That is how you come to terms with the void. (“Improvisation” 112)

Murray’s concern with negotiating “the void” resonates with Ellison’s countless references, scattered throughout the novels and the essays, to the artist’s task of bringing order to chaos. Duke Ellington, for example, receives praise for “reducing the violence and chaos of American life to artistic order” (“Homage” 683). Moreover, Murray’s conception of the break as a “heroic moment” in which “you establish your identity” befits Armstrong’s indomitable performance in *Invisible Man*’s prologue—for what more concerns Armstrong’s song, and indeed the novel it both commences and closes, than the question of one’s identity and of how to establish such a thing in that “delicate balance struck between strong individual personality and the group” that characterizes not only the jam session but daily life in the American democracy-in-progress (*Living with Music* 6)?

There is an undeniable echo of the Armstrongian heroic moment in a scene from the second novel that finds Hickman dueling with a fellow minister, initiating what a jazz musician would call a “cutting session” of mythic proportions. The other preacher having successfully “released the pure agony and raised it to the skies,” Hickman sees no alternative but “to accept his challenge,” to “shift to a higher gear” and give the congregation its sacred “transcendence”: “I had to go beyond the singing and the shouting and reach into the territory of the pure unblemished Word. I had to climb up there where fire is so hot it’s ice, and ice so cold it burns like fire. Where the Word was so loud that it was silent, and so silent that it rang like a timeless gong” (*Three Days* 329). Upon his ascent to this paradoxical realm, Hickman finds himself on the preacherly corollary to the jazzman’s break. The congregation keeps the beat for a time as he begins “climbing” to an improvisatory sermonizing no less heroic than an Armstrong solo, until the accompaniment falls away completely into the silence of the pure break:

Instead of sliding off into silence I started preaching up off the top of that song and they were still singing under me, holding me up there as I started to climb. Bliss, I was *up* there, boy. . . . I preached those five thousand folks into silence, five thousand *Negroes*, and you know that’s the next thing to a miracle. (329)

But if this revival preacher has the heart and soul of a jazzman, it is also true that the jazzman harbors an inner preacher—a concept Ellison illustrates in *Invisible Man*’s prologue, which locates a sermon at the very heart of Armstrong’s “Black and Blue”:

I not only entered the music but descended, like Dante, into its depths. And *beneath the swiftness of the hot tempo there was . . . an old woman singing a spiritual . . . and below that I found a lower level and a more rapid tempo and I heard someone shout:*

“Brothers and sisters, my text this morning is the ‘Blackness of Blackness.’ ” —Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (original emphasis)

Armstrong’s performance famously frames *Invisible Man*, taking center stage in the prologue and returning for a brief encore on the novel’s final page. The song functions as a meaningful aperture in the text. For the reader, it serves as a portal into and out of the narrative, and into and out of the subterranean hole where Jack-the-Bear hibernates “in covert preparation for a more overt action” (13). For the narrator, too, the song is a portal: characterized by its “breaks” that one can “slip into,” the music invites entrance “into its depths” (8-9). It is also a threshold opening onto an evocative spatial arrangement of African American memory and its vicissitudes, containing spirituals and the blues, slavery and freedom, hatred and love, laughter as well as the “*Weltschmerz*” that indelibly marks—but need not disable—that collective memory. From within Armstrong’s performance, a traumatic history unfolds of miscegenation, hybridity, violence, confusion (*e.g.*, why is an ivory-colored girl on the slaveowners’ auction block?): all those near-synonyms for *ambivalence* with which we must acquaint ourselves if we are to have any hope of understanding Ellison or, as he would surely add, the black experience itself.

At the core of this jazz-induced phantasmagoria is an extended passage representing the call-and-response of a black preacher and his congregation—a study in antiphonal sermonizing that Ellison will rehearse at great length, both thematically and structurally, in his second novel. This sermon-within-a-blues, then, anticipates the formal dynamic that will preoccupy Ellison for the rest of his writing life. Moreover, it instantiates an integral relation—religion in jazz, jazz *as* religion, the sacred at the heart of the profane—that models Ellison’s understanding of individual and communal identity, and his vision of African America’s history and future. The pervasive impact of jazz on Ellison’s aesthetic, and in particular the music’s centrality to

Invisible Man, has been established many times over in scholarly articles and book chapters, from Larry Neal's description of that novel as "one long blues solo" (116) to Albert Murray's *précis* that "*Invisible Man* was *par excellence* the literary extension of the blues. Ellison had taken up an everyday twelve-bar blues tune . . . and scored it for full orchestra" (*Omni* 167). Murray's suggestion that Ellison has scored the novel "for full orchestra" speaks to its specific indebtedness to Ellington's and Basie's big-band influence—to the artistic necessity, that is, of framing the improvisatory moment within a complex, unifying formal structure. Although Ellison's 1981 introduction to *Invisible Man* emphasizes its improvisatory character—claiming he had composed it "in the manner of a jazz musician putting a musical theme through a wild star-burst of metamorphosis"—it is important to remember that he worked on that novel for the better part of a decade, to say nothing of his labors on its successor (xxiii). Examining an excised scene from *Invisible Man*, Adam Bradley makes an observation that could apply to any number of passages from either of Ellison's novels: "What reads like a scene improvised on the fly is actually highly structured, even labored" (207).

Indeed, for ears attuned to the cadences of *Invisible Man*, *Shadow and Act*, and even *Juneteenth*, one of the revelations of *Three Days Before the Shooting* is just how prosaic is Ellison's less-polished work, both early and late—how off-key its dialogue, how flat the prose. Ellison was evidently not a great writer of first drafts; like a film actor doing multiple takes of a single scene to erode the sense that she is acting, he seems to have required multiple revisions to create the sense of an apparently "natural," improvisatory style. *Three Days* thus stands as a reminder of Ellison's artistic ethos, which applies as much to his choice in music as to his own poetics. These considerations should call into question certain postmodern readings of Ellison's prose as a kind of "free jazz" on paper, as an experiment that rejects the demands of formal mastery. For Ellison, freedom, liberation, transcendence can be achieved only in a structured, orderly context and can come only with a relentlessly disciplined, even ritualized repetition. Jazz for Ellison must model an idealized democratic liberty, not show forth democracy's limitations in their naked and inevitably rough state. To do the latter would be to give free rein to the chaotic, when the artist's task is to order it. The goal of jazz and literature both, as Ellison declares time and again, is to tame and control precisely the kind of chaos he intuits in bebop and other postwar jazz forms.

At their best, Ellison's writings fulfill the desired functions of his idealized big-band jazz, and they succeed by the same means that he prized in the music: repetition, order, revision, perfection. Only within this carefully composed structure can one achieve the improvisatory transcendence Ellison called "freedom within discipline" (*Living with Music* 30). Unsurprisingly, the author found in this ethos an affinity with high modernism that was imperative to his own modernist approach to the novel form—as suggested, in Ellison's frequently reiterated account, by that fateful perusal of *The Waste Land* that turned a would-be symphonic composer into an aspiring writer of literature: "Somehow its rhythms were often closer to those of jazz than were those of the Negro poets, and . . . its range of allusion was as mixed and as varied as that of Louis Armstrong" (*Shadow and Act* 203). With its captivating rhythms, its parodic irreverence, and its structuring principles of juxtaposition and allusion, *The Waste Land* indeed shares many affinities with Armstrong-style jazz. For Ellison, moreover, the poem's democratic impulse (not an element readers today are likely to remark in Eliot) evinces a distinctly Armstrongian spirit.¹

In the particular merits that Ellison assigns both jazz and literary modernism—the rigorously disciplined self-definition that transcends tradition and the collective while engaging and affirming both—one discerns the core principles of the author's thought, including his approach to identity, racial consciousness, and the American democratic ideal. Critics have more than once noted the influence of Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" on Ellison's jazz writings—for example, in Ellison's

assertion that for the jazz musician “each solo flight . . . represents a definition of his identity as individual, as member of the collectivity and as a link in the chain of tradition” (Ostendorf 112; Tracy 95-96; *Shadow and Act* 267). Indeed, Ellison does not fall short of exalting jazz and Eliotic modernism both to the realm of the sacred, confessing to finding in *The Waste Land* “overtones of a sort of religious pattern which I could identify with my own background” (*Conversations* 90). Here Ellison equates Eliot with Armstrong as an artist whose “religious pattern” and jazz-like improvisatory technique speak to Ellison’s “own background,” the culture of “That Vanished Tribe: The American Negroes,” so that Eliot’s poem, already a holy Ellisonian text, becomes an occasion for articulating the relationship between theology, jazz, and African American culture (*Juneteenth* ix).

