Drawn to the Slaughter:
Violence in Jazz Novels

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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Abstract

This two-part thesis examines the representation of jazz musicians and violence through a critical study and a short novel, ‘Swing’. The interaction between the two parts of the thesis manifests itself through the exploration of three key areas common to both: the relationship between violence and music; the novel as a vehicle for the representation of jazz; and the characterisation of the jazz life.

In the critical study, I argue that novels about jazz musicians frequently include some violence in one or more of three forms: systemic violence; intimate violence; and performative violence. Systemic violence refers to social and political violations relating to race, gender and economics. Intimate violence relates to self-harm and violence towards friends and relations. Finally, performative violence is a term for any violence that occurs to, through or by musicians in the act of performance. Performative violence is the least common form of violence in these novels, yet it is often the most powerful. This is because the representation of violence through performance has the capacity to simultaneously reflect the social and personal history of the performer, while also exploring the musicians’ potential to create new sounds through the destruction of conventional ideas.

The benefits of using this theoretical framework as the basis for the approach to the study of these novels are threefold. Firstly, this framework allows for an examination of how the personal and social history of these characters affects their music. Secondly, through the examination of intimate violence, it is possible to address how and why recurring themes of self-harm and obsession are perpetuated through the novels. Finally, the framework gives significant import to the concept of performative violence, which enables a discussion of the relationship between the performer and the audience.

I suggest that authors who explore the lives of jazz musicians use violence or destruction as a metaphorical tool to aid the representation of the creative process. Characters in jazz novels break apart their music and often their lives to develop new sounds and explore new ways of living. This results in a narrative pattern of destructive events that lead to creative acts. The violence or destruction does not occur in the same way in every novel, and nor does it necessarily with
the same narrative purpose, but there are themes and stylistic tendencies that are common.


‘Swing’ is a novel that was written in response to the jazz fiction of the twentieth century. It follows a year in the life of an Australian double-bass player, Chester Nelson, who is a mediocre performer struggling to balance the different styles of jazz that he performs. Chester is violent at times, but does not always remember what he has done, and as a result both his music and his relationships become unpredictable and unsustainable. By incorporating modes of violence and attempting to write against stereotypes, I present a less romanticised perspective on the life of a jazz musician, while maintaining an element of drama and examining the complexities of psychological deterioration.

Both the novel and the critical study examine the representation of the social history of jazz, the personal conflict of the characters and the technical and aural qualities of the music. Through the consideration of these narrative elements, it has become evident that the literary representation of jazz is an ideal subject through which authors can explore how violence may lead to creativity.
Chapter 1—Introduction

Early in Michael Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976), Buddy Bolden is described as having the ability to ‘reach a force on the first note that attacked the ear’ (14). Bolden’s sound is represented as being able to stretch out into the audience, call to them, make them dance, play with the air and finally threaten the sanity of the musician himself. This representation of the artist as a reckless provocateur dominates novels about jazz musicians. Yet Ondaatje also suggests that the music can be a destructive force that is capable of destroying the musician. The result is a compelling and vivid portrayal of a musician and his relationship to his music in the last few years of his career.

This thesis will examine the representation of jazz musicians and violence in relation to the musicians’ creative processes in nine novels written between 1938 and 1998. I argue that authors who explore the lives of jazz musicians use violence or destruction as a metaphorical tool to aid the representation of the creative process. Characters in these jazz novels break apart their music and often their lives to develop new sounds and explore new ways of living. This results in a narrative pattern of destructive events that lead to creative acts. Through the examination of the social history of jazz, the personal conflict of the characters, and the technical and aural qualities of the music represented, it is evident that jazz has numerous qualities that make it an ideal art form for exploring how violence can lead to creativity. Although there is much discussion of the impact of the history of jazz throughout, the primary focus of this study is on the *representation* of jazz characters in fiction.

This thesis is in two equal parts. One part is this critical study, and the other is a novel, ‘Swing’, that relates to the study in several ways. The interaction between the two halves has been developed through the process of writing and manifests itself through three key areas: the relationship between violence and music; the novel as a response to the history of the representation of jazz in literature; and characterisation.

The development of these two parts initially stemmed from the close reading of novels about jazz musicians. It became apparent through this reading that there is violence in nearly every novel that represents these jazz characters in
detail. The violence does not occur in the same way in every novel, or necessarily with the same narrative purpose, but there are themes and stylistic tendencies that are common. I argue that every novel about jazz musicians that I discuss in this exegesis includes some violence in one or more of three forms: systemic violence; intimate violence; and performative violence. Systemic violence refers to abuse and violations relating to race, gender, economics, and in some cases, social structure more broadly. Intimate violence relates to self-harm and violence towards friends and relations. Finally, performative violence is an umbrella term for any violence that occurs to, through or by musicians in the act of performance. This theoretical framework has provided the foundation for my exploration of violence in novels about jazz musicians.

Beginnings

The lives of musicians have long been explored in literature. Musicians have become the representatives of tortured artists, sacrificial heroes and the impassioned, self-destructive, avant-garde vagabonds who exist outside of ordinary society. These characters’ lives have been strewn across pages, stages and screens with their music echoing around them. While the relationships between the characters and their music can be aurally explored in performative arts such as film, theatre or opera, their characterisation in literature is perhaps more complex. It is arguably much more challenging to use words alone to express the quality, tone and influence of the music in these characters’ lives.

As Werner Wolf points out, the majority of early explorations of the relationship between literature and music focused on poetry (6). Yet, in more recent years, ‘the musicalization of fiction’, specifically literature, has been foregrounded.¹ Musico-literary studies have enabled the question of how music can be represented in literature to become its own field of research. Critics such as Marcin Stawiarski see the growth of the field as so significant that they have developed studies into how it may be taught as an undergraduate and postgraduate field of study (cf. Stawiarski; Correa, Chornik and Samuels).

¹ The phrase “the musicalization of fiction” is the title of Wolf’s text on the subject and refers to the discussion of “how far – if at all – (narrative) literature can attain, or at least suggest, a musical quality in the first place” (Wolf 4).
From Stephen Benson’s concern with the ‘age-old question of how to represent the musical experience with words’ (1) in *Literary Music*, to Lawrence Kramer’s celebration of the history of meaning in *Musical Meaning* and the manner in which this influences how it is heard (Kramer 1), musico-literary studies explore numerous forms of the relationship between words and music. Indeed, a recent publication from the Words and Music Association (Dunkel, Petermann and Sauerwald) identifies three key areas of exploration: music represented in literature; music and literature as one artefact (such as opera); and literature in musical works, such as music inspired by or based on literary works.

Following the critical analysis of researchers such as Sam Solecki, Stephen Benson and Joel Deshaye, this study is focused on the field of musicalized literature. Not all of the texts examined here bridge the gap between music and literature in the same way. Many novels about musicians are simply that: a literary telling of the life of a musician. Yet others, such as Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter*, not only represent the life of the musician, but also go some way towards representing the music that they play through the text itself.

