

**“CAN YOU FEEL IT?” EMOTIONAL RESONANCE ACROSS JAZZ AND
LITERATURE**

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This study explores the interpretive dissonance between two forms of Impressionist artistic expression in the twentieth century. Duke Ellington and Ernest Hemingway offer fruitful comparisons of the High Modernist short story and the short instrumental orchestral Jazz compositional forms respectively. The author offers a qualitative account of the direct threads of comparison between the forms, citing specific examples from each artist. Many questions arise that challenge fundamental aspects of critical convention. How are these conventions applied to an inter-disciplinary topic? What is fundamentally different about the process of appreciating music versus literature? How, when we consider each as performative texts, does the distortion of personal experience versus authorial intent confound authoritative claims about Impressionistic work? These comparisons draw direct parallels between the following examples: Ellington’s compositions, “Take the ‘A’ Train,” “The Star-Crossed Lovers,” and “Daybreak Express,” Hemingway’s short stories, “The Short and Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” “Big Two-Hearted River,” and “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place.” This is a broad, exploratory search for loci of meaning that investigate the critical discourse in different interpretive communities.

The methodology focuses on detailed readings of music and literature with an eye for threads of connection between the two forms. Historical background and philosophical justifications help substantiate claims throughout. The focus, at times, compares component elements of composition and asks whether they can be held responsible for emotional response.

This close reading then contrasts with broader attempts to justify emotional response through general affective reactions.

The conclusions suggest that a closer look at the interplay between forms does impact the reading of each text individually. The experience of reading the texts side-by-side connects thematic trends that would otherwise remain hidden. These two artists are shown to be prime examples of both aesthetic complexity and interpretive flexibility. This project fills a gap in the critical discourse that justly compares two prominent artists of the twentieth century that are rarely discussed in the same sentence.

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1.0 PANDORA’S BOX AND OTHER CLICHÉS

I sat in my History of Jazz class one day fingering scale patterns on my left leg while being introduced to yet another performer praised as “The Greatest _____ of the _____’s,” or, “The King/Emperor/Sultan/Master of the Blues/Funk/Swing/e.t.c.” I listened as my right hand took sparse notes in time with the cadence of the tapping of my left. Then, the YouTube clip loaded and Duke Ellington’s “Take the ‘A’ Train” came roaring out through the P.A. system. I had known the name Ellington in the general Rolodex of Jazz composers; it was this formal introduction to the sounds of the large Swing-era orchestra, however, that attuned my ear to this intriguing arrangement of sound. The rich symphonic textures, the melodic variation, the improvising over a careful and clean rhythm section—this is the sound of our country’s musical legacy. I began to think about what this moment was culturally, musically, and most crucially, artistically. How does the critical language used to describe Ellington compare to the critical language used to describe other forms of art? Is there a formal resonance in different expressions of modernism that can bring together different idiomatic discourses? I seek a better understanding of such a question through a close exploration of music and literature as inclusive texts; this close reading will point to Impressionism as the unifying mode. This project is designed for a reader marginally versed in both musical and literary traditions; indeed, one of my larger goals is to encourage a side-by-side reading of these two fields of the humanities.

Working within the shifting definitions of terms like “Modernism,” “Impressionism,” and “emotion,” all of which are central to my study, frequently mars any sense of clear, discernable progress towards a quantitative conclusion. This has been a journey that plays with the analytic,

the subjective, and the empirical in ways that I can only express as frustrating yet enlightening. The theoretical ground may at times feel unstable, but it is well trodden. What I hope to accomplish over the course of this project is an examination of not just two artistic mediums of the early-mid twentieth century in which a similar poetic subjectivity can be found, but also the work of two particular artists, Duke Ellington and Ernest Hemingway, who exemplify that subjectivity. These two illuminate the poignancy of their respective art forms and depict similar ways of thinking in the changed, modern world. A wild goose chase; a plunge through unearned conclusions; a Lewis Carroll-esque journey down the proverbial rabbit hole; I constantly fear these obstacles—but, there have been few experiences as rewarding as stepping over the precipice into the cloudy, the murky, and the under-defined.

Some preliminary steps are in order. First, a working definition of modernism as a cultural phenomenon must be established. Second, Impressionism must be analyzed in the separate fields of music and literature in order to more fully understand the evolution of the concept in each, and so better appreciate its role in Ellington and Hemingway's work. Finally, a conceptual framework for analysis must be established that will allow my work to take on some coherent shape within the appropriate context.

Modernism is a difficult term to identify because of the connotations it holds within different fields and hermeneutic frameworks. For the historically minded critic, modernism comes from a societal shift through industrialization and technological advancement; these tangible changes are manifest in artistic media because of the bourgeoisies' increased acknowledgment of its place in the world. This definition is incomplete. For each field, there seems to be a new vague definition of what modernism means; the key influences range from a myriad of adapting schools of thought. The only generic claims that one can make about it, as an

artistic movement, seem to surround *very* general claims about technological and cultural advancements. For the literary modernists, defying convention might take on a drastically different form than for visual media. For composers, acknowledgment of previous work is intrinsic to describing a new world. For choreographers, primitivism and classicism invaded the landscape far more than for philosophers. It becomes clear that there is no unifying definition that addresses the specifics of each form; however, that does not mean that different expressive media do not bear a familial resemblance. This is the claim about modernism that I will expand. My thesis is that there is a single line of interpretive growth between the modernist author, Ernest Hemingway, and the modernist Jazz composer, Duke Ellington, stemming from similar realizations and acknowledgments of their “modern” world.

Where literary critics occasionally break down Hemingway’s exercise of modernism in his short stories into component parts and dissect the origins of specific techniques and cues, I will try to expand upon this type of work not because it lacks a direct equivalent in the musical realm (it does), but because it precludes a framework that can explain emotional response. Discord in definitions of modernism tends to occur in relation to questions of emotion and poetic aesthetics. Working within a definition that encourages engagement with the personal response to the artwork without seeking grounding in objective criteria is what enables me to delineate in the two artists a similar poetic subject who, through this art, comes to life. Musically, this same conflict arises between those who discuss Ellington’s oeuvre in terms of particular harmonic trends and musical ideas and those who discuss his impact as a modernist artist seeking broader claims about the nature of art. These sort of methodological differences play out between the sub-categories of musicology. Approaches to Ellington vary between the ethnomusicologist (a lean towards sociological claims) and the analytical musicologist (a focus on the notes and

structures of the music); these same divisions appear in criticism surrounding Hemingway. My goal is to point out that while the nuts and bolts of these two forms of modernism are different, the broader philosophical and aesthetic claims follow a similar trajectory.

Impressionism is the next term that requires more explanation because of how its use requires a crucial act of translation across genres. If we were to look to a generic definition of Impressionism, we would find a claim somewhere along the lines of “describing a moment.” This is all well and good, but it gets at a quintessential problem in my research. How does one articulate a moment or a feeling? Is it only by *narrative* description? Physical representation? Is it possible to share an emotion from the artist to the audience without a distorting critical act of translation? Is it ever as simple as “imagining oneself in someone else’s reality” to truly experience the world from a new perspective? (You can see how this can easily spiral out of control—this has been dealt within a long lineage of philosophical study). Hermeneutics differ between reader-centric views on this essential translation and author-centric views; how can we reconcile this? These questions once again point to divides in interpretive communities. For the visual artist, the Impressionist movement manifests through a sense of subjective detail. Monet’s cathedral series does not seek to paint a Platonically perfect example; instead, it looks to emotional response to subjective detail to share the feeling. For literary Impressionists—Hemingway in many cases—this depiction of a moment harkens back to a centuries old debate about the nature of description in the narrative framework. How much detail is needed to give the impression? Who is the authority on an impression’s success? Is there ever a way to empirically or subjectively measure an impression’s effectiveness? For music, Impressionism becomes even more nebulous.

Musical Impressionists must question the need for explicit narrative in the musical scheme. A complete examination of this debate is out of the realm of this project unfortunately, but it is necessary to acknowledge the prevalence of a healthy discourse. The Impressionist movement goes through many prominent European composers, Debussy and Ravel for instance, before the Great War and continues throughout most Western musical forms for the better part of the twentieth century (from Mahler, to Ives, to Cage an argument runs true). In Jazz, from the swing era onwards, the same influences that affected European Impressionists in their compositions, move across the Atlantic to influence the popular musicians and composers of the inter-war era. For many musical Impressionists, the definition veers slightly off because of the inability to “describe” a moment as “adequately” as in other forms. Here, the argument of what a musical narrative *does* rises to prominence. Where an author can describe a scene using narrative detail, the composer is left with a limited toolbox in which some techniques have no parallel in other forms. For the purposes of clarity, musical Impressionism relies on an ability to describe a moment through less definitive structures—the author seemingly retains more interpretive control.

A clearer way to articulate this is to study Maurice Ravel’s *Jeux D’eau*. Without delving into the piece in detail, many analyses of the work focus on issues of the following: texture as intervallic dissonance (quality of sound), interplay between harmonic sense and polyharmony (overlapping two harmonic units), harmonic progression (how the chords move), and the use of mode-mixture and different scalar forms. This kind of “inside the score” analysis reveals detail about compositional techniques that help one to understand *how* the sound is constructed. This speaks very little, however, to the overall philosophical interpretation of *Jeux D’eau* as an Impressionist work. An analysis weighted more in that direction focuses on larger elements of

depiction and narrative, impact of non-specific musical ideas on a generic emotional response, and more personal claims about the aesthetics of the sound. The question becomes, then, which approach is more critically helpful? Does a listener not in tune with every convention of early twentieth-century piano suites hear the same music as the expert musicologist? Do these two interpretations work in conjunction with one another? It is important to remember that studying a score is the study of the notation, not the sound and its provoked response. Scores are inadequate representations of the music because of the variety and idiosyncrasies in the performance itself; however, the notation answers some fundamental questions that the musicologist can ask regarding which pitches are played and approximately when they were produced. For the scope of this essay, analysis will lean towards the second, more poignantly emotional interpretation without ignoring the necessity of an “inside” approach. Hopefully, these definitions will be more finely articulated by the examples laid out herein.

My decision to not rely on transcriptions comes out of a thorough examination of what a musical text should be. Notation helps musicians perform a piece of music, but the notes on the page lack life and vibrancy. They do not represent the sound in the same way that a summary of a short story delivers the same impact as the full text. Performances are built on musical interpretation, and this is something that can only be expressed through auditory processes. I have chosen certain performances to study—this is not to claim that these are authoritative versions of these songs. Analysis of a transcribed score has merit for the musicologist to better recognize patterns and harmonic trends and for this reason, I refer to transcriptions. These documents are shorthand reminders of the experience of hearing the music. I encourage my readers to listen to each piece multiple times, once at the beginning of each section, and once at the end so that my conclusions can be tested based upon the listener’s experience.