I’d like to hear five recordings of Louis Armstrong playing and singing “What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue”—all at the same time . . . as Louis bends that military instrument into a beam of lyrical sound. —Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

That military instrument, the trumpet, like its close relatives the bugle and trombone, sounds throughout Ellison’s body of work. In the short story “A Coupla Scalped Indians,” for instance, Buster recognizes among the horn sounds of a far-off jazz band the peculiarly military voicings of the trumpet player: “That fool’s a soldier” (*Living with Music* 186). In keeping with its military role, the bugle structures and regiments daily affairs at the invisible man’s college, waking students in the morning and putting them to bed at night—this was Ellison’s job at Tuskegee, one that required a “militant” trumpeter’s tone—just as Armstrong’s trumpeting begins and ends the novel (*Living with Music* 25, 137). After the Mr. Norton debacle, the invisible man makes sure to awaken “before the bugle sounded” in order to rush to Bledsoe’s office; later, after his arrival in Harlem, he finds himself wondering whether the breakfast bugle has blown yet (*Invisible Man* 147, 172). But of more particular interest to our present discussion is the way the trumpet’s martial implications acquire sacred overtones. Reverend Barbee’s sermon binds this military instrument to religious themes, commemorating “the sad sound of weeping bugles” that announced the death of the Founder, who was both Father (“the great creator”) and Son (“the humble carpenter of Nazareth”) (131, 118, 132). In student debates, the narrator, a “bungling bugler of words, imitat[es] the trumpet and the trombone’s timbre,” but this trumpet-voice also rides “the curve of a preacher’s rhythm” (113). And in the sedated moments leading up to his electro-shock treatment, the invisible man hears “a sweet-voiced trumpet rendering ‘The Holy City’ ” from among the ranks of a “military band” (234). The air having become crowded “with fine white gnats,” “the dark trumpeter breathed them in and expelled them through the bell of his golden horn”—like Louis Armstrong recycling the “Bad Air” into “good music” (234, 581).

In his essay “The Little Man at Chehaw Station,” Ellison consolidates the trumpet’s dual roles as instrument of the militant and the sacred. There he recalls that having been advised by his mentor always to direct his musicianship at the inscrutable “little man,” that surprisingly ideal listener who lurks in the least likely of places, “my imagination pictured the vibrations set in motion by the winding of a trumpet within that drab, utilitarian structure [the Chehaw train station]: first shattering, then bringing its walls ‘a-tumbling down’—like Jericho’s at the sounding of Joshua’s priest-blown ram horns” (“Little Man” 490). The battle of Jericho thus provides the paradigmatic context for the trumpet’s militantly sacred art, and when considered alongside Armstrong’s horn-blasts in *Invisible Man*, raises the question: What “action” has this music “demanded” (*Invisible Man* 12), which is to ask: What walls, what divisions, would the narrator have tumble under the impact of Armstrong’s horn, amplified and dissonated through five record players blaring at once?

The blasting of divisive walls, of segregation whether self-imposed or mandated from without, is an ever-present preoccupation in Ellison's work. This form of constructive annihilation, the breaking down of walls along with the affirmation of an integrated "total culture," a "total way of life," represents the duty to which artists—novelists, jazz musicians, preachers—must aspire (*Living with Music* 32, 39, 69). It is a ritualistic and even a sacred duty, for Ellison rejects the seeming incommensurability of piety and profanity to the extent that the most profane jazz performance—with its bleeps and growls, its sweat-drenched corporeality, its Dionysian excitement and release—equates in its effects to the most sacred hymns to be heard of a Sunday morning. Such a duty, with its commitment to a "total way of life," also adds piquancy to Senator Sunraider's speech at the opening of the second novel. Throughout the oration he functions, oddly enough, as Ellison's mouthpiece: "We are defeated only if we fail in the task of creating a *total way of life* which will allow each and every one of us to rise high above the site of his origins" (241; emphasis added). In lines such as these, Sunraider not only reflects Ellison's own views and recapitulates the invisible man's, but also offers a clandestine self-critique:

How can the many be as one? How can the future deny the past? And how can the light deny the dark? The answer to the first is: through a balanced consciousness of unity in diversity and diversity in unity. . . . And how can the light deny the dark? Why, by seeking ever the darkness in lightness and the lightness in darkness. (241)

This clear echo of *Invisible Man's* sermon on "the 'Blackness of Blackness'" returns us once again to Louis Armstrong's performance in the Prologue, and to the integral relation of religion and jazz. Classic jazz combines the religiosity, humor, and artistry that Ellison sees as essential to the black experience in the United States: "Negro Americans have lived by two principles, religion and aesthetics. . . . Their religiosity . . . provided a sacred space, in Eliade's sense. . . . While their humor and aestheticism, mediating between the sacred and profane aspects of experience, served to define their complex humanity and affirm it" (qtd. in Bradley 87-88). In its combination of "the sacred and profane aspects of experience," a truly terrific jazz performance can bring about a kind of hierophany (to borrow another term from Eliade), a manifestation of a peculiarly "Negro" version of the sacred that also models a democratic ideal applicable to all Americans. Jazz is a worldly, profane art ("an orgiastic art which demands great physical stamina") that for Ellison is also sacred in its very erotics. In its "capacity to make the details of sex convey meanings which touch upon the metaphysical," its unique transcendence is paradoxically grounded in an earthy embodiment, and the music is itself somehow corporeal; one aspect of Armstrong's heroism is that "he emphasizes the physicality of his music with sweat, spittle and facial contortions" (*Living with Music* 35, 48; *Shadow and Act* 106).

For Ellison, the Saturday-night jazz dance and the Sunday-morning church service are useful insofar as they involve, bring together, compel, and *move* bodies, ideally foregrounding the corporeality of the community and of its performers, be they preachers or trumpet players. This is one area in which the author interprets bebop as diverging from jazz's ritual functions. In his revealing letters to Albert Murray and in essays such as "The Golden Age, Time Past" and "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz," Ellison worries that bop's effete, hyperintellectual aestheticism both ignores its sacred commitments to the community and threatens to elide embodiment in ways that may even erase—to the extent that "race" is a question of bodies—the racial politics which many of its practitioners mean to foreground. In contrast, pre-bop jazz offers a productive synthesis of the sacred and the corporeal, as underscored by Sunraider's stream-of-consciousness reminiscence of "Daddy" Hickman's preaching:

Who untuned Daddy's fork when he could have preached his bone in all positions and places? I might have been left out of all that—Ask Tricky Sam Nanton, there's a preacher

hidden in all the old troms—Bam! Same tune in juke or church, only Daddy's had a different brand of anguish. (*Three Days* 247)

If the tune is the same in juke or church, dancehall or revival, that is because its music always speaks from and to the erotic body. Hence the reference to trombonist Tricky Sam Nanton, who along with trumpeter Bubber Miley created the libidinal throbbings of Duke Ellington's patented "jungle music." Hence also Sunraider's proximate reflections on Hickman, that archetypal jazzman-preacher-stud who can "preach his bone in all positions" and make the entire church "throb" in rhythm (310). The symptomatic rhythms of the Southern African American church—whose services, Murray writes, "generate paroxysms of ecstasy that exceed anything that happens in the most gutbucket-oriented of honky-tonks" (*Stomping* 27)—are integral to this Ellisonian dynamic, as suggested by Laura Saunders's convincing study of Ellison's indebtedness to the black church, and by the stress Ellison lays on the church as a repository of "a rich oral literature" whose "deeper relationship to the art of twentieth-century literature" has gone underappreciated—"not simply as subject matter, but as a major source of its technique, its form and rhetoric" (*Shadow and Act* 200, 114).² This sentiment accords with James Snead's location of the black church "at the center of the manifestations of repetition in black culture, at the junction of music and language" (70). We have already witnessed this definitional interrelation of music and church in the sermon that preaches from the heart of Armstrong's "Black and Blue." So it should come as no surprise that Ellison's intellectual universe makes ample room for what emerges, especially over the course of his essays, as a kind of High Church of Jazz. Roughly the shape of the United States, its congregation consists largely of African Americans, although one of its foremost aims is to integrate: to establish, on a shared American cultural heritage, a pluralistic collective united by its very diversity but also, unavoidably, by its "inescapable Negro-ness" (*Living with Music* 80).