Though *Coming Through Slaughter* is a pivotal text, the other novels that have formed the basis of my study include Dorothy Baker’s *Young Man with a Horn* (1938), Ann Petry’s *The Street* (1946), John Clellon Holmes’ *The Horn* (1958), Herbert Simmons’ *Man Walking on Eggshells* (1962), James Baldwin’s *Another Country* (1962), Jackie Kay’s *Trumpet* (1998), Bart Schneider’s *Blue Bossa* (1998) and Rafi Zabor’s *The Bear Comes Home* (1998).

The fictionalised lives of musicians in these contexts are mostly over-romanticised and idealised. In the majority of texts, musicians are depicted as artists of genius, who play with passion and incredible skill and yet rarely seem to practise, or to become bored, or to be even slightly unsure of their professional vocation. In reality, most musicians face at least one of these concerns – boredom, technical practice and uncertainty about their vocation – daily and thus the honesty of these portrayals is dubious. Admittedly, the above concerns – particularly boredom – would not necessarily make for invigorating reading or

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2 There are many more critics who work in this field and they will be referenced throughout.

3 This opinion is partly based on personal experience, as I have worked as a professional musician for more than eight years. Although jazz is not my area of personal expertise, some of these concerns are likely to be common to musicians of all genres.
thrilling narrative development, yet some reference to these psychological and philosophical concerns would potentially add authenticity.

Unlike boredom, violence and destruction are common to all of these texts. Systemic, intimate or performative violence often provide the basis for narrative and character development. However, in some cases, the violence that infiltrates the novels goes further than this: it becomes a tool through which authors explore psychological and philosophical concerns. Thus, it may be that the violence, as well as aiding narrative, enhances authenticity and depth in the representation of the musicians.

**Theories of Violence**

As a central word to this study, it is necessary to define ‘violence’ in this context. In these novels, violence ranges from physical aggression and attacks, to breakage and rupture of objects, to psychological pressure and assault, and lastly, to a rupturing or disrupting of music itself. Some theorists, such as Hannah Arendt, discuss violence primarily in terms of the physical (the psychological counterpart being ‘power’ in her view) (56), and indeed some dictionary definitions of violence specify that ‘physical force’ is a necessary element in the meaning of the term (NODE 2063). However ‘violence’ has a more layered meaning in the context of the examination of these novels, and many critics such as Arthur Redding argue that a definition of the term is nearly impossible as ‘violence is also, evidently, destructive, of bodies, ideologies, social systems’(1) and is therefore both physical and psychological.

Indeed, Redding goes so far as to argue that language is limited in its ability to comprehensively explore what violence is (2). James Richard Giles agrees with Redding, arguing further that ‘Violence seems … difficult to identify [through language] but [is] nevertheless a phenomenon most people claim to be able to recognize when they see it’(5). Yet he also argues that ‘while language may be inadequate to grasp violence, language nevertheless constitutes one of our most important modes of access to it’ and that we should therefore still attempt to examine violence as it is represented in literature as a means through which we may come to an understanding of the phenomenon (5).
While I agree that violence is a term that is difficult to define, it may be possible to form an understanding of it by examining qualities that are common to all forms of violence. For instance, although Giles argues against definition, he does highlight an important quality that he argues is ‘universal’ to all forms of violence:

Excess seems to be the one universal characteristic of violence, which in itself can be oppressive, even destructive, or affirmative, even redemptive. By inevitably shattering linguistic boundaries, the excessive will escape any system of signs designed to contain it (5).

Thus, while he argues that qualities of ‘excess’ prevent violence from being defined, it is also a feature of how he understands the term. Excess is also important to this study, as it is a significant feature of the representation of the ‘jazz life’, which, I argue, also inevitably involves violence. While Giles suggests that ‘excess’ is not always a negative, I argue that it can be when used in relation to drugs, alcohol, obsession, or indeed, violence.

René Girard suggests another universal quality of violence is that once it has been suggested, it cannot be stopped – it can only be transferred:

Once aroused, the urge to violence triggers certain physical changes that prepare men's bodies for battle. This set toward violence lingers on; it should not be regarded as a simple reflex that ceases with the removal of the initial stimulus (2).

Girard posits that if there is no outlet for the violence, then a sacrificial victim is used to bear the brunt of the urge towards violence: ‘Violence is not to be denied, but it can be diverted to another object, something it can sink its teeth into’ (4). While the other ‘object’ or victim may not be the original trigger for violence, they can feel the force of the ‘set towards violence’. Indeed this is a quality of violence that is crucial to this study: transference. I argue that violence experienced by characters is transferred into other parts of their lives and sometimes also into their music. It is almost as though violence is a form of energy that does not cease, but is rather passed onto or into something else. A character who experiences racial prejudice, for instance, may then transfer the violence of that experience into committing a physical violation against a white

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4 Excess will be discussed in more detail throughout Chapter Three.
5 This is particularly evident throughout the Bible.
man (such as in Simmons’ *Man Walking on Eggshells*), or alternatively, channel the violence into the music (such as in Zabor’s *The Bear Comes Home*). The moments when the music becomes the outlet for the violence are fairly infrequent, but they are one of many ways music and violence are linked through these novels.

In their exploration of the relationship between popular music and violence, Bruce Johnson and Martin Cloonan define violence as ‘any response [to music] that … induces physical or symbolic violation’ (29). The word ‘violation’ is core to Johnson and Cloonan’s argument here, and they contrast violations such as physical brutality with symbolic violations such as violations of human rights, or, central to their discussion, the violation of the body and mind through the manipulation of sound.

They also assert that because music is auditory, its use as a violent tool is ‘symbolic’ and is more akin to human rights violations than to physical abuse. While music may incite physical violence through political messages, for example, Johnson and Cloonan argue that the sound of music itself also has the capacity to be used as a type of symbolic violation in the form of manipulation:

Music as aggressive or violent intervention thoroughly pervades contemporary life, ranging from its uses in the regulation of public order, to a means of torture and interrogation under duress (148).