While the issue of definition is profound, I believe that there can be a critical attitude that brings the two forms together in the twentieth century. This sort of critical attitude looks for compositional similarities along broader philosophical lines and still looks at the specifics of composition in relation to the historical significance placed on Hemingway and Ellington as prominent figures at the peak of their respective fields in their time. Popularity, however, is only a snippet of what unites their two distinct styles. The specifics of style open up a realm of analysis that appeals to both the detailed specialist and as an outsider trying to explain elements of style to the non-specialist. This sort of analytic diversity helps explain the phenomenon that is the rise of Ellington and Hemingway. As a jumping off point, let us begin with a look at two examples that showcase a specific element of the stylistic awakening that helps define this period as distinctly modern.

2.0 MOMENT-BY-MOMENT: TIME AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE

America is the original version of modernity...America ducks the question of origins; it cultivates no origin or mythical authenticity; it has no past and no founding truth. Having known no primitive accumulation of time, it lives in the perpetual present. Having seen no slow, centuries-long accumulation of a principle of truth, it lives in perpetual simulation, in a perpetual present of signs.

-Jean Baudrillard¹

Hemingway's story "The Short and Happy Life of Francis Macomber" shines as an example of the kind of stylistic change that marked English-language prose in the second and third decades of the twentieth-century. Some of the more remarkable stylistic elements of the story are the temporal flexibility of the narrative arch, the subtlety in the depiction of character's body language, and the narrator's detached omniscience shown by moving to the lion's perspective. The significance of a narrator that is not bogged down with the stylistic order of the world cannot be overstressed; its shifting nature echoes many of the tenets of the "Lost Generation." In analyzing this story, however, it is important not to become too entrenched in a perspective that

¹. Jean Baudrillard, *America* (London: Verso, 1988), 76.

is only stylistically concerned. At its heart, “Short and Happy Life” is a popular, exciting, and dramatic tale with intriguing, honest, and complex characters. Many critics who discuss the story focus on specific stylistic elements such as the character’s symbolic representation of cultural phenomena and a discussion on sport hunting as typifying a global Americanism. These points all deserve ample time and space to draw out more meaning from the text, but I intend to focus on interpretations of time in the narration to illuminate how the form adapts to the modernization of the world.

Time is Francis Macomber’s enemy. His wife grows bored of him, his hunt goes stagnant, and his masculinity wanes as the events progress. The first scene in particular intensifies this emotional dragging as the oppressive environment weighs on Macomber’s soul. He has been emasculated by his cowardice with the lion, but the reader is only shown two men and a woman sitting for lunch in the African midday. It is here that the narrator takes charge of the character definitions in an innovative way. Wilson is not heralded as leader or dominator of the group by adjectives, description or even story title; instead, the narration focuses on the reactions to the dialogue in tight, succinct illustrations of the moment. When Macomber, the headliner and focus of the camp’s attention gives orders to the bartender, his words carry less weight than Wilson’s nods and shrugs.

It was now lunchtime and they were all sitting under the double green fly of the dining tent pretending that nothing had happened.

“Will you have lime juice or lemon squash? Macomber asked.

“I’ll have a gimlet,” Robert Wilson told him.

“I’ll have a gimlet too. I need something,” Macomber’s wife said.

“I suppose it’s the thing to do,” Macomber agreed. “Tell him to make three gimlets.”

The mess boy had started them already...²

Macomber presents the drink menu as a two-choice option that Wilson circumvents in a passive aggressive manner. Mrs. Macomber, whose history with Wilson shifts her allegiance away from her husband, reaffirms this decision. The last line from the narrator, “The mess boy had started them already,” raises the issue of social dominance even more as the mess boy acts as soon Wilson and Mrs. Macomber have uttered their preference. Efficiently, Hemingway hints at the events of the morning’s hunt by carefully selecting an identifying scene that condenses social, emotional, and personal identity. The subtlety of this exchange is the heart of his style; the economy of language and the poignancy of each clause showcase how the hidden details of the scene react to narrative choice. In a sense, the narration is obsessed with the current moment.

This temporal immediacy, where the events of the story occur without much forethought or reflexive thought, comes to a stark head when the lion-hunting scene is recalled. We are given snippets of Macomber’s emotional response through this dialogue, but most conclusions about his mindset come from more subtle sources. His dialogue is prefaced merely by declarations of speech, “Macomber said,” or, in many cases in the story, prefaced with nothing at all—Hemingway wants the dialog to speak for itself. Wilson’s last line before the narration switches to the lion’s perspective, “You don’t shoot them from cars,” makes a startling

². Ernest Hemingway, *The Complete Short Stories: The Finca Vigia Edition* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1987), 5.

transition, but it is transition enough.³ The dichotomy of natural innocence and technological superiority—the focus on weaponry, shooting practice, cars—puts the narrator in an odd place when the focus shifts to the lion. Where time was previously a response to Macomber and his insecurity, the seconds now slow down to appreciate the lion’s suffering. The narrator, like the post-war modern man, is caught between a temporal allegiance to Macomber and the safari lifestyle, and nature in its exacting slowness. In a way, the narrator is experiencing Macomber’s dilemma; however, where Macomber remains personally detached, the narrator searches for bland omniscience to cleanse the modern conceits.

The narration is courageously blunt while also projecting ambiguity in its detached omniscience. Going against the style devices of stream of consciousness and intense description made popular by Anderson, Joyce, and Woolfe, Hemingway almost turns away from the characters as incomprehensible. The narrator relies on the subtlety of succinct detail to bring out the inner emotions and monologues of the characters in the scene. A simple acknowledgment of a gesture or a record of an expression is all that is needed to give the impression of the scene. In a way, this type of narration gives more credit to the reader than many contemporaries who flood scenes with detail. For Hemingway, less is clearly more in a way that allows for a scene to materialize without preconceptions of its shape. This is an exercise in Impressionism more because of its reliance on subjective reader interpretation than the specifics of its motifs. If the longwinded detail of the stream of consciousness modernists seems like a snapshot of a moment, it does so in the way a photograph captures reality by reproduction of detail. The photograph mimics reality in the shapes, edges and contours of the scene; it marks a strict reconstruction of

³. Ibid., 13

the image for the viewer to comprehend. Photo-realism can be manipulated to distort this strict reconstruction, but the fundamental goal is to record what is present from a particular viewpoint. The narrator in “The Short and Happy Life of Francis Macomber” does not impress upon the reader like a photograph, it follows the trajectory of Impressionist painters like Monet, Cezanne, or Pissarro—the edges are blurred, the details are sometimes obscured, but the message is clear and alive within its moment. This interplay brings up how the modernists do not exist on a pedestal to be analyzed by themselves; other facets of cultural advancement through artistic media, philosophical restructuring, and political and social freedom all play an important role in the manifestation of literary and musical modernism. These forces create the perfect storm of artistic innovation that is precipitated by historical events like globalization and technological modernization. Hemingway’s narrator then sits back and lets the actors play out the scene without artificial prodding and focused description of their emotions. On one hand, this style of narration is a leap of faith where the reader is left with his or her own interpretations of the scene to fill in gaps such as motivation and specific scenery.

Focusing too intently in a dogged way on the importance of such narrative devices in literary modernism, however, makes an interdisciplinary comparison increasingly difficult. Where narration is prevalent in the prose form, in musical forms, narration is always secondary to sound. The way that I think of this is fairly simple. In literature, the toolbox of phrases, words, clauses and the grammatical framework remain the same and the narration becomes a vehicle for sharing a larger theme by using these tools. These components can be the notes in a piece, the key, the chord choices, the voicing, the instrumentation, the rhythm, and the intervallic relationships. This component analysis stresses a detailed reading of a text (here literary or musical) where the components become the most important element of authorial control. Is a

component analysis of literature built using the same tools? In musical analysis, the presence of a narrative in the traditional Romantic sense is not always present. Nonetheless, the same method can lead to a similar level of analysis. Duke Ellington's "Take the 'A' Train" is a piece that allows for a similar critical breakdown into component parts that build to a broader scope of understanding.

"Take the 'A' Train" began as a short musical sketch in 1941 by the then arranger and lyricist Billy Strayhorn (1915-1967).⁴ This work morphed into the Ellington Orchestra's signature song of their later period; it redefined the rules for popularity and complexity, shooting Strayhorn into the spotlight, and helped revitalize the dying big band swing style. The music is expressed in the performance, in the spontaneous generation of not only improvised sections, but in the minute differences in tone, color, technique, and resonance in the performance space. A notation of the notes played will never completely represent this phenomenon, but using this kind of document as a placeholder allows for Jazz to be studied in traditional ways. Throughout this section I am referring to the recording found on the 1999 re-issue of *Beyond Category: The Musical Genius of Duke Ellington*. This version is instrumental and has neither Ray Nance nor Ella Fitzgerald singing lyrics.

The composition's genesis comes with its own relevant background and story. ASCAP, the prolific licensing agency in the early 1940's, was under intense and drawn-out negotiations with distributors and radio producers over royalties and rights. During this dispute, the Ellington Orchestra was forbidden from playing songs composed under Ellington's previous contract. At

⁴. John Edward Hasse, "Billy Strayhorn" (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1993), *ii*.

this point, the younger Strayhorn was given an opportunity to come forward as the band's composer/arranger. Through work like “‘A’ Train” and “Chelsea Bridge,” Strayhorn ensured his prominence in the band and the continued liveliness of his legacy.⁵ Determining the authorship of Strayhorn’s contributions to the Ellington oeuvre can be difficult and relies predominantly on hearsay and guesswork. Be that as it may, Strayhorn’s role in the compositions as a full collaborator after World War II is clear. A more traditional composer, Strayhorn relied on actually writing down most of his sketches, adhering more to the conventions of classical Western composition while also playing with harmonic functionality in many of the same ways that Ellington pioneered. Their relationship was symbiotic—Strayhorn worked tirelessly for Ellington with arranging duties and assisting with band leading, and Ellington offered Strayhorn a platform to showcase his work and grow as a composer. “Take the ‘A’ Train,” for many, is Strayhorn’s signature work because of the tune’s unyielding popularity; however, his contributions were far more serious than merely penning a few good songs.

“Take the ‘A’ Train,” as a broader composition, articulates an affective subjectivity both in its component parts and larger interpretive schema. It is a wonderfully complex tune that is representative of much of the overall Strayhorn/Ellington style. The dissonant leaps in the melody break conventional patterns of the previous centuries, the supporting sections enter into the aural palette with a brisk and defiant attitude, and the harmony takes a conventional and well-known pattern and turns it on its head. In looking at the score, one sees immediate parallels to a Hemingway page. The open space is careful, calculating, and poignant in its simplicity. The descriptive language and qualifying pronouns are used sparingly in the same way that the

⁵. Ibid.

orchestral score keeps a clean and simple rhythm section (the piano, guitar, bass and drums). This comparison focuses on defining components across media boundaries, but there is merely a slight correlation based on the aesthetic experience. In this type of exercise, I seek to merely raise the two forms in the same sentence. Seeing the composition process as merely a stacking of component elements is not the only goal, but it is one means of interpretation that deserves some attention to ascertain its merit.