The essential blackness of white America—the notion "that whatever else the true American is, he is also somehow black"—is after all one of Ellison's most compelling and staunchly defended insights ("Portrait" 587). It emerges in his fiction as the ten drops of black liquid required to make Optic White paint; as the "few drops of coal oil" said to make laundry its whitest; and as the surprisingly dark complexions lurking beneath whited faces (*Invisible Man* 200; *Three Days* 359, 403). Ellison's nonfiction likewise insists that white hegemony acknowledge its ineluctable debt to African Americans: "I don't recognize any white culture. . . . I recognize no American culture which is not the partial creation of black culture. I recognize no American style . . . which does not bear the mark of the American Negro" ("Indivisible Man" 360); "You cannot have an American experience without having a black experience" ("Alain Locke" 446).³ Yet even more crucial to Ellison's Americanism is his commitment to a total cultural integration of black and white and in-between, even if it is rooted necessarily in the African American experience. It is thus another of the Jazz Church's aims to revitalize and individuate that collective, to nurture in each that vital subjectivity that can flourish only in the fertile interstices between the communal and the individual.

Just as jazz takes root in the creative tension between band and soloist, the American must be born from a conjunction of *pluribus* and *unum*. With regard to African Americans especially, Ellison defines "the Negro" in much the same way that he defines the jazz musician. The latter finds its place in the interactions between band and soloist, as part of a disciplined musical order that can nonetheless be transcended by means of artistic self-actualization. Likewise, the Negro is generated at the intersection of a community and a self, a self that is both determined by its place in a rigid social structure and potentially liberated by "individual will": "He is a product of the interaction between his racial predicament, his individual will, and the broader American cultural freedom in which he finds his ambiguous existence. Thus he, too, in a limited way, is his own creation" (*Shadow and Act* 160). Through a working-out of

“freedom within discipline,” the African American can create himself anew, just as in the jam session—that exemplary form of black performance that is “the jazzman’s true academy”—he must “‘find himself,’ must be reborn, must find, as it were, his soul” (*Living with Music* 30, 60). For Ellison, jazz comprises a ritual act that shares, and often achieves, religion’s loftiest aims—resurrection, rebirth, and the soul’s redemption—because the exigencies of black American life require rites as well as rights. (It is one of these all-important rites that Bliss’s would-be mother corrupts by trying to take the young preacher out of the hands of his flock, thus fomenting chaos: “She broke the structure of ritual and the world erupted” [*Three Days* 393].)

In Ellison’s High Church of Jazz, there are priests and priestesses—Armstrong, Ellington, Bessie Smith, Mahalia Jackson—and also, as we shall see, false prophets. The author locates jazz musicians’ “priestlike aspect” in their “social function” as “bringers of joy” motivated by “neither money nor fame, but the will to achieve the most eloquent expression of idea-emotions through the technical mastery of their instruments (which, incidentally, some of them wore as a priest wears a cross)” (*Living with Music* 261, 5-6). One of the foremost saints in Ellison’s jazz canon is the blues singer Jimmy Rushing, whose voice is said to be “possessed of a purity” as well as of a “blazing fervor,” by turns sublimely ethereal and irresistibly profane, “now soaring high above the trumpets and trombones, now skimming the froth of reeds and rhythm as it called some woman’s anguished name” (44). It expresses the earthbound as well as the transcendent, sounding a “rock-bottom sense of reality, coupled with our sense of the possibility of rising above it” (45). In a stretch of prose worth quoting at length, Ellison writes of summer-night street corners in his boyhood hometown of Oklahoma City, when

anyone might halt the conversation to exclaim, “Listen, they’re raising hell down at Slaughter’s Hall,” and we’d turn our heads westward to hear Jimmy’s voice soar up the hill and down, as pure and as miraculously unhindered by distance and earthbound things as is the body in youthful dreams of flying.

“Now, that’s the Right Reverend Jimmy Rushing preaching now, man,” someone would say. . . . “Yeah, and that’s old Elder ‘Hot Lips’ signifying along with him, urging him on, man.” . . . And we might go on to name all the members of the band as though they were the Biblical four-and-twenty elders, while laughing at the impious wit of applying church titles to a form of music which all the preachers assured us was the devil’s potent tool.

Our wit was true, for Jimmy Rushing, along with the other jazz musicians whom we knew, had made a choice, had dedicated himself to a mode of expression and a way of life no less “righteously” than others dedicated themselves to the church. Jazz and the blues . . . helped to give our lives some semblance of wholeness. . . .

. . . It was when Jimmy’s voice began to soar with the spirit of the blues that the dancers—and the musicians—achieved that feeling of communion which was the true meaning of the public jazz dance. (*Living with Music* 45-46)⁴

Is the group’s wit “impious” for applying the lexicon of the sacrosanct to a purported tool of the devil? Or does its impiety lie rather in its having unnecessary recourse to such a lexicon when the music and the rite are already holy on their own, equally valid terms? Surely Reverend Rushing’s brand of “raising hell” is righteous in its own right, soaring pure and unsullied by “earthbound things,” although the vehicle Ellison uses to evoke Rushing’s voice—“the body in youthful dreams of flying”—underscores not only the transcendent quality of the blues spirit but also its necessary embodiment. In keeping with the profane-*cum*-sacred jazz gospel, the soul here does not transcend the body; rather, as in the Resurrection, the soul rises *with* the body.

Rejecting outright any incommensurability of popular entertainment and sacred ritual, Ellison insists that “the blues which might in one place be used as entertainment . . . might be put to a ritual use in another. Bessie Smith might have been a ‘blues queen’ to society at large, but within the tighter Negro community . . . she was a priestess, a celebrant who affirmed the values of the group and man’s ability to deal

with chaos” (131). Obeying Ellison’s sense of jazz music’s sacral embodiment, this priestess of the blues emerges not from on high but autochthonously, from the soil: over against the “meaningless artiness” of those who would affect to sing spirituals while barren of the spirit, Smith forever reminds her listeners “of the earth out of which we came” (12). The gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, “an admirer of Bessie Smith” who “grew up with the sound of jazz in her ears,” and who, like a church-singing woman in the second novel, “could battle Bessie note for note and tone for tone, and on top of that was singing the Word of God,” similarly personifies the productive alliances of profane and sacred that constitute the musics both of the church and of the nightclub (*Living with Music* 89; *Three Days* 326).

Jackson’s singing traverses the line demarcating the blue from the hymnic; like A. Z. “God’s Trombone” Hickman, her vocal performances mine the resources of jazz, “from the rough growls . . . to the gut tones, which remind us of where the jazz trombone found its human source” (*Living with Music* 90). That she confines her material to gospel music hardly invalidates her jazz artistry. On the contrary, “those who seek today for a living idea of the rich and moving art of Bessie Smith must go not to the night clubs and variety houses where those who call themselves blues singers find their existence, but must seek out Mahalia Jackson in a Negro church” (91). And if “the true function of her singing is . . . to prepare the congregation for the minister’s message, to make it receptive to the spirit, and . . . to evoke a shared community of experience,” a “spiritual and emotional climate in which the Word is made manifest” (93), this is merely further proof that she is at heart a jazz singer, creating a sectarian analogue to that community which “the Right Reverend Jimmy Rushing” once affirmed on Saturday nights in Oklahoma City (45). The communal spirit aroused in either case differs neither in degree nor in kind; the distinctions are at most denominational.

Jackson’s craft, Ellison goes on, “is an art which swings, and in the South there are many crudely trained groups who use it naturally for the expression of religious feeling who could teach the jazz modernists quite a bit about polyrhythmics and polytonality” (91). This dig at “jazz modernists,” the heretics and apostates of Ellison’s Jazz Church, reflects the author’s aversion to post-World War II jazz forms that he interpreted as having abandoned their musical tradition’s higher calling. If jazz, at its best, serves ritually to heighten and define the subjectivity of both the individual and the collective in ways that are indissolubly sacred and profane, then for Ellison the new avant-garde clearly shirks its most important obligations. In its retreat to a rarefied intellectualism and in its concomitant evisceration of the body, combined with its refusal to recognize the performer’s sacerdotal commitment to his audience, bebop breaks the sacred covenant of jazz and dissolves the communal wholeness that Rushing, Ellington, and the rest worked so hard to build. The “thinness,” Ellison elaborates, “of much ‘modern jazz’ is reflective of this loss of wholeness” (47). We shall have more to say about the jazz modernists below, but to fully understand their heresy it is necessary first to address Ellison’s patriotic politics.