Music can invade or be forced into a space and is widely known to be used in torture and interrogation by military operations, particularly in the United States (Johnson and Cloonan 152). While I agree with this perspective on the power of music, I disagree with the claim that this type of aural torture is only symbolic violence. When sound impacts on the physical world, it is more than simply symbolic since, in the case of torture for instance, a person may have a physical reaction (cf. Cusick 3). Therefore I suggest that the concept of aural violation is a third form of violence that has elements of both symbolic and physical violations. When music becomes violent, it is symbolic because it is not physically tangible but rather capable of emotional manipulation. However music

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6 Both of these examples will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters Two and Four, respectively.
7 This targeted and destructive use of music by an authoritative body is not central to my study here, but it is worth noting as an indicator of the potential music has to affect the listener or audient in a negative or violent way.
can also be physical because of its ability to physically control the listener. The role of the audience or listener is therefore crucial to this form of violence, as they are the victims of the sound. Therefore it is a performative form of violence, requiring an audience to have an impact.\(^8\)

Slavoj Žižek classifies violence in terms of the subjective and objective. In his view, subjective violence is often physical, and is a form of ‘violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent’ (1). In contrast, objective violence is invisible and has two further categorisations: symbolic violence, which is ‘violence imbedded in language and its forms’ (1), and systemic violence – a term I have chosen to also use – which is violence that comes from ‘the often catastrophic consequence of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems’ (2). While I have embraced Žižek’s concept of systemic violence, ‘symbolic violence’ is too broad a term for this thesis. Rather, I suggest that the three forms of violence in the novels I discuss have both physical and symbolic qualities. This is because they are often a combination of both physical and psychological violations.

Inspired in part by Žižek’s ‘triumvirate’ of violence (1), my theoretical framework is also based around three forms of violence: systemic, intimate and performative violence. Yet the impact of the destruction is determined, not by the type of violence, but rather by the way the author has chosen to represent that violence in relation to the character and their music. While the word ‘violence’ is difficult to define, as Redding and Giles argue, throughout this thesis it acts an umbrella term for several forms of destruction, rupture, violation or damaging action. As I will be exploring its use as metaphor, in both physical and psychological terms, and in relation to music making, the nuances will change throughout the thesis, but the term will still be applicable to the overall argument.

Violence is often used as a metaphor in these novels. Physical or visible violence may be a metaphor for psychological disturbance or suffering, while psychological or musical violence is at times a metaphor for deeper emotional concerns within the characters. For instance, the idea of breaking music down, pulling it apart and disrupting the key or time signature is used as a metaphor for

\(^8\) This will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Four.
the disruption of conventions in relation to identity, gender, race and social history.

An important nuance in the way violence or violent language is used in relation to music is when authors represent musicians as violent towards music itself. Where the music, particularly jazz, is cut up, reconfigured and broken down through the process of improvisation, violence is represented as an element of the music-making process. Of course, it is possible to see this fragmentation and reassembly as simply a creative process that is neither violent nor destructive. For instance, in his description of jazz composition, Paul Berliner describes the process of altering a melody through improvisation as follows:

Pursuing subtle courses, musicians carry over the inflections and ornaments of particular phrases to embellish other phrases. Venturing further, they may extract a figure’s salient characteristic, such as melodic shape or rhythmic configuration, and treat it as the rudiment for new figures (146).

Berliner’s attempt at a realistic description of the process of improvisation is focused on the embellishment, extraction and treatment of a melody. However, I argue that the language these novelists use to describe this process is quite different because of its suggestion of violence. It is the representation of the creative process that is of concern here, not how that process is achieved in real life. For instance, in contrast to Berliner’s description, Rafi Zabor describes his fictional character improvising with a very different emphasis:

First thing he did was start dismantling the tune. He played a series of violent lower-register honks, then some angry, disordered runs that violated the cadence at the end of the chorus. And there went the tempo: the rhythm section was forced to break ranks and stutter … the Bear applied more pressure, the time splintered like boxwood (45).

Zabor’s Bear dismantles, disorders, violates, and splinters time and his fellow musicians have to ‘break ranks’. While improvisation in jazz is not necessarily a violent or destructive process in reality, Zabor’s extract highlights how improvisation can lend itself to being described as such. Zabor represents the same process as that which Berliner describes, yet Zabor has chosen to foreground the potential violence of the act, and in doing so he focuses the reader’s attention on The Bear’s aggression and determination in the scene. This suggests that there is an inherent violence in The Bear’s music-making process. Just as a painter may
cut up or rip an image to reassemble into a collage\(^9\), a jazz musician may break a melody or harmony apart to make something new. How an author chooses to describe this act is what determines whether it is viewed as violence or not. When an author does represent the music as violent, the music often becomes a reflection of the character’s psychological state.

As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Four, this violence in the representation of music often mimics narrative events, character histories and character desires. Yet despite this aggression or violation in the music, the resulting sound is not always violent in its impact on the audience in the novels. On occasion the audience is strongly affected, but more often, this type of violence is confined to the relationship between the performer and the music itself.

**Saying Something: Jazz and Improvisation**

It is necessary to reflect upon the type of jazz these characters play, and ultimately why jazz was chosen by the novelists as the music to explore in each of these texts. This is one of the major questions I will address throughout the following chapters.

The jazz represented in these novels begins with the pioneers of jazz, that is, early jazz from New Orleans, of the style performed by Buddy Bolden, Sidney Bechet and Bunk Johnson. Alyn Shipton has argued that this music is a blend of blues, Baptist hymns and the folk music of Spain and West Africa (6). The bands that played it were of mixed instrumentation, ranging from string-only bands, comprising mandolin, guitar, bass, banjo and violin, to large brass bands consisting of trombones, tubas, alto saxophones, clarinets, cornets and/or trumpets and a few percussion instruments (Gioia 33). The large brass bands not only performed in clubs and bars, but were more commonly formed for parades through the streets. It was music affected by race, poverty, disease, and arguably, vice: drinking and prostitution (Gioia 31). This is the jazz of Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter*. As this is jazz in its first incarnation, it is a style that informs every other type of jazz that has followed and is represented in literature.

A novel that precedes the publication of *Coming Through Slaughter*, Baker’s *Young Man with a Horn* (1938), actually looks at a later form of jazz than

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\(^9\) Such as in the work of Pablo Picasso or Kurt Schwitters.
Ondaatje’s novel. A note at the beginning of Baker’s text clarifies that the music her character, Rick Martin, plays was inspired by the music of Bix Beiderbecke (i). Beiderbecke is regarded as a musician who performed and developed Chicago Jazz – a style that bridged the gap between New Orleans jazz and swing (Gioia 74). Chicago jazz was the popular style of the 1920s; it is described as having a ‘restless energy’ and marked the beginning of musicians and counterpoint melodies ‘battling for supremacy’ (Gioia 75). Partly because of these qualities, this form of jazz is also explored in several other jazz novels including Toni Morrison’s Jazz (1992). As I will suggest, stylistic features of the music represented are often crucial to the portrayal of the characters and the violence they experience.

In the 1979 preface to The Horn, John Clellon Holmes suggests that his main character, Edgar Poole, is loosely based on Lester Young, and other characters reference Billie Holliday and a young Charlie Parker, placing the novel in the early 1950s, at a crossroads between swing and bebop (The Horn ii). Holmes describes the music he is writing about as having ‘beauty, lift, swing wrestled out of sordidness, the miraculous concatenation of African rhythm and European melody in an America still uncertain of its soul’, also suggesting it is an early form of bebop that he is representing (The Horn ii). Other texts that are relevant to this study, and which also explore musicians performing a blend of swing and bebop, include Herbert Simmons’ Man Walking on Eggshells and Ann Petry’s The Street.