The main verse section of the song maintains a catchy (for lack of a more descriptive term) melody and a driving rhythm that is contrasted with the solo sections in classic Ellington style. This stylistic element is that of the supporting, non-soloing, elements of the orchestra and their role during the solos. Nance's trumpet solo (which is repeated with slight variation on many different recordings, thus making it part of the composition) interplays with the expected melody by clear reference. This technique, a staple of improvisation off of an established form, can be seen as a contextual nod towards conventionality. As the solo continues however, one notices the underlying parts are nothing like a traditional supporting role. Every reed and horn section is playing their own individual, rhythmically and melodically complex part that not only layers upon each other, but also sets up a call and response atmosphere with the soloist. This is pure controlled chaos on the page, but for the ear, the reality is a fluid and driving sound that accentuates every phrase and turn. This is the careful work of composers who see their instrument in a way that others simply missed. Maybe this is a way that the toolbox of the Jazz musician plays with narration. The song tells a story, and maybe this story can be explained through a detailed look at the notes. Is this the missing link that defines why this song rose to such popularity? Possibly, but more importantly, what about the composition rings true for the World War II era as opposed to earlier times?

“‘A’ Train” is a momentous portrait of time. The introduction sets up a faster tempo with simple piano arpeggios and the kick drum is what sets the sense of a “hustle and bustle” atmosphere of New York. To attribute narrative to the piece (especially with the introduction of lyrics later on), it tells the story of the view from a quick moving train as it goes up to Harlem. Scenes momentarily appear and vanish while the many threads of attention whizz past. Unlike “Daybreak Express,” this piece does not seek to depict the linear events of a train ride—this narrative is logically imposed from background information and interview. “‘A’ Train” is not clearly Impressionist like some of Ellington’s other work. Going from compositional components and working upwards to larger conclusions about the form leads one to see the overlaying of intricate supporting figures and the poignancy of the solos (scripted by the time of extended play and popularity) as building blocks of a larger work that is strengthened by its individual components. Is it fair to judge the work as merely a sum of its parts? In literary analysis, larger claims in the traditions of symbolism, politics, history, philosophy and many other fields draw on specific elements of style to strengthen their claims. How would this translate to a work like this? Can one say that the cascading effect in the reeds and horns after a firm declaration near 1:42 is representative of a composer’s attempt to articulate the need to slow down the heavily industrialized world of WWII era New York?⁶ This seems a little too focused on component parts to be a solid claim, and without direct confirmation of such a claim from an authoritative source (whatever that may be), it seems to flounder weakly on unstable footing.

⁶. Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn, “Take the ‘A’ Train” (New York: Smithsonian Institution, 1927-67), CD.

Maybe this touches on the quintessential difference between words and notes, and maybe the distinctions between the two get at why such acts of translations are so difficult. In “Short and Happy Life,” passages stick out that obviously support larger claims about style and intent. Is there a direct analogy in musical text? Look at the following passage from Hemingway:

At the end of that time his wife came into the tent, lifted her mosquito bar and crawled cozily into bed.

“Where have you been?” Macomber asked in the darkness.

“Hello,” she said. “Are you awake?”

“Where have you been?”

“I just went out to get a breath of air.”

“You did, like hell.”

“What do you want me to say, darling?”

“Where have you been?”

“Out to get a breath of air.”

“That’s the new name for it. You *are* a bitch.”

“Well, you’re a coward.”

“All right,” he said. “What of it?”

“Nothing as far as I’m concerned. But please let’s not talk darling, because I’m very sleepy.”

“You think I’ll take anything.”

“I know you will, sweet.”⁷

⁷. Hemingway, *The Complete Short Stories*, 18-19.

Margot Macomber has just returned from Wilson's tent in the middle of the night and unapologetically cuckolds her husband. Her use of the falsely endearing terms "sweet" and "darling," only serve to accentuate her callousness. This exchange demonizes her and when combined with later passages sets up a trend of negative descriptions of Margot and her relationship with her husband. This is one of the defining moments that lead the reader to believe that Margot murders her husband intentionally. This type of analysis draws on specific instances of style and word choice to draw out larger meanings about the text in a traditional and responsible way, but how does the interpretive chain go from analysis of the use of a word like "darling" to broader claims of Hemingway's misogynistic attitudes? Here is the trick. The words demand a personal connection from the audience to the creator because of our nature of communicating principally through language and images. Hemingway's minimalism offers room for the audience to imagine more of themselves in this creative space. The particular arrangement of his words encourages readers to imagine particular feelings and emotions in ways that they can understand. Is there a vocabulary in musical composition that asks to be thought of in this way? While literature can create passages for typecast essays, music offers a different interpretive experience that I will explore in the rest of this essay.

If music has more difficulty creating definite interpretive standards, then how does musicological analysis function? Breaking down a work like "'A' Train" allows for textual analysis (the score and the performance simultaneously) in the tradition of analytic musicology, but what does this accomplish? This is a deep-seated question in the tradition of musicology. Ellington's work in particular comes loaded with cultural relevance and ethno-musicological questions that some other work does not; in this sense, the music carries with it an interpretive structure that calls for more than just a strictly analytic view.

3.0 ALL IT TAKES IS A LITTLE SPACE: NARRATIVE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN COMPONENTS

Hemingway writes in the preface of the *First Forty-Nine Stories*, a passage that points to the need to get ones hands dirty to create true work. His attitude towards the short story comes from treating his life experiences as examples to use in his palette of storytelling. A profound observation, this passage illuminates how his media lends itself so perfectly to this kind of expression and gets at what is missing or hidden in music as a similar text.

In going where you have to go, and doing what you have to do, and seeing what you have to see, you dull and blunt the instrument you write with. But I would rather have it bent and dulled and know I had put it on the grindstone again and hammer it into shape and put a whetstone to it, and know that I had something to write about, than to have it bright and shining and nothing to say, or smooth and well oiled in the closet, but unused.⁸

This is his process of storytelling. He tries to take what he observes and feels and translates it into words that can represent the truth and courage of life. When one reads the description of

⁸. Ibid., 3.

fishing in “Big Two-Hearted River: Part II,” the culmination of *In Our Time*, Nick’s character is simple, his emotions and feelings described in succinct modes of expression—“happy,” “tired,” “hungry,” these are the essential and natural elements of the story that come out.⁹ The act of fishing is always described in near laborious detail, laced with Nick’s particular physical and mental state. In a way, the experience of fishing is translated into fiction by Nick’s attitude on reality—the natural elements like the sun, the swamp, the water, the trees, the grasshoppers, and his camp are described as broadly as possible to allow for the reader to see them as they see fit. This interpretive act highlights the limitation and inability of words to depict an exact scene. Hemingway’s images are broad sweeping strokes that reinforce the dynamic transaction between the author, language, and the reader. Hermeneutic theorists wrestle with these limitations in a variety of ways, and the mid to late twentieth-century debates in literary criticism make these fundamental problems of language poignant.

This same process occurs with particular examples of musical form; however, the manifestation becomes even more fraught with instability. Music translates in an undeniable way into an uncontrollable form of imagination. Ellington’s Shakespearian Suite, *Such Sweet Thunder*, bridges the gap between typical musical song form and narrative homage. As Stephen Buhler explains:

Ellington, however, asserts a more complex and interesting objective. In the liner notes for the suite’s original recording, he asserts that he and Strayhorn, his co-composer and orchestrator, had endeavored to "parallel the vignettes of some of the Shakespearean

⁹. Ibid., 173.

characters": that is, they tried to present, in musical terms, the characters in scenes, in dramatic context.¹⁰

This is a daunting task. To "parallel the vignettes" sets up a responsibility for the music to undeniably convince a listener of the connection. This is a fascinating case of interpretive destabilization because when the music stops, the provenance is expected to continue. For much of the suite, the individual pieces are rarely praised as wonderfully as some other Ellington compositions; however, many of them approach the "dramatic context" Buhler is discussing above.

The task of presenting an atmosphere of Shakespearian narrative in musical form is nothing new. Felix Mendelssohn's "Music to a Midsummer Night's Dream" (*Ein Sommernachtstraum*) was originally conceived as incidental music for a production of Shakespeare's comedy. The music's grandeur has since set it apart from the play as a standalone work of art. What intrigues me is the way in which both Mendelssohn and Ellington/Strayhorn focus on Shakespearian elements to liven their compositions. They both use harmonic ideas to express moods and discuss the characters by offering different interpretations of Shakespeare's words through musical technique. Where they coexist the most is in the textural appreciation of musical style as it evolves. For Mendelssohn, the Overture is the clearest moment in his program music where the Impressionist distinction becomes relevant. He is not tasked with setting

¹⁰. Stephen Buhler, "Form and Character in Duke Ellington's and Billy Strayhorn's *Such Sweet Thunder*" in *Borrowers and Lenders* (Vol. 1, No. 1, 2005), 2.

supporting musical themes behind words; instead, he seems to, as Ellington/Strayhorn attempted, “parallel the vignettes of some of the Shakespearean characters.”

A brief analysis of the score to Mendelssohn’s Overture follows; indeed, this line of reasoning can and will transfer to *Such Sweet Thunder*, but keep in mind the underlying question of whether or not its poignancy lays in the notes themselves or the critical reading of the work.

The opening five measures tonicize E Major with a building instrumentation to heighten the arrival. This can be seen as a simple call to orient the listeners to the music or it can be seen as the beginning of the narrative of the play—the royalty, both Theseus’ court and Oberon’s court, are introduced with a resounding, solid harmonic event principally in the string and horn sections. This is quickly undermined by the bouncing, staccato violins whose melodic motion in thirds outline the chaos of the magic in the play. The royalty-chords are then intertwined with the floating, fairy-like strings in simple periodic phrases. Each string part ends with a half cadence as the next phrase begins the cycle over again. This pattern sets up a narrative between the social classes as they are all affected by the magic of the fairies, and this theme resonates in Shakespeare’s text. The narrative continues through all of the clearly marked sections of the score—the lovers seem to enter the forest (a change to a ‘rustic’ sound); there is a climactic dispute for dominance in the harmony and the instrumentation (Oberon and Titania’s disputes); and eventually a sportive resolution in B Major that ties the score (play) together. This Overture merely mimics the narrative by retelling the story point-by-point—is this Impressionism? Mendelssohn, as an early, conservative Romantic, lacks the necessary precedent to accomplish what Ellington and Strayhorn do with their Jazz orchestra. Where they can “parallel a vignette”

of a character, Mendelssohn's conventional approach to narrative musical form can only play with timbre and texture while maintaining the same framework as his predecessors.¹¹

Such Sweet Thunder and specifically “The Star-Crossed Lovers” stands as an iconic achievement of Impressionist music. Not only does it manifest some of the broader claims made earlier in regards to Ravel’s *Jeux D’eau*, it links the literary and Jazz worlds together in a profound exploration of the limits of conventional musical norms. This piece, the ninth track of the suite, seeks to parallel the characters of Romeo and Juliet—this is not an attribution of meaning that is to be taken lightly, for in setting up this problem, the composers demand that listeners ask, “does this work?” I firmly believe that the work itself stands on its own regardless of its provenance and history as dictated by the liner notes; for me, the meaning comes from the reaction to the composed sounds more than the composers’ preconceptions of the sound. By weighing my response to the music as an analytical tool, my reading takes on a tone of personal attachment to the notes; because of this, I encourage readers to take the time right now to listen to the piece and get a general sense of their feeling before my biases come into play.¹² It is important to note that the version I am referring to is off of the album. This is a version without lyrics, with the piano introduction, and without outtakes. The listening exercise, when freed of pretense and expectation, asks for honest judgment of the work. I have made such an idyllic goal

¹¹. Felix Mendelssohn. *Music to a Midsummer Night’s Dream, Op. 21* (New York: Broude Bros., 195?), Overture.