Sometimes now I listen to Louis while I have my favorite dessert of vanilla ice cream and sloe gin.
I pour the red liquid over the white mound, watching it glisten and the vapor rising. . . .
—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

The invisible man’s favorite “mock patriotic” treat (red liqueur, white ice cream, and Armstrong’s blues) emblemizes Ellison’s vexed, deep-seated, but never mocking commitment to American ideals (O’Meally, *Craft* 85). For all his deft critiquing of the United States, Ellison remained an unabashedly proud African American, with the emphasis on *American*, even through periods when such patriotism made him wildly unpopular and certainly out of step with younger black activists—many of

whom, in the words of Hortense Spillers, despite having “just discovered their ‘beauty’ that morning,” nonetheless “skewered [Ellison] for an insufficient demonstration of ‘blackness’” (10-11).⁵ In any event, the invisible man’s red-white-and-blue dessert hardly exists in simple discord with the music of “Ambassador Satch,” even if the song’s lyrics (“How will it end / Ain’t got a friend / My only sin / Is in my skin”) expose a fault—systemic racism—that for Ellison is “an American form of original sin” whose “serpent-like malignancy” enacts “a constantly recurring fall from democratic innocence” (“Perspective” 778, 775). A scene from the second novel finds Hickman channeling Ellison in his prayers outside the dying senator’s hospital room, speaking with improbable eloquence of the United States as a fallen “holy land”:

This land that’s soiled itself before the ancient flight of doves, the screams of eagles, the fall and rise of wheat, corn, cotton, and red roses, Thy Son upon his cross. . . . its Bible forgot, its own laws bleeding from the raw self-laceration and desecration of its ancient dream. (69-70)

This transparently biblical language typifies Ellison’s theological framing of American history. Not surprisingly, the Church of Jazz takes as its principal texts the sacred documents of the United States, by the light of which it works through “antagonistic cooperation” toward refining “our corporate identity as Americans” (“Little Man” 509, 500). This “ceaseless contention” is enacted across

a terrain of ideas . . . that draw their power from the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. . . . [T]hese principles—democracy, equality, individual freedom and universal justice—now move us as articles of faith. Holding them sacred, we act (or *fail* to act) in their names. . . . As we strive to conduct social action in accordance with the ideals they evoke, they in turn insist upon being made flesh. . . . [T]hey demand that we keep the democratic faith. . . .

In our national beginnings, all redolent with Edenic promises, was the word *democratic*, and since we vowed in a war rite of blood and sacrifice to keep its commandments, we act in the name of a word made sacred. (“Little Man” 500-02; original emphasis)

Even Sunraider is not blind to the kinds of blood sacrifices that have watered America’s shifting promises of paradise. Remembering Oklahoma, he ruminates, “Out there where they thought the new state a second chance for Eden. . . . Tell it to the Cherokees!” (265)⁶ More to our point, Ellison’s biblical diction in the above passage again underscores his vision of U. S. history, and of its future, as a sacred if fallen journey that advances by “contention”—that is, dialectically, for “contradiction . . . is how the world moves” (*Invisible Man* 6)—and not without violence. Blood has been shed, scapegoats sacrificed, but the nation advances onward in the name of its “god-term,” democracy, which is fated to reveal “our unity-in-diversity, our oneness-in-manyness,” to the relentless beat of jazz and the blues (“Little Man” 502, 503).

I stumbled about dazed, the music beating hysterically in my ears. It was dark. . . . I was sore, and into my being had come a profound craving for tranquility, for peace and quiet. . . . For one thing, the trumpet was blaring and the rhythm was too hectic. —Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (original emphasis)

The above lines suggest that among the many times, places, and figures that crowd Armstrong’s performance of “Black and Blue,” Ellison saves some room for the hectic bleatings of bebop. At the very least, the passage serves ably to evoke the visceral repulsion and disorientation Ellison felt in bebop’s presence. In a letter to Albert Murray following the 1958 Newport Jazz Festival, he not only excoriates modern jazz in general—that “miserable hard-bopping noise”—but also singles out its most celebrated practitioners, such “screwedup [*sic*] musicians” as the “miserable, beat and lost” Charlie Parker, “that poor, evil, lost little Miles Davis, who . . . sounded

like he just couldn't get it together," and John Coltrane, "with his badly executed velocity exercises" (*Trading Twelves* 193). These newer artists, he opines, will "never be more than a bunch of little masturbators," a statement which, aside from resonating uncannily with Adorno's similarly couched dismissal of jazz, speaks to the solipsism Ellison perceives in the postwar avant-garde (194). Rather than engaging in affirmative communal ritual, the bebop-onanist plays only for—or with—himself (194).⁷ The Newport festival's one saving grace that year appears to have been a team-up of Ellington and Rushing that instigated a nostalgic return to communal wholeness, as surely as if Ellison had bitten into a hot yam on a Harlem sidewalk: "it was like the old Basie band playing the Juneteenth ramble at Forest Park in Okla. City" (194).

Ellison reserves his most articulate lamentations over bebop for his essay "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz," which depicts Charlie Parker as a false god, or at best as the wrong sort of prophet. With the publication of *Bird: The Legend of Charlie Parker*, the inventive saxophonist has undergone "his apotheosis or epiphany into the glory of those who have been reborn in legend" (*Living with Music* 69). But his is a pathetic apotheosis, lending itself to a mythic celebration of all the wrong things—in part because Parker never understood his own duties and obligations as a performer, just as he misunderstood the role of the previous generation's jazz heroes:

[H]is struggles to escape what in Armstrong is basically a *make-believe* role of clown—which the irreverent poetry and triumphant sound of his trumpet makes even the squarest of squares aware of—resulted in Parker's becoming something far more "primitive": a sacrificial figure whose struggles against personal chaos, onstage and off, served as entertainment for a ravenous, sensation-starved, culturally disoriented public. . . . While he slowly died (like a man dismembering himself with a dull razor on a spotlighted stage) from the ceaseless conflict from which issued both his art and his destruction, his public reacted as though he were doing much the same thing as those saxophonists who hoot and honk and roll on the floor. (71; original emphasis)

Parker's story spotlights and even celebrates this inadequate Phoenix's dismemberment—with a dull razor, no less—rather than any triumphant rise from the ashes. (Here, as nearly everywhere in Ellison, it is Armstrong who is "triumphant.") The body, which in the older generation is vital and "exuberant," is here, like those of the Bird's fellow boppers, "of a different physical build" than that of the real jazz giants, just as bebop's intellectual reserve "contrast[s] sharply with the exuberant and outgoing lyricism of the older men" (63). It is no surprise that the jazz hero of Ellison's second novel is such a large man, replete with a "great tub of guts and muscle and deep, windy lungs and this big keg-sized head and all that animal strength" (*Three Days* 471). Hickman's "sheer height and girth" is the outward manifestation of another, more pertinent largeness; the more flesh, in Ellison's cosmology, the more spirit (515).

Worse even than Parker's comparative smallness is the fact that his body falls apart in an emasculating dissolution. His debased hagiography ends with "his waning, suffering, disintegration and death," not with a meaningful rebirth (*Living with Music* 73). We should pause, too, over the word "disintegration," remembering that jazz's ability to *integrate*, to affirm and bring together communities of people—African American communities especially, but also pluralistic communities whose interior racial divisions could be healed by the music's catholic proselytizing—is for Ellison the true democratic mission and gospel of jazz. It is also no small component of the author's aesthetic philosophy: "The imagination is integrative. That's how you make the new—by putting something else with what you've got. And I'm unashamedly an American integrationist" (*Conversations* 235). Under the harsh light of Ellison's critical demands, Parker doesn't cut it as either musician or deity. In the final analysis, Bird "was not the god they see in him" (*Living with Music* 75).

As bebop abandons its sacred commitments, it also departs from the habitually telic quality of Armstrong- and Ellington-era jazz, whose diatonic structures are forever “evolving toward a goal, viz. the tonic,” thus “foster[ing] the illusion of *telos*” (Harding 145). Classic jazz for Ellison maps artistically the road that African Americans, and the entire American democracy, must follow—from dissonance to harmony, from the provisional chaos of artistic and political becoming to a tonic resolution. Little wonder, then, that Ellison should regret the way Armstrong’s familiar music, “that embodiment of a superior democracy in which each individual cultivated his uniqueness[, has] given way to the near-themeless virtuosity of bebop” (*Shadow and Act* 325). Ellison’s teleological outlook is not naïve by any means—he bemoans “the clash between the American dream and everyday American reality; between the ideal of equality and the actualities of our society in which social, educational, and economic inequalities are enforced explicitly on the irremediable ground of race”—but it is earnest, and he presupposes its necessity, always positing the role of the artist as that of encouraging the democratic dialectic and revitalizing its spirit (31).