The music of this early modern jazz, or bebop, as I refer to it here, broke away from structures that provided accessible rhythms for dancing. As well as this, improvised lines became more complex, and the emphasis on beats shifted to what were considered traditionally weak beats, often giving the music, as Ted Gioia puts it, ‘a querulous, incisive tone, imparting a slightly off-balance quality’ (202). Paul Berliner suggests that the term ‘bebop’ is in fact ‘onomatopoetic’ and ‘based on a characteristic rhythmic pattern of the idiom’, again suggesting that it is the rhythmic changes that mark the shift towards this type of jazz (122).

Other later jazz styles referenced in these novels also developed from the qualities of swing and bebop. Jackie Kay’s Trumpet, and James Baldwin’s Another Country, are both largely set in the 1960s when free jazz was developing. In both of these novels the musician characters also play music that has elements
of both swing and bebop (particularly in Kay’s text), much like the jazz of Holmes’ *The Horn*. This provides a background of tradition mixed with ingenuity and intuition, allowing the characters to break free from their pasts and express something of their personalities through the music. This is crucial to the exploration of these characters’ lives, and I will discuss this in greater length in subsequent chapters.

Two other texts that explore different jazz styles are Bart Schneider’s *Blue Bossa* and Rafi Zabor’s *The Bear Comes Home*. *Blue Bossa* is partly based on the life of Chet Baker, so is inspired by the sparseness of 1950s West Coast jazz, though this novel focuses more on the lifestyle than the music. Zabor’s *The Bear Comes Home*, is the only novel I discuss that explores free jazz, post-bop and fusion. Berliner argues that these styles go some way towards an ‘ideological rejection of former jazz conventions’ and blend other styles of music such as rock into the idiom (122).

Yet, common to the representation of all these types of jazz in the novels is the importance of improvisation. Philip Alperson argues that nearly all human activity is a form of improvisation, but that improvisation in the artistic sense is essentially ‘spontaneous achievement within the constraints of the possible’ (274). In his study into the meaning and method behind improvisation, *Thinking in Jazz*, Paul Berliner suggests that it is a misconception that improvisation is only about performing with spontaneity and intuition (2). Yet many of these novels do imply that musical inspiration comes from intuition alone. This creates a romanticised vision of the jazz musician, which often suits literary representations of these characters. However, in his comprehensive study, which involved interviewing and working with many jazz musicians throughout America, Berliner argues that there is, ‘in fact, a lifetime of preparation and knowledge behind every idea that the improviser performs’ (17). This is perhaps what Alperson means by the ‘constraints of the possible’ in his definition of improvisation: the limitations of the instrument itself and the performer’s skills, will provide the boundary for the performance.

Throughout this thesis, I argue that improvisation is the key to understanding why authors choose jazz as the genre of music through which they examine or explore their characters. It is also the core factor that explains how
jazz can be so closely related to acts of violence or destruction, as will be
discussed in Chapter Four.

In the nine novels under review, only one character – James Baldwin’s
Rufus Scott – performs in the rhythm section, as he is a drummer. The rhythm
section is made up of instruments such as double bass, drums or even piano, yet
across the field of jazz novels, few main characters specialise in these instruments.
Therefore the majority of subjects for these novels are front-line players (playing
trumpet or saxophone predominantly). This means they are most often the leaders
of their bands, and not only have the opportunity to express their individuality
through the music, but do so by standing at the front of the stage. This is no
coincidence. The role that improvisation plays in jazz enables the authors of the
novels to provide their characters with a new means of communication, and these
characters are placed in the front of the band so that what they play is presented
with as much power as possible. In addition, their physical position of facing the
audience opens a direct line of communication and allows for maximum impact.

As Ingrid Monson argues:

> When a musician successfully reaches a discerning audience, moves its
> members to applaud or shout praises, raises the energy to dramatic
> proportions, and leaves a sonorous memory that lingers long after, he or
> she has moved beyond technical competence, beyond the chord changes
> and into the realm of ‘saying something’ (Saying Something 1-2).

The idea of communication is crucial to Monson’s somewhat romantic
description of improvisation. Yet, the concept of ‘saying something’ also
highlights the importance of adding meaning to the music, as she suggests the act
of communication through the music is made significant through ‘the reciprocal
and multi-layered relationships among sound, social settings, and cultural politics
that affect the meaning of jazz improvisation’ (Saying Something 2 my emphasis).
In his complex study of when and how music has meaning, Lawrence Kramer
describes music as ‘the art of collapsing distances’ (3). This highlights that it is
not only jazz and improvisation that act as forms of musical communication, but
that all music has the ability to do so.

Yet it is the immediacy of the act of improvisation – composing on the
spot – that makes the sense of communication in jazz more vibrant than in other
forms of music. Indeed, numerous recent empirical studies into the state of jazz
performances highlight how important this live composition is to audiences, as Burland and Pitts posit:

Spontaneity and uncertainty offer a sense of excitement as does the immediacy of the event: the sense that the music is being formed “in the moment” and that the audience is part of that process resonates with research on jazz musicians and audiences (527).10

Monson’s concept of ‘saying something’ through improvisation is also a reminder that an important part of the jazz performance process is collaboration. The improvising soloist relies on the support of his or her band for the establishment of the melody, harmony and rhythm, and on their complicity in the act of creation. A common metaphor used by musicians to describe what it is like to improvise in a jazz context is that of a conversation. Yet Berliner has a more comprehensive metaphor for a jazz performance: that of a journey, where the musicians

must take in the immediate inventions around them while leading their own performances toward emerging musical images, retaining, for the sake of continuity, the features of a quickly receding trail of sound. They constantly interpret one another’s ideas, anticipating them on the basis of the music’s predetermined harmonic events (348).

In addition to this complex collaborative journey, the act of improvisation provides an interesting narrative context for these characters. An episode of improvisation is also a public display of something incredibly intimate: the moment of creation. As Alperson suggests, improvisation is interesting to audiences and readers alike because ‘we are actually witnessing the shaping activity of the improver. It is as if we the audience gain privileged access to the performer’s mind at the moment of creation’ (274). Improvisation then, is the act of creating music in a public or live setting, through the combination of technical skill, musical knowledge, personal history, collaborative intuition and emotion.

The concept of improvisation is substantial enough to be the subject of numerous books and much critical material (cf. Alperson; Berliner; Carvalho;

10 Other empirical studies that emphasize the importance of live performance and improvisation include (Brand et al.; Doffman; Macdonald and Wilson). Yet it is important to note that the results of studies such as these may be affected by how audiences believe they should respond both to the music and to questions posed by researchers.
Kamoche and Cunha; Lespinasse; Monson *Saying Something*; Szekely; Dean and Smith), and it will be addressed many more times throughout this study.