¹² Duke Ellington, “The Star-Crossed Lovers” (New York: Columbia Records, 1957), CD.

impossible by introducing my views already, but interpreting the music by oneself encourages the kind of independence that lies at the heart of these two artists' compositions.

“The Star-Crossed Lovers” brings out a “dramatic context” through attention to orchestration and individual technique.¹³ It begins with Ellington alone on the piano, introducing the narrative by outlining a chromatic ascent in the bass for three measures with a return down chromatically in the fourth measure. This feature orients the listener to the B^{b7} chord being played in an arpeggio through all of the chord tones in the right hand of the piano. The effect of this stacking, as well as the dynamic emphasis on the bass notes (G^b, G, A^b, G), is one of controlled and expected dissonance. When he plays the G in the second measure and the fourth, there is a severe emphasis on the dissonance between the two hands, that even as the right hand resolves the chord with its final run up the scale in the fourth measure, listeners are left with an expectation of dissonance and conflict between the voices. This is the “ancient grudge” breaking to “new mutiny” of *Romeo and Juliet*.¹⁴ The subtlety of this connection is aided through the irreconcilable wrestling with the provenance of the piece. The notes tell a story that falls in line independently of forced interpretations. This connection, and the genius of the composition, becomes clearer as the work moves into the main verse figure, the A-section.

The A-section of “The Star-Crossed Lovers” offers a clear example of both the Ellington compositional style and a method for literary interpretation in musical style across disciplines. Before launching into this discussion, it is important to remember how this all fits into the larger

¹³. Buhler, “Form and Character,” 2.

¹⁴. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992), Prologue.

scheme. If we are to call Hemingway’s prose impressionistic, then there should be some contextual elements of style that appear across the disciplines. This piece’s A-section begins with a solo alto saxophone (Johnny Hodges) clawing its way from a D to an F in the melody line. There is so much more to this in terms of articulation and inflection than can be traditionally notated. I did work with a transcription by David Berger that is meant to be a prescriptive performance resource.¹⁵ This document, while admittedly limited in fundamental ways, helped me account for layered aspects of the score. The transcription acts as a shortcut for analysis that symbolically represents moments in the auditory experience. Hodges’ playing is both rhythmically conscious of his downbeats and responsibilities to the harmonic language as the chords move, but his melody line glides from tone to tone with a sense of exacting precision *and* relaxed confidence. The first two measures move along with painful drive as the supporting reeds in the section play breathily and sweetly to augment the sound of Hodges’ saxophone as it struggles to hit its high A in the phrase (the struggling is intentional to heighten the tension of the dissonance of sliding to a non-diatonic note [a note outside of the chord tones that by nature, clashes with other notes in the other parts]).

The supporting reeds play a major role in the narrative context. The “padding” from the other saxophones is articulated by a subtle emphasis in the tenor saxophone section; the part wavers a bit and stands out amid the other contrapuntal lines. This line exists throughout the piece as its own melodic entity that plays off of and supports the main alto line. For all of the A-section, these two voices can be heard flirting with each other as their specific call and response

¹⁵. Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn, “The Star-Crossed Lovers” (New York: Alfred Publishing, 2000).

melodies intertwine. (See m.5-6 [00:17], where the lines between the tenor 1 and alto lead play the same key notes in the phrase an octave apart then when the tenor part reaches for an A^b as opposed to the previous A-natural, the alto lead enters a bit later at an even higher B^b, articulating a phrase structure that once again, heightens the tension between the two parts through the dissonance of the major-ninth interval (the A^b to a high B^b). In response to this show of dexterity, the tenor line remains static and simple for the next two measures to allow for the alto to dance melodically on top. They then rejoin in unison for a repeat of the previous connection. Then here, at m.11 (00:47), the tenor responds by reaching higher than he previously did at m.7, and, with the B-flat in m.11, forces the alto to counter with an even higher and more elaborate show. This leads into the B-section with the entire reed section marching in unison through an F-minor transitional chord. This is only breaking down the A-section of the piece, but you can see the richness of possible descriptive techniques in analyzing music like so.

In the above analysis, replace the alto saxophone with Juliet, and the tenor saxophone with Romeo and you have a delicate narrative of flirtation and intrigue that both characterizes musical elements of the score in literary terms and accounts for a general sense of listening. This kind of interpretation encourages the specific characterizations of individual notes as elements of the narrative structure to be used as an explanation for a commonly felt phenomenon. Buhler frankly asserts, “the same dynamic is present in ‘The Star-Crossed Lovers,’ in which Juliet (voiced by Johnny Hodges’s alto sax) rightly dominates — as in Shakespeare’s playtext — every scene she shares with Romeo (portrayed by Paul Gonsalves’s tenor)¹⁶. This kind of statement means little without some gritty analysis of the music behind it—indeed, these broader claims

¹⁶. Buhler, “Form and Character,” 6.

are common in many reviews of Ellington's work. Few critics have sought to substantiate claims by looking directly at the specific organization of sound. The narrative in "The Star-Crossed Lovers" places the two principle characters in the same imaginative space: this is a space in which the music can "parallel a vignette" of a character. This is a bigger deal than many people seem to notice.

I do not, however, want to launch a fully-fledged attack on the entire analytic process; instead, it is more valuable to look for where the process falls short, and where it shines. In thinking about the emotional impact of an aesthetic experience, there are moments when empirical analysis falls woefully short. In contrast, such empirical data can lead to fascinating claims along other lines. Neurophysiology has something to say about the musical experience and these findings are just as valid as meandering accounts of feelings and emotion. There is a method to the madness of judging emotional response, and to a certain extent, it must rely on some contextual realization of the importance of component elements. The task then becomes to discern where it is truly appropriate to focus on these aspects, and when it is appropriate to focus on less tangible elements. If all ways in which we analyze music are, in essence, make-believe (meaning that the structures are explained using abstract concepts like pitch, harmony, and timbre) then is it necessary to distinguish between "analytic" and "emotional?"

It is more than just a flowery and imaginative mind that imprints this kind of narrative on top of the notes; it is a careful mix of authorial intent and natural consumer response that determine the efficacy of the suite. Is it fair to ask a listener if they think that the alto saxophone line represents Juliet? If this kind of leading question would be inadmissible in a courtroom, then why would it be acceptable in critical analysis? It seems reckless to jump to conclusions, but by entitling the piece "The Star-Crossed Lovers," Ellington and Strayhorn are implanting the

thought within the listener's mind. If one does not call up specific images of "palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss," then a listener is set upon the idea of Love (with a capital 'L') merely by the title.¹⁷ No detail is too small here because in attempting to show some distance when judging a particular impression, we must seek to eliminate as many strictly personal points of view as we can. This brief look at the introduction and the A-section shows a careful compositional acknowledgment of *a* narrative structure, but how can we know it is *the* narrative structure that the composers intended?

At m. 25-26 (1:59-2:08), there is a cascade of notes in many instruments that swells back up to recall the main theme. This passage is the ultimate tension release for the players and the listeners as the style of sustained and withdrawn playing in the reeds and horns has finally become too much to bear—they exhale in dramatic fashion, some spiraling down the scale and others playing a unison counter-melody to the main theme. This descent is followed by a tremendous unison swell of the main theme (previously only played by the two soloists) that immediately gets softer to leave the two principal actors to play their parts as the rest of the orchestra comes back in, now all playing counter-melodies. This is an unprecedented musical technique that *must* mean so much more than just an interesting compositional choice to return to the A-section. To me, this is the precise moment that Romeo and Juliet kiss for the first time; to non-Shakespeare-skewed interpreters, it is a climax in the narrative between two lovers (a climax in a variety of ways). Afterwards, the previously dissonant reed supporting lines become unified in support of their connection (this may be the "glooming peace this morning with it brings" of

¹⁷. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, I.v.111.

Prince's final lines of the play).¹⁸ Issues arise because even within this interpretive leap of faith, other specific interpretations could play out. This could also be the Mercutio-Tybalt murders, or even the double suicide in the crypt. If the moment is undifferentiated to a particular moment in the narrative, then it must be a broader sense of the story. The work continues through a repetition of previous parts and finally ends with an exact repetition of the introduction as a chilling unresolved end. Regardless of whether or not the notes point to a specific corresponding literary moment, the critical task at hand becomes deciding if the composers did in fact "parallel a vignette."

Analysis like the previous passage should raise a key questions to a discerning reader of the source text. How much of musical analysis is context-dependent? This is the principle issue at stake when working across boundaries between media. For music, it is a strange task to discuss specific notes at their core elements of wavelength and timbre. Understanding the physics of sound in all its complexity may illuminate some depths of musicology, but is it applicable to these larger artistic trends? In turn, what is the smallest component of composition that *does* directly contribute to a larger understanding of form and style? Wavelength or periodic unit? It is tempting to look at the "chord" as the definitive choice, and indeed I think it works well as a component for many musical examples; however, atonality, non-western systems, repetitive harmonic units, and even radical poly-chords (stacking too many chords on top of one another), all bring into question the prevalence of the chord as the base unit. Turning then to rhythm as the essential base is a strong tack, yet while rhythm is clearly pivotal in an understanding of music, merely focusing on rhythm leaves out other elements of style. In a

¹⁸. Ibid., V.iii.316.

sense, classifying music as just the organization of pitch and rhythm is inherently flawed; its *reliance* on context is what gives it meaning. This approach to components of style translates to the literary realm.

I mentioned Hemingway’s “Big Two-Hearted River” earlier as an example of vague adjective choice; this example operates as more than an examination of style. *In Our Time* is often praised as an essential moment in Modernist literature because of its agile storytelling and the repercussions of Nick’s story as a transitional tale out of the Victorian era into the Modern. Along the lines of Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg Ohio*, *In Our Time* tells Nick’s story through small episodic stories that annotate his timeline with detailed vignettes. While these smaller narratives frequently focus on Nick’s maturation through childhood, war, and life as a veteran, Nick himself is rarely described in excruciating detail; he is meant to symbolize a great many soldiers, and through that, many Americans. “Big Two-Hearted River” is a two-part denouement of sorts that follows Nick as he journeys through the pastoral countryside.