So it is perfectly Ellisonian that his first novel should join the ranks of what Frank Kermode called “end-determined fictions” (6). “The end was in the beginning,” the narrator reminds us in the final pages, echoing his own promise in the prologue that “the end is in the beginning and lies far ahead” (571, 6). *Invisible Man* begins at the end, its prologue telling us exactly where (though not how) the narrator has ended up. The whole question of beginnings and ends thus shadows the novel’s pages from the start, indeed in an undeniably self-conscious fashion. Perceiving the importance of the future and of “the end”—of *telos*—to Ellison’s concern with American democracy and art, Fred Moten rightly reads jazz in *Invisible Man* as “the trope of a certain understanding of totality as America, of representation as America, of democracy as America, of the future—which is to say the end—as America” (69). In *Shadow and Act* Ellison confirms his sense not only of (African) America’s telic momentum, but also of his own writing’s obligation thereto. Like jazz and the blues, his fiction is meant to model an idealized form of progress, conceived as both an aesthetic and a political structure: “Our strength is that with the total society saying to us, ‘No, No, No, No,’ we continue *to move toward our goal*. So when I came to write I felt moved to affirm and to explore all this” (*Shadow and Act* 76; latter emphasis added). The route toward this goal is not fixed, preordained, but rather jazz-shaped, improvisatory, riffing on *Invisible Man*’s boomeranging model of history. Like all African Americans, and indeed, for Ellison, like all Americans, the invisible man must negotiate his way to self-actualization through a series of epistemic reversals occasioned by one traumatic boomerang-whomp after another. He rejects the arrow and the spiral models of history, but his critiques of Marxist and other vulgarly deterministic historiographies do not imply a dismissal of progress or teleology per se. It is important to remember that the boomerang’s flight, albeit erratic, nonetheless knocks him *up* a rung or two on the ladder of consciousness each time it comes back around.

“In my novel,” Ellison elaborates, “the narrator’s development is one through blackness to light; that is, from ignorance to enlightenment: invisibility to visibility” (215). The invisible man’s “movement vertically downward [into his subterranean apartment] is a process of *rising* to an understanding of the human condition” (111). The novel’s own critiques of naively simplistic models of progress—from Reverend Barbee’s (literally) blind vision of African American history as “an ever-unfolding glory,” “a saga of mounting triumphs,” to Brother Jack’s notion of history as “a force in a laboratory experiment” to be controlled and directed at will—may tempt us to

disregard this progression toward “enlightenment” (*Invisible Man* 133, 441). But to ignore that progression is to neglect the obvious transformations the invisible man undergoes along his journey from the false certainties of ignorance to the complexities of enlightened subjectivity. This is what Ellison meant by describing *Invisible Man* as his own “attempt to return to the mood of personal moral responsibility for democracy” (*Shadow and Act* 151). The narrator must *learn*—painfully, traumatically—to “see the darkness of lightness,” to read the terrain of his invisibility and to interpret his place in it (*Invisible Man* 6). He must advance, with the nation, according to “the improvised form, the willful juxtaposition of modes” that characterizes American society as well as its most original artistic contribution: jazz, that perfect embodiment of the “American compulsion to improvise upon the given” (“Little Man” 507).⁸

In contrast, bop, a species of Rinehartism, partakes of chaos and revels in “themeless” disorder rather than performing the Ellisonian artist’s task of bringing form to that disorder, of mastering the protean chaos that threatens. As Reverend Hickman remembers of his own jazz-band days: “our hard-driving style gave a little more order to what even *white* folks were feeling. Gave form to all that freewheeling optimism and told folks who they were and what they could be” (*Three Days* 717). Coupled with his persistent valorization of order over formlessness, Ellison’s consistently teleological, even theological conception of African American futurity renders suspect the popular reluctance to find in his work, *Invisible Man* in particular, any structure or style that carries even a whiff of *telos*. This critical tendency motivates recent readings of the novel as relentlessly un-diatonic, hence a literary form of bebop or post-bop, indebted more to the post-World War II avant-garde than to the music of Armstrong, Basie, and Ellington. For instance, understating Ellison’s “ambivalence” toward the newer music, Michael Borshuk adduces *Invisible Man*’s bop-like “palimpsestic negotiation of tradition” to propose that bebop is “the form of jazz that Ellison’s novel most resembles” (*Swinging* 91, 114). *Invisible Man* becomes, for Borshuk, “a literary realization of the bebop aesthetic” (“So Black” 268).⁹ Ellison’s recurrent rejections of bebop, while hardly obviating readings such as these, must at least call them into question. Why would Ellison adopt as template for his novel a musical form against which he inveighs so spiritedly in his criticism and correspondence?

Kevin Bell takes his own jazz-informed reading of the novel a step further away from the “familiar music” of Ellison’s beloved big-band era, comparing *Invisible Man*’s supposed “embrace of entropy” with the relentlessly improvisational elements of Sun Ra and other free-jazz pioneers. Making no allowance for the novel’s developmental narrative, indeed reading its protagonist’s boomeranging as the “nondevelopmental and perpetual movement of subjectivity,” Bell argues that for the narrator, “all origins and ends are strictly discursive sites, no more than verbal strategies” (23, 28). This reading, as Bell acknowledges, cannot be made to accord with the conspicuously teleological worldview that Ellison elaborates unambiguously and at length in the essays. Thus he posits, in effect, two separate and incommensurable Ellisons; the essayist can only be imagined as distinct from the novelist, who comes down on the side of chaos, invisibility, and multiplicity, leaving the “critical Ellison . . . to long for the home he denies his abandoned protagonist in *Invisible Man*” (39). Yet Bell’s reading really accords with neither of these Ellisons, and certainly not with the goal-oriented politics made manifest in *Invisible Man*, which foregrounds its narrator’s painful but empowering ascension through the ranks of a boomeranging dialectic—at the end of which he subscribes plainly to the Ellisonian goal of “Our fate,” which “is to become one, and yet many” (*Invisible Man* 577).

B. P. Rinehart presides over Bell’s analysis as a kind of heroic figure, the “apotheosis of the nonidentitarian” (31). But to elevate in this way a character whom Ellison himself, with far less enthusiasm, considered “the personification of chaos,” is to elide a crucial point. Rinehart is no role model; he is merely an embodiment of

the extreme *possibilities* of African American (non)identity, minus that commitment to the collective which for Ellison is the responsibility of all democratic subjects, especially of the artist, whose job it is to model democracy's fated fulfillment in his or her art—be it music, sermons, or novels (*Shadow and Act* 223). “But what do I really want,” the narrator wonders at the close of *Invisible Man*, and he begins to answer that question with an emphatic repudiation: “Certainly not the freedom of a Rinehart” (575). Despite the narrator's refusal ever to “lose sight of the chaos,” he hardly aspires to personify it; his earlier attempts “to do a Rinehart” must be counted among the various provisional and temporary positions he occupies along his dialectical odyssey, that perilous course he charts—beset on one side by the whirlpool of Rinehart's elusive indeterminacy, and on the other by the rock of Brother Jack's dogma—toward the attainment, in his own words on the novel's final page, of “a socially responsible role” (580, 507, 581).

To fully appreciate Ellison's own valuation of Rinehart, it is helpful to consider one of the chief revelations of Adam Bradley's *Ralph Ellison in Progress*: that Rinehart “is reborn in Ellison's novel in progress, transformed and transfigured” as Bliss/Sunraider (125). The author's earliest notes for the second novel feature a character “of indeterminate race,” named Rhinehart or “Senator Bliss P. Rhineheart,” who “is raised in the church by a black preacher; he runs away and reemerges as a movie man looking to exploit a small Oklahoma town; he fathers a son named Severen . . . and he gains political office, serving in the United States Senate, where he is assassinated” (141, 133). An expurgated scene from *Invisible Man* informs us that “Rinehart had been a boy preacher” and that he “might be the same as ‘another boy preacher who had grown up and passed for white and become . . . a reactionary writer on politics—with no one except a few negroes the wiser’ ” (125). As late as the mid-1980s, Ellison's notes on the novel still refer to Sunraider as “Rhineheart,” as though each name summons merely a different iteration of a man who, in his “mythomania” and “ironic self-rejection . . . has rejected his human center” (qtd. in 138-39).