**Violence Times Three: The Framework**

Novels about jazz musicians exhibit violence in three forms that I have identified: systemic, intimate, and performative violence. Violent occurrences in these novels are not only plot or narrative devices, but are acts that are actually ‘performed’ as a means of highlighting the development of the characters’ psychological states. The three forms of violence are thus interrelated through characterisation, with both systemic and intimate violence causing performative violence throughout the novels.

I developed the systemic-intimate-performative framework as a result of reading numerous novels and short stories about jazz musicians. Patterns of violence and destruction were identified through the readings and planted the seed of enquiry regarding the prevalence of this quality in the musician characters. In addition, some reading of critical material on violence helped crystallise the definition of the three forms of violence.

I regard systemic violence as a type of violence that stems from either economic need or racial and class prejudice. Systemic violence occurs when musicians are physically or psychologically damaged because of prejudice against their racial identity (primarily African-American), or when they are denied performance opportunities because of their race and class. The result of this is that they not only face economic hardship because of their lack of employment, but also have to respond to the prejudice on a psychological level. Performative violence develops from this when characters react to these issues through their music, and in these instances they create a gesture that is both public and political.

Intimate violence refers to the overwhelming frequency of self-harm that occurs in narratives about jazz musicians. It includes patterns of drug and alcohol use and abuse, destructive acts towards friends and relations, as well as states of isolation and psychosis into which many musician characters fall. In *Seems Like Murder Here*, Adam Gussow defines intimate violence, in terms of the racial issues of the Jim Crow South, as violence perpetrated by African-Americans upon other African-Americans – that is, as attacks by African-Americans upon their
own people (144). Gussow’s definition is applicable to the psychological violence into which many fictional jazz musicians are drawn, as the perpetrators of self-harm, such as jazz musicians, victimise those closest to them; their own people. Yet although Gussow characterises intimate violence as being racially defined, I suggest its definition can be more broadly applied to anyone irrespective of their racial identity (i.e. to people of any race) as long as the victim is emotionally connected to the perpetrator of the violence. Intimate violence sometimes results in performative violence, as it is often the desire to perform and create on stage that drives these characters to self-harm and drug use.

The strongest and most arresting form of violence in these novels occurs when musicians themselves perform acts of violence through their music. This is performative violence — a term I have constructed11 — and primarily occurs when the music itself seems to take on a physical shape and has the ability to cut, bruise, or burn the audience within the novel. Other forms of performative violence take shape when musicians actually attack the audience or each other, sometimes destroying their instruments or hurting themselves in the process. When performative violence occurs, it arises out of systemic violence and intimate violence in the characters’ lives.

The benefits of using these three forms of violence as the basis for the approach to this study are threefold. Firstly, this framework allows for an examination of how the personal and social history of these characters affects their music. As argued above, improvisation in music making is not only intuitive and spontaneous, but rather takes immense skill, a sound knowledge of the genre, an understanding of collaboration, and an emotional investment. Therefore, the past of the characters is crucial to understanding the significance of their music making and how violence may have had an impact on their creative output.

Secondly, through the examination of intimate violence, it is possible to address how and why stereotypes relating to self-harm and obsession are perpetuated through the novels. I argue that drug use and addiction is so common in both real and fictional narratives about jazz musicians that it has become an almost necessary part of the representation of the ‘jazz life’. However, by looking

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11 The term “performative violence” will be discussed at some length in Chapter Four, and draws on theories of the word “performative” from Austin and Butler.
at this recurring theme as a kind of violence against the self that has an impact on
the music-making process, it is possible to give these patterns of representation
some meaning. Not only do these themes create characters who are enigmatic and
destructive, but their tendency towards addiction aids the evocation of empathy
and renders the characters heroes in spite of their personal flaws.\textsuperscript{12}

Finally, the framework above gives significant import to the concept of
performative violence, which also enables a discussion of the relationship
between the performer and the audience. Violence in performance brings together
all three forms of violence, and as a device only used on occasion in these novels,
it is an interesting point of difference between the texts. I argue that those authors
that push their musicians into performative violence add a layer of meaning to the
music that other novels fail to address. Through metaphor, the use of performative
violence not only connects more fully with the art of improvisation but in some
cases also enables an embodiment of jazz through the text itself.

Through the analysis of the novels, I have found that their success as
compelling literary works depends upon the link between the three forms of
violence I have outlined in the framework. The authors’ ability to represent the
music as well as the characters’ identity is dependent upon whether the
psychology of the relationship between music and violence is explored.
Therefore, I aim to define this relationship, examine its multiple forms and
examine how, when and why layers of psychological meaning are achieved
through metaphor. This provides the basis for understanding how and why jazz
and violence are so commonly linked in novels about jazz musicians.

Throughout the thesis, I highlight the intersection of violence with many
complex themes such as race, gender, economics, social history and the process of
music making. In addition, the examination of the representation of jazz and
violence leads to lines of enquiry such as: the relationship between race and
artistic production; the addict as a heroic character; and the solitude of artistic
production in the context of a collaborative art form.

This juxtaposition of ideas highlights how the exploration of symbolic
violence – ‘violence embodied in language and its forms’ (Žižek 1),– is

\textsuperscript{12} This is based around the idea that these characters are portrayed as victims of their
addictions and therefore become empathetic heroes because they must overcome their
addictions to succeed. This concept is further explicated in Chapter 3.
insufficient to define the types of violence explored in relation to jazz in literature because it does not account for the physical impact of the violence represented in the novels. Violence in these novels is continually being transferred: from one person to another, from the psychological to the physical, and from the musician to the music.

Thus this study suggests that a broader conception of violence – beyond an idea of violence as simply physical or psychological – is necessary to understand how and why violence and jazz are related in literature. By conceiving of violence as a transferrable energy, or force, that can move through both the artist and the creative work itself, I have developed the systemic-intimate-performative framework through which the relationship between creativity and destruction can be examined.

Research Methodology

This critical analysis, and the novel associated with it, have been developed simultaneously, however the research for the critical component was dominant initially. This is due, in part, to the approach taken with ‘Swing’ that was somewhat intuitive and fragmentary in its initial stages. Indeed, the approach was perhaps along the lines of what Brad Haseman would argue is ‘being led by what is best described as “an enthusiasm of practice”: something which is exciting, something which may be unruly’(100). Fortunately, Haseman goes on to suggest a critical agenda may still be at the core of a practice such as this, as he argues further, ‘This is not to say these researchers work without large agendas or emancipatory aspirations, but they eschew the constraints of narrow problem setting’ (100). While the creative work on the novel was being developed, a more practical conceptual approach was taken with the critical component of the thesis.