This story carries a lot of baggage—the task of wading through the different analytical approaches asks for not only a keen observance of the text itself, but also an acknowledgment of critical trends. While branding one’s own method of analysis can be an unproductive step when done too hastily, this project demands an understanding of the surrounding landscape that places my claims between lines. Centrally, I like to think of “Big Two-Hearted River” as a symbolic text along the lines of William Bysshe Stein’s 1960 article, “Ritual in Hemingway’s ‘Big Two-Hearted River;’” however, there is something about the language akin to later studies of specific stylistic choices. Somewhere between these approaches lies a happy medium where close reading does not obscure larger thematic trends.

My engagement with this text begins with a more general reading of the story and contrasts it with a focused reading of linguistic choices. Stein summarizes the story with the following passage that illuminates the rich narrative that places this story in the context of *In Our Time*.

Without the faith in himself, in man, in woman, in civilization, or in God, he is...rootless and lost. Unable to face the terrors and nightmares of this isolation, he desperately turns to nature in order to find some purpose in life. But with his ego disenfranchised of its authority, he is completely at the mercy of his instincts; he is “possessed” by the daemonic-divine powers within and without himself, the supernatural monsters of the eternal waters (the river, the abyss, the underworld, the unconscious). And it is their occult potency that he must assimilate and control, else be destroyed.¹⁹

An epic account to be sure. What elements of this kind of reading ring true for other interpretations of the text? Is it reasonable to define Nick’s meandering in the stream as wrestling with the “occult potency” of “supernatural monsters”? There must be some limitations to the critic’s authority; these limitations should stipulate that the text should ultimately be the evidence, not meandering accounts of what critics think the characters represent. This is the task that plagues many devout Hemingway scholars. It occasionally calls for a leap of faith to

¹⁹. William Bysshe Stein, “Ritual in Hemingway’s ‘Big Two-Hearted River’” in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* (Vol. 1, No. 4, Winter 1960), 556.

connect his specific stylistic choices to larger claims about his characters and their motivations. For the example above, Stein is treating “Big Two-Hearted River” as the culminating chapter of a larger work; but should the story not stand on its own? *In Our Time* is not always treated as one unified story; in fact, excerpts and individual stories are frequently extracted in English classes across the world. This is a problem of contiguity. The context of Nick’s days fishing in Nature impacts an understanding of the story as a whole, but ultimately, the *text* should elucidate larger claims about style and character.

I would like to substantiate some of Stein’s claims by evaluating the text in a similar fashion to how Ellington is reviewed. It is tempting to comb the words of the text looking for evidence that ties in to larger thematic claims, and in this instance, Nick’s actions are punctuated by such word choices. In “Part Two,” Nick rises early with the sun and is meticulously accompanied by his internal narrator as he prepares and begins his day fishing. In these preparations lie the elements of Hemingway’s writing style that separate him from others of his time; the exacting slowness of the descriptions do not waver from their mission to paint the world. To zoom in further, “Nick was excited. He was excited by the early morning and the river. He was really too hurried to eat breakfast, but he knew he must. He built a little fire and put on the coffee pot.”²⁰ Here we see a key element of Hemingway’s “Iceberg Theory” at play.

The Iceberg Theory comes out of a Hemingway quote in reference to a passage from *Death in the Afternoon*. In an interview with George Plimpton, Hemingway remarks, “If it is any use to know it, I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it under water for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only

²⁰. Hemingway, *The Complete Short Stories*, 173.

strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show.”²¹ This is a crucial aspect of the Hemingway aesthetic—deciphering the hidden elements of his prose becomes an essential part of reading his work. Hemingway establishes a “creative void” where the readers must discover the “seven-eighths” under water.²²

Nick’s “excitement,” when taken on its own, leads readers to genuinely believe the narrator’s tone and coloring of the Natural setting; only by looking at the story as an element of a larger whole can one come near Stein’s larger thematic claims. Hemingway repeats the phrase “excited” multiple times in the first few pages of the story, and the narrative genuinely paints a brightly lit, non-pejorative description of the tranquility of the riverbank. This word, “excited,” may seem like a small victory for detailed textual analysis, however, it is not. This is crucial to analyzing the description in the first few pages of the story because Hemingway takes care to prepare his narration without modifying or clarifying descriptors. The first moment where we get any sense of Nick’s feelings is at the start of the thirteenth paragraph with “Nick felt awkward and professionally happy...”²³ These first thirteen paragraphs are punctuated by three repetitions of the word “excited” that serve as the only qualifying moments of Nick’s internal monologue. For instance, “The meadow was wet with dew and Nick wanted to catch grasshoppers for bait before the sun dried the grass. He found plenty of good grasshoppers.

²¹. Carlos Baker, *Hemingway and his Critics* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), 34.

²². Romeo Giger, *The Creative Void: Hemingway's Iceberg Theory* (Zurich: Francke Verlag Bern, 1977), 13.

²³. Hemingway, *The Complete Short Stories*, 175.

They were at the base of the grass stems. Sometimes they clung to the grass stems.”²⁴ Here is a key moment of reading-between-the-lines. For one thing, the narration makes it clear that Nick is in a good mood...sort of. The connection between “Nick wanted,” and “He found,” sets up a hidden dialogue where Nick has fulfilled a wish and is now happier for it. However, a more sinister interpretation focuses on “they were at the *base* of the grass stems,” and “they *clung* to the grass stems,” (emphasis mine) where the grasshoppers represent the intolerable loss of personal agency after the Great War and in the modern world. Hemingway’s “creative void” can cause interpretive problems if his overall goal is still to convey effectively “what you really felt, as opposed to what you were supposed to feel, and had been taught to feel.”²⁵

This hermeneutic issue does not stop as more texts are brought in; instead, Hemingway’s Iceberg Theory becomes a nebulous concept akin to Ellington/Strayhorn’s goal to “parallel a vignette.” These two works are linked by the same concept of *sfumato*. At the invocation of this term, one immediately thinks of the cryptic smile of the Mona Lisa; however, turning to the Latin root, *fumare*, connects these two examples of Impressionism in a truer sense. *Fumare*, “to smoke,” communicates a vague sense of definition that seems inherently against what Hemingway says in *Death in the Afternoon*. By acknowledging his own inability to accurately describe his world, Hemingway, like Ellington, “smokes” the borders of his scenes. Smoke mixes with air in a constant struggle to retain some of its clarity; as smoke dissipates into a larger gas body, the vapors lengthen like tendrils reaching backwards to the point of origin. This image

²⁴. Ibid., 173.

²⁵. Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932), 6.

captures perfectly what Nick is feeling on the riverbank, but it also captures perfectly what a thousand other characters, real or imagined, *can* think about their lot in life. Stein's assertion that Nick's fishing journey is a diabolical Odyssey to find his "disenfranchised ego" states too boldly an interpretive angle the precludes other options. In looking at Nick on the riverbank, it is more pertinent to see how the language shows an everyman who is happy with his pure and mundane tasks. He is "excited." In this style of blunt, direct sentences, Hemingway seeks to "parallel a vignette" like Ellington/Strayhorn.

The game I have been playing by offering differing readings at every declarative sentence for both artists will now finally pay off. "The Star-Crossed Lovers," as I pointed to earlier, cannot be a definitive narration of the *Romeo and Juliet* story; instead, it is an articulation of a poetic subjectivity that may, or may not, be reminiscent of the invoked reference. In the same fashion, "Big Two-Hearted River" recounts events and details where the emotional responses to the pastoral landscape take center stage. For Nick, the grasshoppers merely cling to the grass roots because that is what he sees them doing. His narrator does not take the time to enliven the tale with how *he* interprets the scene; instead, the task of attaching deeper meaning lies squarely with the artistic consumer.

4.0 THE MOVE TOWARDS IMPRESSIONISM

The point is that any piece of Impressionism, whether it be prose, or verse, or painting or sculpture, is the record of the impression of the moment; it is not a sort of rounded, annotated record of a set of circumstances—it is the recollection in your mind of a set of circumstances that happened ten years ago—or ten minutes. It might be the impression of the minute—but it is the impression not the correlated chronicle ... [T]he business of Impressionism is to produce an illusion of reality. Thus the Impressionist author is sedulous to avoid letting his personality appear in the course of his book. On the other hand, his whole book, his whole poem, is merely an expression of his personality.

-Ford Madox Ford²⁶

My definition of Impressionism must emerge out of recognition of the cultural and theoretical trends that situate my view, which builds from the key question posed by Beardsley and Wimsatt Jr. in their article “The Intentional Fallacy.”

²⁶. Ford Madox Ford, “On Impressionism” in *The Good Soldier* (Ontario: Broadview, 2003).

The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art, and it seems to us that this is a principle, which goes deep into some differences in the history of critical attitudes. It is a principle, which accepted or rejected, points to the polar opposites of classical “imitation” and romantic expression. It entails many specific truths about inspiration, authenticity, biography, literary history and scholarship, and about some trends of contemporary poetry, especially its elusiveness. There is hardly a problem of literary criticism in which the critic’s approach will not be qualified by his view of “intention.”²⁷

This is their starting claim in a discussion that focuses around the meaning of authorial intent to the modern critic. This work in the 1950’s situates their argument through the rise of New Criticism. There is strong hermeneutic control in the ideology of New Criticism. In this respect, Wimsatt and Beardsley may be correct in saying that “there is hardly a problem of literary criticism in which the critic’s approach will not be qualified by his view of ‘intention.’” Granted, Post-structuralism will subsequently remove intention in Wimsatt and Beardsley’s scheme and try to more appropriately situate the same sort of claims inside larger contexts and with more variables. Nonetheless intention, as a concept, differs in many ways from what I am referring to as authority. Repeatedly throughout this essay I have tried to connect artistic modes through a similar appreciation of a *lack* of interpretive authority. Approaching texts through a

²⁷. W.K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy” in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2006), 90.

“devil’s advocate” variety of interpretive schemes has touched on the issue of the reader’s subjectivity, but at its heart, this approach is still reductive. While it is a rewarding academic exercise to imagine a reader other than myself, the reality is that to connect these two artists, there should be a compositional element that draws upon a similar worldview and poetic subjectivity. In my opinion, Impressionism is this worldview.

What does it mean when someone says that Cezanne used “expressive” brushstrokes? What does it mean when Debussy “dances” through a scale? What does it mean when Hemingway leaves a “creative void?” These questions all require book-length examinations, but in these next examples, it is important to remember that these forms of art were mass-produced and consumed by a culture that relished in the art. Hemingway and Ellington, at their peaks, were principle figures for popular forms.

To introduce Ellington’s “Daybreak Express,” it is important to look back to Baudelaire’s poem, “Correspondences,” so as to better understand how Symbolism influences Ellington’s Impressionism.

Nature is a temple where living pillars
Let sometimes emerge confused words;
Man crosses it through forests of symbols
Which watch him with intimate eyes.

Like those deep echoes that meet from afar
In a dark and profound harmony,
As vast as night and clarity,

So perfumes, colors, tones answer each other.