Walker Millsap, one of Hickman's informants, explains in a long letter the remarkable extent to which Bliss has succeeded as a Rinehartist, slipping and sliding from hustler to gentleman to chauffeur to entrepreneur, from advertising to minstrel shows to the movies, doing stints as a songwriter and as a purveyor of bleaching creams (*Three Days* 682-707).¹⁰ All of this helps to explain that otherwise perplexing note appended to *Three Days Before the Shooting* . . . : “Bliss Proteus Rhinehart returned to his part very much as a man to his mother or a dog to his vomit, and that's no lie” (976). Ellison evidently associates Rinehart's chaotic, small-time successes with Sunraider's equally chaotic failures, and he hints at this association subtly enough by carrying over in the second novel the “Bliss” of Bliss Proteus Rinehart (*Invisible Man* 494). Rinehart and Sunraider stand as warnings that the celebrated “American compulsion to improvise upon the given” has its ethical limits (“Little Man” 511). And other limits as well: for Rinehart becomes Bliss, and Bliss becomes Sunraider, who becomes both cause and victim of a suicidal patricide. Chaos, we can only infer, breeds chaos.

The second novel offers a more sustainable and affirmative model of identity in the character Love New. Ever candid about his mixed racial ancestry (white, black, American Indian), he embodies a unified diversity. He is called Black One, Part White One, or Love New, depending on present company, but he answers freely to any of these names (*Three Days* 829). Unlike a Rinehart or a Bliss/Sunraider—a.k.a. Rhineheart, Prophet Eddy Shaw, Prophet D. Witt, and Mr. Movie Man—Love need not repudiate his other names and selves to inhabit just one identity at a time. He is multiracial and multifaceted, but he is finally less protean than integrative—that all-important Ellisonian term. In this way he mirrors A. Z. Hickman, whose initials remind us that he is first *and* last, alpha and omega, both/*and*: he is a jazzman preacher who recognizes his profane past as having “[i]ts own communion and fellowship,”

and whose sermonizing borrows the rousing erotic charge of a jazz performance: “If they’re cold you heat them up; when they get hot, you guide the flame”; “you must speak to the gut as well as to the heart and brain. . . . I’ve made that whole church throb” (480, 303, 310). Eschewing disguises of any form, Hickman is a unity of seeming opposites, an ineluctable blend of profane and sacred: “I’m neither Peter Wheatstraw disguised as King Kong the Baptist nor King Kong disguised as Wheatstraw, I’m Hickman” (724). John Wright nicely elucidates the essential difference between Ellisonianism and Rinehartism, as suggested by the lessons of *Invisible Man*’s narrator: “Unlike Rinehart, ‘that confidencing sonofabitch’ whose own ingenuity knows no moral boundaries, [the invisible man] commits himself to community” (193). Such a commitment entails that the American artist answer two sacred callings: first, the universal artistic commitment to master chaos through form, and second, the specific American task of conquering all those sins—racism, inequality, injustice—whose continued existence impedes the attainment of our democratic ideal. These are the actions that Ralph Ellison, like Louis Armstrong’s familiar music, demands.

Thy voice could sing through the blues and even speak through the dirty dozens. . . . In the zest and richness Thou were there, yes! —Ralph Ellison, *Three Days Before the Shooting*. . .

In a *tour-de-force* passage from the second novel, Sunraider remembers the traditional Juneteenth revival as a “bunch of old-fashioned Negroes celebrating an illusion of emancipation, and getting it mixed up with the Resurrection” (*Three Days* 314). This confusion of the historical with the biblical pervades this section of the manuscript, a conflation that Ellison “mixes up” even further by introducing a third term, jazz, as both theme and structuring principle. Like jazz artists, Bliss and his counterpart, Reverend Hickman, jam together and riff on one another’s sermonizing throughout the revival. Sunraider recalls the way Hickman would pick up his old trombone, “blowing tones that sounded like his own voice amplified; persuading, denouncing, rejoicing—moving beyond words back to the undifferentiated cry.” This reflection prompts another: “Jazz. What was jazz and what religion back there?” (314) The question remains unanswered, and unanswerable, because—as Ellison constantly reminds us—jazz and religion do not occupy opposed or even wholly distinct realms. It was through his trombone that Hickman learned, and from the pulpit that he perfected, “the secret of moving his listeners beyond the deceptive limitations of words and into those misty regions of existence wherein all things, whether sacred or profane, time-bound or timeless, were constantly mingled” (519). In church or dancehall, the full-blooded jazz spirit sounds the same transcendent though never disembodied call to democracy; it is as sacred as it is profane, whether in the voice of Jimmy Rushing or in the extralinguistic cry of Hickman’s trombone.

This easy convergence of profane and sacred, church and juke-joint, gets tested in Book I of the novel when “Mother Smathers,” a conman disguised in a nun’s habit, enters a rowdy jazz bar to raise funds. Chaos, naturally, ensues, erupting in bloody violence that ends only the faux nun has been chased into the street. The bar’s owner laments, “It makes for too much confusion, bringing religion into a jazz joint” (124). It is hard to tell whether he realizes the irony of his statement, as inside the band continues officiating over its own communion, driving at least one listener to dance as though he were “a transported supplicant in a frenzied rite” (122). The narrator reports,

It was the weird mixture of sacred and profane which provoked the laughter and gave it its character that got me. There was a note sounding through it that was more upsetting than the violent and androgynous figure who had aroused it. It was too inclusive, it hinted at too many unnameable, chaotic, and unpleasant things. (125)

The chaos caused by Mother Smathers has everything to do with his androgynous ambivalence: an uncanny blend, not only of male and female, but also of profane and sacred. But it is important to recognize that this figure is not at all the sacred-profane admixture Ellison endorses. In the character of Mother Smathers we have instead an apparent woman who is revealed to be a man, and an apparent preacher who becomes unclothed as a profane confidence man. The thresholds dividing flesh from spirit are rendered wholly visible at the instants of their unveiling—whereas, in Ellison's preferred species of jazz performance and religious observance, the divisions between flesh and spirit, secular and sacred, dissolve completely. Indeed, the more embodied, the more earthy the music or the rite becomes, the more sacred a character it assumes.

Back at the Juneteenth revival, Bliss and Hickman preach on the Valley of Dry Bones, an archetypal text of the black sermonic tradition, affirming like Bessie Smith “the earth out of which we came” while also illustrating the ritual centrality of music and dance to African American identity (*Living with Music* 12):

And if they ask you in the city why we praise the Lord with bass drums and brass trombones tell them we were rebirthed dancing, we were rebirthed crying affirmation of the Word, quickening our transcended flesh.

. . . we stamped our feet at the trumpet's sound and we clapped our hands, ah, in joy! And we moved, yes, together in a dance, amen! . . .

. . . They couldn't divide us now. Because anywhere they dragged us we throbbed in time together. If we got a chance to sing, we sang the same song. If we got a chance to dance, we beat back hard times and tribulations with a clap of our hands and the beat of our feet, and it was the same dance. (*Three Days* 321-23)

The dance and the song are danced and sung together, “throbbed” together, held together by a common time signature that unites and reaffirms the community, shielding it from whatever forces would divide it. This is the function of Hickman's preaching, no less than of Rushing's blues. Tragically, however, one of the revival's presiding preachers is fated to reject the community of wholeness that he has helped to foster, which brings us to the great enigma at the core of Ellison's unfinished novel: How and why does Bliss become Sunraider? This mystery, the novel suggests, is the nation's, and it has broadly theological significance. “There lies the nation on its groaning bed,” Hickman thinks as he observes the hospitalized senator; “there on the bed lies the old abiding mystery in its latest form and still mysterious” (479, 413). How can white America deny black culture, when that culture simply *is* American culture? How can the nation's actions conflict so baldly with its promise and its promises? How can a fallen people sustain its Edenic illusions when the fruits of its Fall are everywhere in evidence?