As the critical work began to take shape before the creative work acquired a comprehensible structure, this has resulted in the development of a methodology that has been somewhat research-led. However, the creative practice has also fed back into the research throughout the writing process. The resulting work has thus been both research-led and practice-led, perhaps embodying some of the complexities of the ‘iterative cyclic web’ as outlined by Smith and Dean in their
introduction to a collection of essays on the relationship between creative practice and critical research (8). The image of this ‘web’ highlights the interaction between research and practice, while also providing space for unexpected areas of development through both research and practice. This is an important area of discussion that is also addressed by critics developing concepts of ‘Performative Research’ (Haseman 98) and other areas of ‘cross-discipline inquiry’ (Sullivan 43 also cf; Bell; Harper).

In contrast to the ‘enthusiasm of practice’ that generated the creative work, the critical study has been approached as conceptual research, which is, as Smith and Dean argue, based around ‘argument, analysis and application of theoretical ideas’ (4). While observations made throughout the creative practice also influence elements of the research, the selection of texts chosen for analysis initially informed the development of the research.\(^{13}\)

The nine novels that have been chosen for examination in this study were selected firstly because of their subject matter, and secondly for their different approaches to the relationship between jazz and violence. In terms of subject matter, it was crucial to the selection that each novel had a significant character that was a jazz musician.\(^{14}\)

‘Jazz fiction’ is a term that covers quite a broad range of novels. However, as the framework of this study is dependent on novels that feature jazz musician characters specifically, it was necessary to exclude three types of jazz novels from the research parameters. Firstly, creative non-fiction about real jazz musicians and real events, such as Geoff Dyer’s *But Beautiful: A Book about Jazz*, were excluded because the characters and events were not essentially fictional.\(^{15}\) In addition, Dyer’s book could be viewed as a collection of short stories, which also renders it inappropriate for inclusion in this analysis. This study is limited to

\(^{13}\) The exact manner in which the research and fictional components interrelate is discussed more fully in Chapter 5, the conclusion.

\(^{14}\) In most cases, the protagonist is the jazz musician, however in James Baldwin’s *Another Country*, for instance, the novel is driven by an ensemble of characters, two of whom are jazz musicians.

\(^{15}\) Although Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter* is very loosely based on the life of the real cornet player Buddy Bolden, the majority of the novel is fictionalised as Ondaatje knew very few facts about his life at the time of writing. The details of this are discussed in Chapter Four.
novel-length texts with only passing reference to short stories, though there are many that also reflect the relationship between jazz and violence.\(^{16}\)

The second type of novel that has been excluded is the jazz novel that is not so much about a musician as it is about the jazz era and lifestyle. Jazz era or ‘jazz age’ novels include F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* and are most often set in the 1920s.

Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* is a contemporary example of the third type of jazz novel that is excluded from analysis here. *Jazz* is a novel that is based around jazz structures, but contains little that is specifically about the music or musicians (cf. Rice 423). Similarly, Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* is often described as being influenced by jazz, as are many of the works by the beat poets (cf. Malcolm 85). Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* was also of significant interest in this category because of its literary style and the narrative of ‘jes grew’ (a renamed representation of jazz) as a ‘psychic epidemic’ infecting America. However, as there is no significant jazz musician character in the novel, it will not be discussed here (5).

Due to the nature of this combined creative and research project, there were also some limitations with regards to the number of texts chosen as the final thesis is half the length of a conventional Doctorate of Philosophy. For instance, in order to keep the study to a suitable size, novels written in languages other than English have been excluded. It is also important to note that the majority of novels about jazz musicians are written by authors from the United States of America, so there are many more texts from this region in this study than from other parts of the English-speaking world.\(^{17}\) This also reflects the importance of the history of jazz to the project. Most of this history is centred on the development of the music in America. No appropriate Australian novels were found.\(^{18}\)

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\(^{16}\) These include James Baldwin’s ‘Sonny’s Blues’, Eudora Welty’s ‘Powerhouse’, Ralph Ellison’s ‘Cadillac Flambé’ and Langston Hughes ‘Bop’.

\(^{17}\) The two exceptions are Michael Ondaatje who is Canadian and Jackie Kay who is Scottish.

\(^{18}\) There are many non-fiction texts about jazz and jazz musicians in Australia, but they were not included due to the focus on fiction in this research.
Directed by these parameters, more than twenty novels that featured jazz musicians were read through the course of the research.\(^{19}\) However, more than half of these novels were excluded from this study for two primary reasons: they were either not of a high literary standard, or they only briefly made reference to the music the characters performed. The search for appropriate texts was extensive, and it uncovered more novels than could be addressed in this research.

It is important to note that there was also an effort to select texts from many periods throughout the twentieth century, as attitudes towards jazz and jazz musicians generally have changed throughout that time, as has the music itself.\(^{20}\) Interestingly, while changes in the style of music have affected some elements of these texts, the core feature of improvisation has remained a consistent focus in the representation of the music throughout the novels.

As gender is a crucial element in the discussion of systemic violence in particular, it was important to include some texts that are both written by women and written about women. There are very few of these female-focused texts in the field of novels about jazz musicians. This is perhaps unsurprising as men also dominate the musical world of jazz, and while many of the most interesting performers in the history of the music have been women, particularly singers such as Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith and Nina Simone, they are unfortunately in the minority. Although Dorothy Baker’s *Young Man with a Horn* is not about a woman, it is significant as one of the earliest texts I discuss here. Ann Petry also broke new ground with *The Street*’s singer Lutie Johnson, and Jackie Kay pushed the jazz fiction genre into an exploration of transgender relations with *Trumpet* in 1998.

Although the analytical framework was developed after reading many of these novels, the identification of three forms of violence has provided a launch pad for closer analysis. Michael Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter* is the lynchpin of this study as it incorporates all three forms of violence into the narrative. Ondaatje also uses the music itself as a guide to the structure of the text\(^{21}\), which is an innovation that helps take the novel to psychological depth

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\(^{19}\) These novels were found through references in critical material, university course text lists (primarily from America), recommendations from supervisors and other academics, and also through general library and internet searches on the subject.

\(^{20}\) As discussed in the earlier section “Saying Something: Jazz and Improvisation”.

\(^{21}\) As examined in Chapter Four.
beyond many of the others. Another exemplary novel that addresses psychological concerns through the musician characters is James Baldwin’s *Another Country*. However, the use of performative violence is quite different to Ondaatje’s approach.

Each of the nine texts emphasises at least one of the forms of violence identified here. For instance, Herbert Simmons *Man Walking on Eggshells* is predominantly an exploration of how systemic racial vilification has affected the life and music making of its protagonist, Raymond. In contrast, Bart Schneider’s 1998 novel, *Blue Bossa*, is a reflection on the effect of drug use and intimate violence in the world of jazz. Because Simmons’ and Schneider’s novels each have a clear focus on one type of violence, they have been used to help explore how that form of violence relates to the music, what impact it has on the music-making process, and if and when this turns into performative violence. The majority of the other novels discussed explore violence through a multi-layered perspective.