There are perfumes fresh as children's flesh,

Soft as oboes, green as meadows,

And others, corrupted, rich, triumphant,

Possessing the diffusion of infinite things,

Like amber, musk, incense and aromatic resin,

Chanting the ecstasies of spirit and senses.²⁸

Baudelaire weaves a hypnotic landscape of descriptive terminology that blends together sensory input and figurative metaphor to create something altogether different than the sum of its parts. This is the foundation of Impressionism in the sense that by combining the right selective details, an artist can recreate an emotion or experience. For Baudelaire, the synesthetic third stanza marks a moment when poetry actively tries to describe by invoking senses that would not automatically be associated with the sensation. Here we see simile after simile that distorts the usual connotations between senses. Perfumes (scent) are here fresh to touch, soft to hear, green to see, and qualified as “corrupted” or “triumphant.” This cannot truly share a feeling of synesthesia; instead, the beauty of the stanza comes from translating the text into sensory appreciations that make sense. This act of interpretation comes not from Baudelaire’s

²⁸. Charles Baudelaire, “Correspondences” in *The Selected Poems of Charles Baudelaire* (New York: Grove Press, 1974).

authoritative “intent” on what the poem should mean; one would hardly expect that to be the case. Instead, the poem gives space for the reader to imagine the “forest of symbols” in whatever exacting detail they feel is necessary—this is the beauty of Impressionism.

Stanley B. Katz’s 1996 book, *The Epistemic Music of Rhetoric: Toward the Temporal Dimension of Reader Response and Writing*, offers a hermeneutic position where the pseudo-scientific rigor of the New Critics clashes with the sociological and more shifting definitions offered by the Reader Response school. His book presents these two ideologies not as polar opposites, but as points along an evolutionary graph. For Katz, Reader Response has developed out of the New. The direct comparison of scientific and literary theory should be extended to the musical realm. Katz maintains that Newtonian physics is to New Criticism as New Physics is to Reader Response. These corollaries are strongly supported throughout his argument and indeed the comparison brings to mind a hugely important element of inter-disciplinary studies.

Interpretation is the foundational methodology that underlies all classroom activity, whether it be an interpretation of a literary text, other kinds of texts, student responses to a text, or the motivations underlying student responses to a text...We construct heuristics to facilitate interpretation (of texts or response statements or subjective motivations). The classroom as a community is still an interpretive community.²⁹

²⁹. Stanley B. Katz, *The Epistemic Music of Rhetoric: Toward the Temporal Dimension of Reader Response and Writing* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1996), 69.

This account thinks about interpretation as an almost indescribable act. This may be the most responsible tack, but I intend to simplify this problem a bit. Katz discusses the exact ramifications and techniques of applying Reader Response theories by thinking of the issues at stake in the ways that we understand our world. Primarily, this manifests in praise for an acknowledgment of phonocentric interpretation rather than strictly logocentrism. When crossing media boundaries, this sensory focus becomes relevant—what is a musical score, or an audio book, or an advertisement for perfume in a magazine? These examples mix the senses and challenge us to look at their metaphorical meaning in a new way. The easiest way in my eyes (maybe ears) to reconcile this difficulty would be to focus on one word: imagination.

Breaking down the word imagination opens up the doorways to a fuller understanding of the nature of Impressionism and the nature of these two powerful artists. Within these five syllables lies a cohesive definition of almost every claim made about the crisis of Modernism and its stylistic trends. Webster's defines imagination as, "the faculty of imagining, or of forming mental images or concepts of what is not actually present to the senses." Let us slow down this definition a bit further and think about what weight these words carry. First, imagination is a "faculty," an inherent capability that is latent and defining for humanity. Here, imagination becomes an integral part of our mental framework; it is not a creation of the modern world, it is a quality and natural phenomenon. The next condition, "of forming mental images," speaks to the exact dilemma at play in Katz's account of the epistemic acquiring of logo-centric views of the world. This natural phenomenon "forms" images in the consciousness—what happens when the "concept of what is not actually present to the senses" cannot be expressed visually? This may speak to a deeply rooted debate regarding the essential differences between art forms. I merely invoke the complexity of such definitions and hope to guide my next section through recognition

of these seemingly intractable problems. Imagination is a loaded term that at its heart may not be the genesis and explanation for *all* forms of art. There must be some accountability for the meaning of the word and how it undeniably relies on “the image” as the principal unit for critical thought.

In defining Impressionism once again, it behooves me to notice how far we have come. There is a particular period, style, and ideology that can help to rigidly define the impressionistic convention, especially in the visual arts. However, as Impressionism moves through visual art and more traditional late Romantic musical forms, it takes on a more vague identity that Ellington/Strayhorn adopt in their compositions. The canonical painters of the Impressionist school (Manet, Monet, Pissaro, Cezanne, etc.) all reach for a similar goal—a distancing from rigid realism and grand scale to detail, emotion, and subjectivity. With this newfound freedom, we get an attitude similar to Baudelaire. This opened space for the consumer is further understood in the musical realm as not only scoffing at convention, but as a new radicalism to be embraced. Ford Madox Ford’s views on the specific nature of Impressionism and the appreciation of subjective description help situate my understanding of Hemingway and Ellington: “This is because the novel has become indispensable to the understanding of life. It is, that is to say, the only source to which you can turn in order to ascertain how your fellows spend their entire lives.”³⁰ If the novel, as Ford Madox Ford claims, has “become indispensable to the understanding of life,” then the process of understanding life can be found somewhere within the particulars of style found in the text. His idea relies on the reader’s imagination and ability to

³⁰. Ford Madox Ford, “The English Novel” (London: Constable, 1930).

envision a new reality based on the given information. Exploring this distinction will help conclusions about the form.

Some techniques for describing experience hinge on an endorsement of the quotidian aspects of life as holding quintessential meaning. For detail-oriented consumers, this focus on the mundane can illuminate vital aspects of life. This is not an extreme thought in the context of the industrialized middle class. If the description of an event, place, or person can illuminate reality, then how does one attempt to “understand” something, let alone someone, which is never expressed on a surface level? This gap is filled with an emphasis on the mundane details of life as the great communicator of the inexpressible.

Description is a grand leveler in the sense that storytelling often relies on description to connect the audience with the target world. Therefore, cataloguing information, especially the minuscule details, offers a clear bridge to an “understanding” of the world. In giving so much weight to the mundane details, this argument does little to explicitly wrestle with issues of internal struggle in a character’s mind. Instead, these issues must manifest through a detailed representation of the world. This process relies heavily on the reader’s ability to pick up on symbolic elements, physical manifestations of personality changes, and most importantly, emotion. For this descriptive-bias, emotion is merely a sum of its manifested elements. A nervous mind is expressed through tapping fingers and wringing hands; objects strewn across a room are broken down into their parts and categorized by the intensity with which they signify larger meaning. In the view emphasized by Ford, the objects in the room are part of a larger whole—they are part of a new world that is communicated by the language and style to the reader through a new perspective.

True reality cannot be reproduced on the page, canvas, or musical score; however, communicating one's *idea* of reality becomes the creative process. In Ford's claim, however, the subjectivity of the author is a crucial element of the illusion—the new reality is a representation of the creator's particular perspective. This is where imagination comes into play. For this Impressionist, the mundane details are the building blocks of the whole and they can only assist in clarifying a larger picture. For Ford, an image of the scene contains more than just the collected elements; additionally, the pieces of the larger puzzle can form together to express something greater than the individual parts can hope to accomplish. Once again, the issue becomes the inexpressible aspects of the human experience.

In this setting, a character's emotion can influence the reality he or she inhabits. There is acknowledged distortion relative to the subject and relative to the consumer. For a character fraught with sadness, the mundane details of a scene may change. The unreliability (or humanity) of the narrator comes into question more frequently because the mundane details are no longer objectively static. Within a fluid world, the author creates a new reality inhabited (and created) by the imagined mind of the character—in this way, a reader's “understanding” is a confluence of more than just empirical information and stylistic pacing, it is a new way to look at the world as if it were from different eyes.

The means of producing this subjective illusion of reality in turn become manifestations of not only a large artistic movement, but also a change in ways of thinking. Impressionism as a movement attempts to capture the image of reality as a snapshot of time in a particular place, look, and frame of mind. This is what is at stake in both Hemingway and Ellington's work.

5.0 IS IT A TRAIN? OR IS IT *THE* TRAIN?

Therein lies the essential difference between “classical” and Jazz composition. Classical composition assumes, with a certain narrow variability, a “correct” trumpet sound, or a “correct” trombone or violin sound. Jazz tolerates all sorts of oddity and individuality, and Duke went beyond toleration...he turned idiosyncrasies to his advantage.

-Gene Lees³¹

In 1933 Duke Ellington composed “Daybreak Express” to capture a train ride in New York. This project, while akin to Strayhorn’s later “Take the ‘A’ Train,” uses dissimilar methods to achieve its goal. The work itself is a monumental accomplishment in testing the limits of the Jazz orchestra, and Ellington’s thorough appreciation of the world around him manifests through specific techniques articulated in the music. This short musical portrait historically influenced the short film of the same name by D.A. Pennebaker, and thus helped establish *cinéma-vérité*.³² Its composition highlights Ellington’s capabilities as a composer and careful arranger of sounds, palettes, and techniques to achieve an exact desired effect. “Daybreak Express” is an Impressionist work at its core and in the same vein as the traditional Impressionists and indeed in

³¹. Gene Lees, “Ellington Remembered: A Minority Report,” *High Fidelity* Nov. 1974.

³². Anna Daly, “Daybreak Express,” in *Senses of Cinema*, Issue 36.

the vein of Ernest Hemingway, the composition mirrors life in honest, yet artistically profound ways.

In discussing this piece, I would like to clearly outline a few elements of traditional musical analysis as I see it that may fall short; indeed, this is a key moment where blending literary criticism and musicology should produce a convincing reading. The most difficult part of dealing with a monstrous score such as this is context. Statistical analysis and theoretical minutia illuminate prescriptive elements that could help in understanding how to replicate such a work. They do little, however, to discuss what makes the piece special and memorable. For these larger claims, one must listen, then listen again, then listen differently. Watching the score fly by can be intriguing to see the contours of the melodic lines as they weave and interact; however, the auditory experience is the primary means of interpreting this work. Hearing the recording is the only way to understand how this level of coordination can be achieved separate from strict notation. The sound palette is a distinct example of the “Ellington Effect.”