Bliss/Sunraider embodies these contradictions, and his dramatic fall before Congress recalls not only the expulsion of Adam from the Garden—“Adam” being, after all, the senator's chosen first name—but also the fall of Lucifer, a descent that resonates with Hickman's own sermonizing on the original sins of America's European settlers:

It was a crime, Rev. Bliss, brothers and sisters, like the fall of proud Lucifer from Paradise. . . . [T]his was a country dedicated to the principles of Almighty God. . . . They had turned traitor to the God who had set them free from Europe's tyrant kings. Because, God have mercy on them, no sooner than they got free enough to breathe themselves, they set out to bow us down. (316-17)

Thus educated, Bliss nonetheless grows up to side with the oppressors, precisely by putting to political use his knowledge of the oppressed. Hickman's voice continues to suffuse the senator's race-baiting rhetorical flourishes: “he felt himself carried swiftly beyond either a concern with the meaning of the mysterious vision or the rhetorical fitness of his words onto that plane of verbal exhilaration for which he was notorious” (237). This is the plane of the preacher's “undifferentiated cry”;

Sunraider's speech before Congress perverts the awesome flights of Hickman's vocal performances, dramatizing palpably its speaker's fall from the black folk culture he continues both to channel and to deny. As Sister Neal remarks to Hickman during the speech, to see the senator "*doing you* in front of all these people and humiliating us at the same time—I don't know, it's just too much" (1009).

The reader asks along with Hickman "how after knowing such times as those [Bliss] could take off," leaving behind "the *communion*, the coming together," that characterizes the black community in which he grew up (325). The reason for his rejection of that communion, and for his horrible transformation—the initial inscrutability of which has led more than one critic to blame Bliss/Sunraider's contradictoriness for the novel's failure to cohere—may, I submit, be startlingly simple.¹¹ The answer lies—and here the national parallel is again evident—in Bliss's inability ever to *integrate* his own subjectivity in the way he can a congregation full of people. He cannot reconcile his body with his mind, his flesh with his soul, his desires with his vocation, any more than he can reconcile Revelation with the lower-case revelation of a woman's nakedness. (And he can only interpret the latter with reference to the "naked, roaring-drunk Noah" [379].) He might preach Job with the best of them, but he doesn't dance (282), and he can't sing: "Bliss, [Hickman] said, there's but one thing keeping you from being a great preacher—you just won't learn to sing! A preacher just has *got* to sing, Bliss" (264). What Hickman doesn't know is that Bliss has tried, unsuccessfully, to sing (265), but he cannot fuse his preacher self with his embodied, desiring, singing self—in the way that Jimmy Rushing, or Bessie Smith, or Mahalia Jackson succeed at doing. Without the ever-requisite music, his preaching is doomed to become the hollow, sterile racism of Senator Sunraider, a discursive force for division and intolerance rather than for the sacred goals of integrated democracy.

That is why the boy splits in two, his body having to accommodate the "Bliss inside me" as well as "the stranger" (268). "What happened to Body?" Sunraider wonders from his hospital bed. "Come back, Body!" (247, 299) Although he is ostensibly referring to his boyhood friend Body, the implication here is hard to miss. Sunraider has abandoned the body, or at least the life-affirming embodiment of the folk culture he left behind. In his delirium he again registers what seems to him an irreconcilability of church and flesh: "*Except in church* we [Body and Bliss] were always together" (285; emphasis added).¹² Sunraider still fails to heed the lesson that Hickman not only preaches but embodies: that "Body and soul are all mixed together" and not only can but must remain together, in the church or out of it (412). Hence Hickman's advice for anyone seeking God to "look into his own *bed*" and to "search his own *loins*" (387), and his prophecy that "If we ever learn to feel real revulsion of the flesh—any flesh—that's when hell will truly erupt down here and the whole unhappy history become an insane waste" (468).

Yet perhaps Hickman himself is to blame for Bliss's fate. He has, after all, compelled a child—one still too young to grasp either the flesh or the spirit—to stimulate the passions of bodies and of souls simultaneously, to do, that is, the grown-up jazz-preacher work of exciting and tending the audience/congregation's passionate, sacredly profane mysteries. On one hand Hickman wants Bliss "to be resurrected so that the sinners can find life everlasting" (249). He is to be "a symbol and hero on the order of Christ," who will fulfill "the combined promises of Scripture and this land's Constitution" (527). But on the other hand, the boy's endlessly reiterated resurrections from his vaginal, pink-lined coffin resonate with a much more sexually knowing performance—except, that is, for the sexually unknowing Bliss, who innocently breathes "the hot ejaculatory air" through a tube hidden in the lid of the casket (330). He becomes Sunraider, as Ellison's own notes suggest, "precisely because he was catapulted into manhood too early" (*Juneteenth* 357). How could Bliss comprehend the ecstasies of mind and body that he uncannily induces from his child's pulpit? As he explains, many long years later, to Hickman:

Maybe it was the weight of the darkness, the tomb in such close juxtaposition with the womb. . . . I guess it was just too much for me. I could set off all that wild exaltation, the rending of veils, the grown women thrown into trances; screaming, tearing their clothing. All that great inarticulate moaning and struggle against what they called the flesh . . . those aisles of straining bodies; flinging themselves upon the mourners' bench, or rolling on the floor calling to their God. . . . Didn't you realize that afterwards when they surrounded and lifted me up, the heat was still in them? That I could smell the sweat of male and female mystery?

. . . Didn't you realize that you'd trapped me in the dead center between flesh and spirit, and that at my age they were both ridiculous? . . .

. . . Then when they gathered shouting around me, filling the air with the odor of their passion and exertion, the other mystery began. . . .

. . . I was too young to contain it all. . . .

. . . I was bringing forth results which I couldn't understand. (311-12)

Hickman's response comes too late to be of much use to the senator, but it ably sums up an extraordinarily important motif of Ellison's work, a motif binding flesh to spirit that has everything to do with the preoccupations that dominated the author's thought and career, those democratic goals—oneness in many-ness, the activation of self and community—that are so sacred that they can be attained only through the most diligently profane means.

What was it, Bliss? Was it that you wanted the spirit without the sweat of the flesh? The spirit *is* the flesh, Bliss; just as the flesh is the spirit under the right conditions. They are bound together. At least nobody has yet been able to get at one without the other. (312; original emphasis)

These sentiments have as much to do with Ellison's beloved jazz as with the black church, wherein "the Christian split between the body and the soul is overcome" (Murphy 174). Hickman speaks, that is, from the very heart of Ellison's textual universe, where preachers and jazzmen inhabit the same indissoluble bodies, where the sacred is profane, the many are one, and, yes: the Spirit is the Flesh.

I wish to thank Adam Bradley for graciously answering my questions about the second novel and for providing me an advance copy of his book *Ralph Ellison in Progress*; and Nicole Waligora-Davis, whose Cornell graduate seminar in the fall of 2007 inspired these reflections.

Notes

1. Ellison was fond of pointing out that "Among all the allusions to earlier poetry that you find in Eliot's *The Waste Land* he still found a place to quote from 'Under the Bamboo Tree,' a lyric from a song by James Weldon Johnson, Bob Cole, and Rosamond Johnson" (*Living with Music* 29). As it happens, Ellison got his facts wrong—a telling error, perhaps, in its seemingly wishful attempt to fuse even more strongly the two traditions, literary modernism and jazz, that inspired so much of Ellison's work. Although drafts of *The Waste Land* "contained at one time references to a number of rags and minstrel songs"—which were, in any case, mostly expunged in the published 1922 text—these seem not to have included any specific allusions to "Under the Bamboo Tree" (North, *Dialect* 10). Ellison may have had in mind the "distorted version" of that song that appears in *Sweeney Agonistes* (88). Incidentally, the philistines—those critics who were deaf to the merits of jazz and of modernist poetry both—shared Ellison's inference of the essential links between literary modernism and jazz, though in a negative sense, seeing formlessness where Ellison found a positive quantity of form and structure. A *New York Times* editorial of 1924 averred that jazz "is to music what most of the 'new poetry,' so-called, is to real poetry. Both are without the structure and form essential to music and poetry alike" (qtd. in Levine 179). Clive Bell drew a similar comparison, complaining that Eliot, like other high modernists, had produced "a ragtime literature which flouts traditional rhythms and sequences and grammar and logic" (qtd. in North, *Reading* 115).

2. "In addition to making hundreds of biblical allusions, Ellison often uses theological words like 'communion,' 'temptation,' and 'sin,' in ways that—if not quite orthodox—are never ironic. . . . At times he even sounds like a preacher. . . . And whenever Ellison inserts a sermon in his text—whether it's on 'the blackness of blackness,' African-American history, or even 'the letter A'—he is underscoring the subject's importance" (Saunders 36).