Performative violence is thus an element of every chapter of this thesis to some degree. In addition, novels such as James Baldwin’s *Another Country* and Rafi Zabor’s *The Bear Comes Home* blend systemic and intimate violence into performative violence, and thus require a multi-focal analysis. This blending of types of violence has meant it is often difficult to define a text as representing only one form or another, and several texts are discussed in two or more chapters.

While there are several brief articles that address the complex relationship between music and violence, there are very few critical works of a significant length that focus on the connection specifically (cf. Johnson and Cloonan; Attali; Gussow). The relationship between jazz and literature is also primarily examined in only a small number of critical texts (cf. Bourjaily; Grandt; Jerving; Lespinasse; Lock and Murray; Thomas). Indeed, there are even fewer critical explorations of the relationship between jazz and violence in literature (cf. Bok; Solecki). To accommodate this, the systemic-intimate-performative framework has been developed as a basis through which the examination of these novels as explorations of both jazz and violence could begin. Due to the lack of critical focus on this area, the critical material used throughout this study is an assemblage of critical fields that include texts on jazz, violence, musico-literary studies, bohemianism, addiction, race, gender and numerous articles that focus
specifically on the novels selected. In addition, although the history of jazz is an important element of the argument here, I have limited the number of resources used to discuss this history, as much of the information examined is simply factual.

The close reading of these novels and critical material has led to an examination of how the types of violence are interrelated, how they relate to jazz itself and why jazz has been chosen by these authors as the vehicle through which to explore the process of creative expression.

‘Swing’: A Novel

The fictional component of the thesis attempts to incorporate many of the issues addressed in this critical study while avoiding stereotypical representations of jazz musicians. Primarily, the relationship between the two parts is one of subject matter, as the protagonist of ‘Swing’ is Chester Nelson, a fictional jazz double-bass player. Chester alternates between playing swing-era jazz and contemporary jazz that incorporates elements of bebop, fusion and West Coast. Unlike many real musicians, Chester is not able to maintain a healthy balance between these two styles and the novel focuses on his unraveling and descent into violence, which is partly the result of this internal musical conflict.

The novel is also a response to the fiction I have read for this research and is an attempt at representing the life of a jazz musician in a new light. The novel is essentially an update on the jazz novel, as it is set in Sydney in 2010 and draws attention to some of the more trying lifestyle concerns of being a contemporary musician. These include: needing to take on ‘scuffling’ work, which is employment that is not music-based but pays the bills; the discipline of practice and the guilt that comes with not practising; the care and maintenance of the instruments themselves; the discipline and structure of rehearsals; teaching music; and attempting to find a music-work-life balance.

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22 The term ‘scuffling’ is referenced in Bradshaw and Holbrook’s analysis of the mythologising of self-destructive artists (Bradshaw and Holbrook 125).
23 I have drawn on my own experience working as a musician in Sydney, as well the experiences of many friends who are musicians, as the basis for the representation of these kinds of economic, social, psychological and philosophical concerns.
Yet perhaps the biggest difference between ‘Swing’ and other novels about jazz musicians is that Chester is not a particularly good musician and is certainly not a creative genius. There are characters that are strong players within the novel, they both highlight Chester’s faults and provide an ideal to which Chester aspires.

While I have attempted to avoid clichés, there are some lifestyle qualities of being a jazz musician that I felt were appropriate to include in the novel for the purposes of both realism and narrative effect. For instance, like many real and fictional jazz musicians, at times Chester does drink too much alcohol and smokes marijuana, but though the combination of these substances does make him excessively paranoid and erratic, he is not an addict. His unpredictable behaviour is one of the reasons his primary relationships deteriorate, and it also affects how other characters treat him generally.

As Chester deteriorates throughout the novel, it becomes evident that it is not in fact his drug and alcohol use that is his primary flaw, and again this is where ‘Swing’ departs from other novels about jazz musicians. Chester is psychologically damaged by his family’s past as well as his fear for the future. The impact of these influences also manifest in his inability to reconcile his limits as a musician and the music he wants to play.

When Chester has an accident that renders him unable to perform, there is a suggestion that he may be able to stabilise his psychological condition. However, when he does perform again, he becomes unsettled once more. This implies that the music he plays is actually a catalyst for his disturbed mental state, holding a psychological power over him that disrupts an otherwise calm demeanor. When a family secret is revealed, this news pushes him into a violent state that is not drug-fuelled, but rather music-inspired. Through this representation I suggest that the psychological challenges of making a living from music, and the actual creative process, may be enough to impact a musician’s mental state in a negative manner – particularly if the musician is already vulnerable.

In his struggle to maintain psychic health in the face of his relationship breakdown and musical challenges, Chester becomes a symbolic representation of the idea that the creative arts are not good for everybody to pursue as a profession. The suggestion is that perhaps he would be better off being a gardener who plays
a little music on the side. Where so many authors use music as the primary source of inspiration and devastation in a character’s life, the music is actually secondary to Chester’s other psychological concerns, though it does push him towards instability. Chester’s somewhat mediocre skills as a performer, combined with his fragile mental state, mean that the life and music of jazz is not good for him: this is the key to understanding how ‘Swing’ breaks away from other novels about jazz musicians.

Once the three forms of violence (systemic-intimate-performative) were identified and distilled in my research, it became clear that violence was also an important element in Chester’s narrative. Performative violence was always a significant part of Chester’s performance style, and intimate violence was a crucial aspect of his character, but systemic violence was not prevalent initially. As a result I developed a back-story to Chester’s character, involving the infidelity of his father, which raised issues of masculinity, parental pressure and family secrets. Chester is a white man living in contemporary Sydney, so issues of racial identity are not as important to his reality as they are to African-American musicians, for instance. However, Chester suffers from an internal conflict about the relationship between masculinity and violence and this is the result of systemic violence inflicted on him by his father, Arthur. Arthur was a violent man who beat Chester and teased him about his masculinity. I suggest that Arthur’s perception that masculinity and violence are linked does come from a broader cultural perception of what it is to be a man. This is an outmoded perspective on masculinity, but is relevant for a man such as Arthur, whose childhood was spent in regional Australia in the 1950s.

Significantly, Arthur died before Chester was able to prove to him that he was a strong and capable man. This has left Chester with a sense of uncertainty about his own strength, his seemingly random acts of violence and his role as a provider for his family. Thus for Chester, masculinity and family are embedded within systemic violence. In this way I have aimed to enhance the psychological depth of Chester’s portrayal and to evoke empathy with his story.