“The Ellington Effect” is a term coined by Billy Strayhorn. “Ellington plays the piano, but his real instrument is his band. Each member of his band is to him a distinctive tone color and set of emotions, which he mixes with others equally distinctive to produce a third thing, which I like to call ‘The Ellington Effect.’”³³ This “third thing” is difficult to quantify. Ken Rattenbury, in his book *Duke Ellington: Jazz Composer*, presents “The Ellington Effect” as an amalgamation of blues and ragtime influences filtered through Duke’s specific individualistic composition style (here meaning his ability to highlight individuals in his band). By looking at

³³. Nat Shapiro and Nat Henthoff, *Hear Me Talkin’ To Ya* (London: Peter Davies, 1955),

five Ellington scores across his prolific career, Rattenbury asserts that an in-depth look at the notes and their tendencies argues a defense for Ellington as a composer in the traditional “Classical” sense. These claims highlight a debate that has raged in Jazz literature for decades—should Jazz composition be held to the same standards as “Classical?”

For many musicians in the Western Art tradition, the music was a blueprint for further performance; therefore, the score was the authoritative document that prescribed the effect of the work. For Jazz, because of the proliferation of aural media (radio, records, live club performance), the prescriptive score became a relic for most popular examples. Ellington’s relationship to authoritative scores was a rocky one at best. Historians have had difficulty finding these mysterious codices because in many instances, they did not exist. The composition process was much more fluid than the solitary genius scribbling away at a piano bench producing a masterpiece for the orchestra to reproduce in sound. From little adjustments on the bandstand, to outright switching people’s parts at the last minute, Ellington focused on the sound as the premier lasting example of his music. The performance then becomes the text, and analyzing performance goes beyond the confines of the written score. Rattenbury highlights this exact phenomenon as a precursor to his more rigid analysis.

To me, the main attraction of Jazz lies in its unpredictable performance, or in the precise, highly rhythmic interpretation of scores written expressly for Jazz musicians. In either circumstance, conventional brass, reed, and stringed instruments are coaxed into producing microtones, glissandi, and portamenti well

beyond the standard twelve-tone notational system...Ellington was the first genuine Jazz composer to incorporate these effects comprehensively.³⁴

The claim of Impressionism does rely on the incorporation of these “new” techniques; in fact, only by experimentation and creativity can “Daybreak Express” achieve its full potential.

“Daybreak Express” demands study because its complexity transcends a key contextual issue at play in studying both Ellington and Hemingway—it can be enjoyed as both background music (my simplification of popular or dance music) and as serious composition in the canonical tradition. This is an aspect of both artists’ work that has made them popular in both academic and social fields. For “Daybreak Express,” this transcendence comes from calculated compositional effect (that can sometimes only be appreciated on the page by trained readers) and aspects of the specific performance (a more universal mode of appreciation). These two methods of analysis do not get in each other’s way.

Describing the music exhaustively would take a long stretch of analysis that, unlike “Star-Crossed Lover,” would not elucidate as many claims about the work as a whole; instead, I seek to highlight elements of the less tangible components of composition that set “Daybreak Express” apart. Arguably, the most vital musical element in the composition is the appreciation of rhythmic variety to develop the narrative. This song highlights the rhythmic acceleration and deceleration of the horn section in ways that are usually reserved for the rhythm section itself. For this section, I am referring to the version published in the collection from 1999, *Beyond*

³⁴. Ken Rattenbury, *Duke Ellington: Jazz Composer* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1990), 5.

*Category.*³⁵ The introduction of the piece is merely an ascending pattern played by the horns and the rhythm section that begins at an E^b and moves chromatically each measure to culminate after fourteen measures with an explosion into A^b with an F in the melody.³⁶ This modulation (where it changes keys) is sudden because of a lack of traditional secondary dominance to ease the modulation, but the really expressive element of the section is in the tempo change. At the start, the quarter notes are moving at roughly one hundred beats-per-minute and by measure fifteen have accelerated to roughly two hundred eighty beats-per-minute. This acceleration requires extreme proficiency and communication between the performers and the conductor (most likely Ellington originally) and helps to define the train-like atmosphere of the work as a whole.

The rhythmic acceleration in the introduction serves to create the atmospheric appreciation of a train leaving the station—everything from the melodic contours to the exact speed of the tempo are composed with this goal in mind. This repeated melody is circular, with the contour moving down a whole step then moving chromatically back up to the first note by the last note in the sequence. As this pattern repeats, it clearly is meant to bring to mind an image of the wheels of the train as they accelerate with an imagined melody much like what is on the page. This is an example of bringing reality to the music in an effort to directly mimic the soundscape that one would hear as a passenger in a train leaving a station. This compositional technique extends further to the instrumentation as a wooden train whistle is incorporated to the

³⁵. Duke Ellington, “Daybreak Express,” *Beyond Category: The Musical Genius of Duke Ellington* (New York: Smithsonian Institution, 1927-1967).

³⁶. Duke Ellington, “Daybreak Express,” ed. Gunther Schuller (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1993).

reed voices to bring even more realism to the work. The reeds extend this whistle motif as they bend to and away from notes very high in their register. At the same time three trumpets stacked in thirds slide down a minor third interval—this effect echoes the indeterminate pitch of the train whistle and clashes with the harmony developed by the reeds and the rhythm section. Tricks like this continue as the piece takes on a general picture of the rhythm section creating the wheels and foundation of the train and the reeds and horns creating an image of the whistles and other sounds as the train moves through town.

In addition to creating a general atmosphere of the train ride, Ellington crafts the solo sections to highlight other impressionistic moments. The first solo moment appears at m. 26 (0:28), as a solo alto saxophone seems to sputter in a short burst of conversation that is overheard while the rest of the reeds and horns fall silent. This melody contains dynamics that can be notated specifically to accent a sort of falling off of the thread—of being lost in the bustling atmosphere as the alto reduces to a pianissimo level and the rhythm section retakes the forefront for a few short measures. This is one of those moments that beg to be connected to narrative structures and storytelling. In these five measures (roughly four to five seconds in real time) an idea is expressed in sound that would take hundreds of words to capture—the context of the piece develops a vague narrative that places this solo alto saxophone as a speaker in a scene. Claims about the meaning of this line are less important than a general appreciation that such a moment exists in the chaotic rumbling of the rest of the piece. For these brief few seconds, the listener is caught off-guard by an understandable voice that has something to say. Johnny Hodges (once again a wonderful interpreter of more than what is on the page) plays with the rhythm of the phrase and fits in behind the beats of the syncopated piano and guitar. This subtle

accent in both his volume (dynamics) and phrasing (in this case I mean rhythmic eccentricities) is what helps my classification of this piece as impressionistic.

Hodges' personal stylistic inflection may have been the cause of a specific note from Ellington or it could be from his own manipulation of his toolbox; regardless, the authorship of these moments of intricate beauty is less important than their function in the larger piece. As the piece continues, everything is developed in an escalating fashion; therefore, as sections are added on, each instrument comes in at a different time. This leads to rare tutti sections (where everyone is playing). Even when most of the parts are in, one or more of the voices are performing what I think of as distracting lines that pull attention away from the general harmonic progression and accent the unpredictability and chaos of a crowded train ride. These moments, like the gradually ascending opening trumpet plunger mute that goes from m. 46 to m. 57 (0:48), or the piercingly high clarinet line from m. 47 to m. 54, distract with intended effect. These are the effects that make this piece different, special, and a wonderful example of how a sensory explosion such as "Daybreak Express" can also be a poignantly careful examination of a social moment and worldly phenomenon.

To extend this line of thinking, I would be remiss not to mention more astonishing moments that set this example apart. The saxophone sections have exceedingly intricate flowing parts towards the middle of the piece that function as a sort of group solo around a particular rhythmic statement (1:18). These sections move along with quick alacrity outlining both scalar and chordal elements of the processional nature of the narrative. Beginning at m. 118 (1:44), the lead trumpet begins a series of high notes that demand physical strength only a few performers can muster—these repeated notes do not merely act as ornaments, they become the call for response sections in the rest of the ensemble as similar cascades and slides dominate the palette

of the rest of the work. Another innovative element of composition is the modulation at m. 117 (1:42).

Gunther Schuller, a prominent transcriber and scholar of Ellingtonia, hails this modulation as a key moment of musical brilliance.

The harmonic collision that occurs here in this phrase-elision contributes one of the most remarkable moments in the entire score. As the saxophones and rhythm section finish off their dominant-tonic cadence, (E^b-A^b), the brass's A-diminished chord sneaks in behind the reeds, gradually overwhelming them and at the same time sliding upwards microtonally: all this produces a harmonic/textural mix that again had surely never been heard before in any music.³⁷

This description of the harmonic motion is helpful to musicologists and those with enough musical literacy to understand how modulations like his occur normally. However, Schuller then does a reading of the moment in the way that I have been trying to articulate with the following passage:

Beyond the musical/technical/harmonic aspects of this passage, what makes it truly amazing is that it represents ingeniously—and realistically—what happens when a train passes over a switch and moves to another track. We all have

³⁷. Gunther Schuller, “Daybreak Express,” (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1993), *ii*.

experienced and seen this in operation, and we can thus easily see and hear how Ellington switches the train from an A^b to a D^b track, how the harmonies split in two, as it were, diverging just as subtly as two track systems do at the switch point, and how the gradual upward curvature of the sliding brass chord shows the rails veering off to a new track.³⁸

This is a wonderful articulation of how narrative can be implanted upon music, but also an appreciation of how narrative might be implicit in certain music because of context and expression with and against convention. Ellington is arranging sounds to replicate how they occur in life—the notation and previous playing techniques were inadequate for the impression, so he invented his own.

Gene Lees, in the epigraph posted above, points to “oddity,” individuality,” and “idiosyncrasy” as the key elements of what makes a Jazz composition special—my case is that Ellington’s “Daybreak Express” highlights these moments above all else to create a masterful Impressionist work.³⁹ Lees also incorrectly asserts that Classical convention puts forth an idea of a “correct” sound—this is a debatable topic that he glosses over to advance his point. The textual examples I have shown thus far merely scratch the surface of analytic exercise latent in the work; indeed, my reading of the text is based upon my own musical fluency and aural understanding of convention. Would a trumpeter have more to say about the “oddities” in the trumpet parts? Yes. Would a drummer have more to say about the driving rhythm and

³⁸. Ibid., *ii-i*.

³⁹. Lees, “Ellington Remembered,” 28-34.

symmetrical slowing down of the end of the piece as the train returns to stasis at its next stop? Maybe. Schuller's bi-directional approach to analyzing the one transition at m. 117 gives me a model with which I can look at some analytic attempts. He begins at the level of harmony and note-analysis and moves outwards to grander claims about the nature of the piece. He is claiming that the work is impressionistic under my understanding of the term, but is that enough to compare "Daybreak Express" amongst its other Impressionist brethren in the Ravel and Debussy canon?

6.0 IT IS CLEAN. IT IS WELL-LIT. IT IS CLEAN AND WELL-LIGHTED: THE “HEMINGWAY EFFECT”

[Hemingway] was not detached. Indeed, his primary concern was to communicate emotion, not rational themes which might require objectivity and disinterestedness.

—Raymond Nelson⁴⁰

The exercise performed in the previous section, for “Daybreak Express,” could work beautifully to articulate the critical ideology that can understand the minutia and the sweeping gestures at the same time. I seek to apply this idea to Hemingway one last time to grasp at the threads of connection between these two forms.