3. In a suggestive letter to Murray, Ellison writes of having to dress down a fellow critic at the Newport Jazz Festival who “didn’t believe that Jazz was connected with the life of any racial group in this country . . . and I didn’t bite my tongue in telling this guy where he came from and who his daddy was—who his black daddy was” (*Trading Twelves* 195). With regard not just to music but to culture in general, as Hickman puts the matter in the second novel, white Americans “take what they need [from blacks] and then git. Then they start doing all right for themselves and pride tells them to deny that they ever knew us” (1009-10). The jazzman Lee Willie Minifees expresses this feeling with considerably more indignation, complaining of black musicians’ and songwriters’ exploitation by those who “ain’t even smelled the funk of Birmingham . . . and never even rubbed a chick at a breakfast dance!” (222) He even views the senator’s assassination, following so fast on the heels of Minifees’s own Cadillac flambé, as another in a long series of white appropriations: “here comes a cat who’s done grabbed my Sunraider riff and blowed it through a goddamn shotgun!” (222) Such statements contrast tonally with Ellison’s own integrationism, but they also articulate white America’s intrinsic blackness in a way the novel clearly authorizes. The inverse of Ellison’s general proposition of the nation’s essential Negro-ness—the sense that a projected *whiteness* lies at the core of American constructions of blackness—irrupts into Welborn McIntyre’s dream of a talking lawn jockey that undergoes a discomfiting metamorphosis, its black face dissolving to expose McIntyre’s “own face, pale and ghastly. . . emerging as from the cracked shell of a black iron egg” (193).

4. Ellison invariably emphasizes jazz music’s live presence, as exemplified by the public jazz dance, as essential to the “communal experience” it can best offer in “the interchange between the orchestra and a moving audience,” buoyed by “the supportive rite of dancing” (*Living with Music* 274, 27). One of Ellison’s principal dissatisfactions with bebop is that it “has become separated from the ritual form of the dance” (qtd. in O’Meally, “Introduction” xxix). All of this makes it very difficult to accept the claim, advanced by Alexander Weheliye in an otherwise compelling essay on Ellison and sound technology, “that Ellison locates the [Benjaminian] aura not in the original musical utterance but in the mode of mechanical reproduction itself” (106). I would argue instead that the inordinate amount of time Ellison spent worrying over his stereo equipment’s sonic fidelity (with all the concern that word implies for the *live* event of the recording) reflects his abiding obsession with replicating the auratic presence of the ordinary jazz performance.

5. Ellison, in an interview with O’Meally: “I’ve *never* identified with Africa. Now, I’m not denying my Afro-blood at *all*. But there’s a complex mass of cultures over there. . . . My strength comes from Louis Armstrong and Jimmy Rushing, Hot Lips Page and people on that level, Duke Ellington . . . Mark Twain—all kinds of American figures who have been influenced by and contributed to that complex interaction of background and cultures which is specifically *American*” (*Living with Music* 286).

6. The character Love New speaks to Ellison’s vision of a fallen American Eden as well as to the genocidal sacrifice that undermined America’s sacred promises even as it made them possible. Conversing with Hickman, New compares the American Indians’ totem rituals to “your High Court up in Washington. . . . Up there the medicine men are called justices, and their totems have names like the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the Constitution. Which are totems of words but more powerful than armies” (824). But white Americans, he observes, have “corrupted the spirit of the words they claimed to hold sacred”—those “documents of state” that Hickman himself accuses America of “defiling” (808, 527).

7. Adorno, whose position on jazz Richard Leppert (a sympathetic reader) characterizes as unresearched, ill-informed, and “indefensible,” infamously argued that jazz syncopation “is purposeless. . . . It is plainly a ‘coming-too-early,’ just as anxiety leads to premature orgasm, just as impotence expresses itself through premature and incomplete orgasm” (356, 490). It is revealing of Ellison’s visceral reaction to bebop that he resorts to a similar trope of sexual inadequacy in order to vent his abhorrence.

8. Ellison is not alone in assigning jazz a set of highly valued democratic and spiritual aims. Crouch argues that jazz and the blues take on “the ultimate democratic challenge, which means bringing into the aesthetic arena the fundamentals of Constitutional discourse” (20). For Crouch, jazz contains always “a spiritual essence,” and its successes constitute “a victory for democracy, and a symbol of the aesthetic dignity, which is finally spiritual, that performers can achieve” (14-15). Douglas states the linkage of jazz, the nation, and spirituality in similarly bald terms: “If the blues were the roots of America’s modern religious sensibility, jazz was its oxygen” (434).

9. Spaulding reaches similar conclusions about *Invisible Man*’s aesthetic and thematic relation to post-World War II jazz. Like Borshuk he reads the young narrator as reflective of the boppers’ ambivalent relationship to their forebears: “From Ellison’s perspective, the narrator suffers from a ‘crisis of identity’ much like Charlie Parker and other bebop musicians . . . experienced: an inability to discern the value of the folk tradition of their past”—as represented by a Peter Wheatstraw, or by a Louis Armstrong—“from the racial stereotypes that perverted that tradition” (490). Spaulding remains more alert than Borshuk to the problems raised by Ellison’s obstinate critical stance, however, and appropriately finds in *Invisible Man* a final development *beyond* a (naïve) bebop mentality: by the time of the novel’s prologue and final pages, he has moved “beyond the identity crisis that Ellison sees in the bebop musicians of the 1940s. At this reflective stage in his life, the narrator can separate Armstrong’s virtuosity from the stereotypical limitations

imposed on his art and his persona as a performer; the narrator of the Prologue . . . has reached a level of virtuosity that allows him to embrace Armstrong's voice as a part of his own" (492).

10. According to Millsap's letter, under the shape-shifting mentorship of Mississippi Brown—himself “a rambunctious embodiment of living chaos”—Bliss becomes an elusive figure “that can only be described as a combination of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, P. T. Barnum, George Washington Carver, Groucho Marx, Billy Sunday, Yellow Kid Weil, William S. Hart, Teddy Roosevelt, Warren G. Harding, Gaston B. Means, and Lon Chaney—*plus* our own dam' Sam, John Henry, and Brer Rabbit. A creation which turned out to be so swindle-prone, fluent, and shifty that absolutely *no one* could get him into focus” (690, 699).

11. Both Kenneth Warren, in “Chaos Not Quite Controlled: Ellison's Uncompleted Transit to *Juneteenth*” (Posnock 188-200), and Eric Sundquist, in “Dry Bones” (Posnock 217-30), have reasonably blamed the seemingly irresolvable contradiction that is Bliss/Sunraider for Ellison's failure to finish the novel. Yet the recently published *Three Days Before the Shooting* . . . makes it clear that this pivotal character posed the least of the book's problems. As characters go, Reverend Hickman and Welborn McIntyre, the white reporter who narrates Book I, seem to have been much taller hurdles in the novel's path to completion—not to mention Severen, who remains little more than a cipher. McIntyre's personality and voice can hardly compete with the sermonic vitality of a Hickman or a Bliss/Sunraider, let alone sustain fifteen chapters' worth of narrative. And it was Hickman, the character that had decades earlier been rendered so vividly in Book II, who became Ellison's “nearly consuming preoccupation” in the computer-enabled years of obsessive rewriting and reimagining—at the expense of the novel's more pressing structural needs (Bradley 25). By offering “a stifling awareness of endless possibility,” Ellison's computer must have represented for the author a kind of technological “chaos,” whether he realized it or not. It was certainly to blame, in large part, for Ellison's counterproductive, seemingly endless reworkings of a handful of scenes. “It is possible,” Bradley observes in this context, “for an artist to be too free”—a sentiment Ellison himself expressed in countless ways in his pronouncements on the necessary discipline and limits of art (34).

12. Yet on some level, or at least in one remarkable scene, Bliss recognizes that his division into Body and Bliss amounts to a false dichotomy. As he courts Lavatrice in his days as “Mr. Movie Man,” he realizes that “the Bliss inside me” connotes an affirmation of the flesh, not a denial: “He, Bliss, returned. . . . the me preacher . . . the preacher me . . . Bliss no more. . . . Yes, I want to go anywhere you say, Miss Teasing Brown, yes I do. He was trying to break out of my chest. Bliss, fighting me hard” (266).

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