Hemingway, like Ellington, produced stories of more than one kind. Where Ellington has his Church masses and his jungle dances, his vignettes and his ballads, Hemingway’s stories range topically and stylistically across a few broad themes. There is the Africa story, the War story, the Nick Adams story, the Spanish story, and the Realist story, to name a few. But all of these general themes serve the same larger artistic identity. Much like the “Ellington Effect,” there is a “Hemingway Effect” that sticks out to many readers.

⁴⁰. Raymond Nelson, *Hemingway: Expressionist Artist* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State Univ. Press, 1979), x.

“A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” is often touted as one of Hemingway’s most dialogue-reliant short stories and a strong example of the “Hemingway Effect.” Written in 1926, the story falls cleanly into the ex-patriot movement of the 20’s. The three principal characters loiter in a Spanish café before closing time and remark on the symbolic futility of life. Symbolically, they are frequently considered simply as the beginning, middle, and end of adult life—each stage reacting to stimuli in identifiable ways. Broad symbolic breakdowns of the story bring out intriguing commentary on the ideals of the “Lost Generation.” In looking at this story, Hubert Zapf’s framework explained in “Reflection vs. Daydream: Two Types of the Implied Reader in Hemingway’s Fiction,” offers a look at reception theory that I believe may translate across the media gap to Ellington. In the article Zapf outlines how “horizontal” aspects of the implied reader differ from “vertical” aspects. This idea correlates nicely to a study of Hemingway’s prose because of the reader’s implied independence.

These two aspects of reception (the vertical aspect of the implied reader as defined by the indeterminacy of a suggested deep structure of the text and the horizontal aspect of the implied reader as defined by the process of experience inscribed into the text) represent *two different types* of appellative structure in Hemingway’s fiction. The first appeals to the reader’s sense of discovery and cognitive coherence, to his ability to detect, connect, and interpret implicit, ambiguous, or incomplete textual information. It therefore involves a predominantly mental, reflective activity of the reader. The second type appeals to the reader’s sense empathy with significant human fate, building upon the

psychic tension of expectation vs. result, desire vs. reality, hope vs. disappointment. It involves a predominantly emotional, psychological activity.⁴¹

Zapf's framework zooms in upon this issue of hermeneutic independence in a particular way that works for both Hemingway and Ellington. This summary of the "vertical" vs. the "horizontal" is a beautiful explanation of what I have been dancing around and trying to name for a while now. This "vertical aspect of the implied reader" represents the surface understanding of what is at stake in reading a work—the "horizontal aspect" represents the fundamental species activity that is more universal and difficult to quantify. Even though Zapf lumps "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" in with other "static" stories, this does not mean that it falls squarely into the "vertical" type as he asserts; in fact, Zapf's use of the psychoanalytic lens and the concept of the Freudian daydream as the strongest criteria for a "horizontal" reading places emphasis on what he regards as the "psychic tension" driving the narrative.

This concept of "psychic tension" lies at the core of crossing the media boundary between music and literature because in this space, emotional connection plays a large part. Impressionist music asks the listener to contemplate the sound—it demands appreciation on a deeper level. This moment is implicit in the music just like many characters in Hemingway's stories contemplate the reality around them and bathe in its honest detail. A "vertical" implied

⁴¹. Hubert Zapf, "Reflection vs. Daydream: Two Types of the Implied Reader in Hemingway's Fiction" in *New Critical Approaches to the Short Fiction of Ernest Hemingway: The Jackson J. Benson Edition* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1990), 97.

reader reads the scene to understand the events as they take place whereas the “horizontal” reader reads the scene to understand the feeling behind the eyes of the character there described.

In the text of “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” the central conflict revolves around a symbolic figure and the realistic discussion surrounding him—this is static in terms of action, but still deals with the psychic tensions of a mobile story. The story reads like a screenplay, where the only times when dialogue disappears is when descriptive passages act as stage directions for the scene. In describing action, the narration fulfills the criteria of the “vertical” implied reader. “The waiter poured on into the glass so that the brandy slopped over and ran down the stem into the top saucer of the pile. ‘Thank you,’ the old man said. The waiter took the bottle back inside the café. He sat down at the table with his colleague again.”⁴² Is this an example of the “indeterminacy of a suggested deep structure of the text?”⁴³

Vertically, the reader must use his “sense of discovery and cognitive coherence...his ability to detect, connect, and interpret implicit, ambiguous, or incomplete textual information.”⁴⁴ The waiter serving the old man in the descriptive passage above is doing so with indecency and impatience. This kind of empathetic identification with the actor comes from contextual clues like his previous complaints about the old man to the older waiter and his identity as the “waiter who was in a hurry.”⁴⁵ These context clues test the reader’s ability to discover the coherent symbolic structure of the work. The deeper this “vertical” analysis goes, the more rewarding it

⁴². Hemingway, *The Complete Short Stories*, 289.

⁴³. Zapf, “Reflection vs. Daydream,” 97.

⁴⁴. Ibid.

⁴⁵. Hemingway, *The Complete Short Stories*, 289.

becomes. In this one passage, the sloppy pouring motion sticks out in contrast with the old man's natural tendency. Then, "This old man is clean. He drinks without spilling. Even now, drunk. Look at him."⁴⁶ So symbolically, the young waiter attempts to impose his undignified view of the old man by spilling his drink for him. Hemingway, a page later, connects this thread: "The waiter watched him go down the street, a very old man walking unsteadily but with dignity."⁴⁷ Is this the only way to interpret these "static" scenes? Zapf's exclusion of the "horizontal" aspects of the story leaves much to be desired, especially when considering interdisciplinary approaches.

Horizontally, the reader has a sense of "empathy with significant human fate, building upon the psychic tension of expectation vs. result, desire vs. reality, hope vs. disappointment. It involves a predominantly emotional, psychological activity."⁴⁸ On a surface level, these tensions are built into the general plot. The older waiter is thoroughly empathetic, identifying with and defending the old man against the younger waiter's impatient rebukes. In contrast, the younger waiter is concerned with the psychic tension of hope vs. disappointment. Hemingway conveys these emotional complexities within the language. "'I want to go home to bed.' 'What is an hour?' 'More to me than to him.'"⁴⁹ This attitude represents an aversion to empathy and identification with hope against the old man's symbolic disappointment. These tensions reach a breaking point at the *nada* passage towards the end of the story.

⁴⁶. Ibid.

⁴⁷. Ibid., 290.

⁴⁸. Zapf, "Reflection vs. Daydream," 97.

⁴⁹. Hemingway, *The Complete Short Stories*, 290.

The *nada* passage asks for a “horizontal” implied reader. Hemingway carefully introduces the narrative switch into the older waiter’s consciousness by literally re-lighting his scene. “Turning off the electric light he continued the conversation with himself.”⁵⁰ The reader attaches meaning to the scene by empathizing with the closing routine and the symbolic extinguishing of the electric light. The conversation is only carried on in the narrative from the waiter’s perspective for a few moments until the third person narrator retakes control and devolves into morose thought about the disenchantment of the world. “It is the light of course but it is necessary that the place be clean and pleasant. You do not want music. Certainly you do not want music. Nor can you stand before a bar with dignity although that is all that is provided for these hours.” Here ends the narration from the older waiter’s point of view. The reader is here attuned to the character’s desires by the brief switch to the (seemingly) first person view, but without any indication, the narrative switches back to begin its spiral. “What did he fear? It was not fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too.”⁵¹ Who is the “he” in this moment? It must be the older waiter who suffers from a “nothing that he knew too well.” This is a powerful moment of connection between the suffering of the character and interpretive structure of the implied reader. As the ritualistic repetition of the word *nada* begins, the narrative becomes a psychological exposé that, through emotional attachment with the reader, bridges both of the Zapf’s frameworks. This level of emotional resonance from narrative to reader is at the core of musical interpretation as well.

⁵⁰. Ibid., 291.

⁵¹. Ibid.

Can this kind of rigor be applied to the musical realm? Are there degrees of separation in musical reception theory that can possibly have corollaries in the literary realm? Claiming that “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” is a “static” story only to be received through a “vertical” framework precludes any concept of what these kinds of distinctions in reception theory can mean across media boundaries.

7.0 CAN YOU FEEL IT?

Interpretation is a process with no clear endpoint. There is no number of interpretations that indicates to a researcher that it is time to stop. Moreover, any interpretation can itself be interpreted. The hermeneutic circle can be an infinite loop.

-Michael Giazzoni⁵²

I want to go back to a question posed earlier. Do the nuts and bolts of composition help create guidelines for artistic interpretation? Through this study, I have looked intently at two forms of Impressionist composition that intrigue me for similar reasons. Is this connection automatically present, and can it be found within the minutia of the text? I began this study with a hopeful ideal that “-isms” line up across media boundaries—what kernel of truth could I really seek to find within my definitions? The journey, however, has brought me to a new level of appreciation and understanding of these two artists and my reactions to their work.

I set out the goal in my introduction to encourage a side-by-side reading of multiple fields of the humanities. Throughout this engagement, I have explored how interpretive problems are not limited to specific interpretive communities. There are many ways to approach this issue,

⁵². Michael Giazzoni, “A Gadamerian Investigation of the Two Cultures Phenomenon in an Undergraduate Honors Research Fellowship” (PhD Diss., Univ. of Pittsburgh, 2009), 26.

indeed, if we are to accept that there is no such thing as a text in a vacuum, then this parallel reading articulates precisely where certain experiences overlap and intersect. Music can be difficult to talk about for many of the same reasons that literature is difficult to discuss—does any engagement with these two forms have to be mired in these concerns? Does a removed, out-of-body lens offer more tangible conclusions about the work and its impact upon the consumer? This experience has shown me that seeking objectivity through rigid criteria does not get at the heart of *why* we are fascinated by art. If it is a fundamental species activity to make aesthetic judgments, then it is time that I accept the boundaries of my own subjectivity. I speak for myself in an effort to justify this subjectivity.

The question that most strongly influences my reading is the detailed question of *how*. While musicology and literary criticism occasionally work with different sensory experiences, the conventional places for their work can and should extend across boundaries between forms. Short stories are as much about auditory processes as they are visual and narrative, and music is about the mechanics of storytelling as much as it is about neurophysiological processes in the brain. The two are not automatically dissimilar.

Ellington amazes me with his idiosyncratic genius as he takes novel ideas and turns them into revolutionary soundscapes. Hemingway amazes me with the condensed nature of his prose and the beauty hidden underneath the surface readings of his work. There exists a connection between Duke Ellington and Ernest Hemingway in the way that a detailed study of their art has articulated a sense of complexity hidden in simplicity, a sense of emotional impact through honesty rather than manipulation, and of theoretical calculation taking a back seat to provocative new ideas. A parallel study of the two forms highlights how similar emotional states are reached

through different technical means. These emotional moments resonate across the forms; indeed, they resonate for the reader and the listener in ways that demand more in-depth study.

In any case—isn’t it pretty to think so.

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