In contrast to the novels examined in the critical study, the jazz culture represented in ‘Swing’ does not embody a history of violence. Many of the

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24 This Australian perception of masculinity as ‘rough’, ‘hard’ and at times ‘aggressive’ can be seen in Russel Ward’s 1958 analysis of the traits of the Australian man (16, 196).
musicians in my novel are quite rational people who do not act violently in any way. Some of them do use some drugs, but not excessively. Due to this, there is a strong contrast between Chester and his fellow musicians. Whereas Chester is inclined towards violence because of his personal history, his friends attempt to calm him down to avoid conflict. This is another way in which Chester does not quite fit into the jazz community in Sydney: he is too big, too violent and too excessive in his lifestyle to maintain his musical collaborations and his friendships.

Although literary structural techniques were not a focus of the research, using music as a structural framework was of importance to the novel. The novel was assembled through a process of sorting many disparate fragments of writing into a cohesive whole and the key organising structure in the initial stages was inspired by free jazz. Fragments were grouped into thematic sections that were ‘led’ by one character or another, and the other characters would either follow that theme, or suggest a contrasting theme. For instance, in one chapter labeled ‘Counter theme: Memory’, the character Beau plays music to forget the past and Chester follows her sound, but Simone chooses not to follow the sound and refuses to even listen to the music. Therefore, in the next chapter, a new theme, ‘Counter theme: Anarchic Freedom’ is suggested, this time by Chester. Through this process a structure for the novel was formed, based on the thematic material.

Due to a preference for narrative and character development, as well as a need to produce cohesive work, this musical framework was largely left behind. Yet elements of this structure do remain. The novel is predominantly composed of small fragments and many perspectives bounce off one another through the course of the narrative. For instance, images echo between characters, representations of performance and practice follow each other to highlight character differences and scenes are juxtaposed to emphasise different perspectives of the same dramatic narrative events. The intention is for this thematic focus to imbue the novel with a musical tone.

Three other elements reflect the focus on music in the novel. Firstly, each of the twenty chapters is named after a popular piece of jazz music – particularly songs. These titles make reference to thematic elements within the chapters. For instance, the opening chapter, which focuses on the aftermath of a relationship breakdown, is called ‘After You’ve Gone’ after the song by Turner Layton and
Henry Creamer. A less obvious title is ‘Round Midnight’, named after the piece composed by Thelonious Monk in the early 1940s. This chapter focuses on Chester’s return to performing music after an injury, and in many respects he is returning to a night-based lifestyle. Midnight is also symbolic of the time of night when transformations occur, and in this chapter Beau and Chester play together for the first time since they separated. It is a moment of change and suggests a possible renewal of their love for one another.

Throughout the novel there are numerous poems, written from the perspective of Chester’s double-bass. The bass is personified as an old man who is somewhat of a seer, and this highlights the importance of the instruments in these character’s lives. The intention is also that the poetic voice reflects elements of music, as it is not linear or overly prosaic, but rather spread across the page and composed of fragments and images. The poems are also functional as at times they enhance the narrative by providing a chorus-like viewpoint of the action.

Finally, there are also seven quotations from significant jazz musicians throughout the novel. These quotations serve as a reminder of the nature of jazz, which is complex, oblique and often difficult to describe. Like the chapter titles, they also provide some insight into the perspective through which the chapter could be read. For instance, Chapter Thirteen has the following Art Blakey quote: ‘Jazz washes away the dust of every day life’ (cf. Edgerton 66). This chapter tracks the aftermath of Chester’s car accident, and marks the beginning of a change in his situation. As he is unable to play for a time, and has to move in with his sister, he is forced to recover slowly and also to have a break from his music. This is a period of cleansing for Chester, and as such the ‘dust’ is washed away. It is not the jazz that has caused this cleansing, however, but a break from jazz, and thus the quote is ironic for Chester.

**The Pages Ahead**

While much attention will be given to the concept of performative violence throughout, all three forms of violence are important to the overall argument. As such, the systemic-intimate-performative framework has been used as a structural outline for the chapters of the critical component of the thesis.
Through the examination of systemic violence in Chapter Two, I argue that the music of jazz was born out of, and as a reaction to, systemic abuse. The relevance of this is twofold: firstly, the context of the beginnings of jazz highlights the music as a metaphor for the complex and often damaged personal histories of these musician characters. Secondly, by placing characters within this context of systemic abuse, they are portrayed as victims of prejudice and thus inspire empathy. Empathy is important to the novels, as these characters often perform violent, abusive, selfish and irresponsible acts that require some explanation. The systemic violence the characters face can do this, giving the reader an understanding as to why they may behave the way they do.

In Chapter Three, I argue that intimate violence is an essential part of the representation of the jazz lifestyle in fiction, and is often a reaction to the systemic violence the characters have faced. Indeed, intimate violence is more prevalent in novels about jazz musicians than any other form of violence. Yet it is also related to the search for the sublime through the act of creation that often consumes these characters. The characters are driven to self-harm, substance abuse or isolation in order to access something new in their music making. This search for balance between identity and creative achievement is a Romantic vision of the life of an artist, and one that is found in many of these novels. As these characters sacrifice something of themselves for their music, music and identity become intertwined. Therefore, intimate violence becomes a metaphor for the destruction required in the creative process, while also highlighting the psychological and philosophical concerns of the musicians.

Focusing on the representation of performative violence in Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter*, in Chapter Four I argue that jazz musicians in fiction are provoked into performing acts of violence, ironically, through the desire to find balance in their lives; particularly the desire to find a balance between creativity and destruction. These novels suggest that to be truly creative, you have to break down the musical parameters that have been established. In urging themselves to create music on the one hand, and to destroy convention on the other, characters in jazz novels are driven to acts of violence: they explode through and out of the music, destroying themselves and attacking their audiences. Jazz performance is the perfect metaphor for exploring this search for balance as it relies on the combination of preconceived structures and the intuitive
qualities of improvisation in a live and public situation. An investigation of the social and historical context of jazz also brings together a complex developmental history and narratives of personal sacrifice. Thus the representation of the music has the potential to add psychological layers that create a rich metaphorical tool through which the full experience of the creative process can be examined.
Chapter 2 – Origins: Systemic Violence

Prior to examining how and why literary jazz characters are violent, it is necessary to explore where the relationship between jazz and violence originated, from both an historical and a literary perspective. The violence that comes from historical foundations is systemic: it is violence born from racial prejudice, economic instability and gender inequality. This form of violence also reflects the world from which the music of jazz was born – the social and environmental context of the musicians who developed the style was permeated by systemic violence.

The key concern of many of these novels is: ‘how will these musicians respond to the systemic violence that is inflicted upon them?’ My research shows that their response frequently leads to either intimate or performative violence. While all three forms of violence are interrelated, it will become evident that systemic violence is most often the origin of these other forms.

In this chapter, I argue that these novels draw on the history of systemic violence against musicians to establish a context for their characters that renders them sympathetic to the reader. While intimate violence is primarily self-inflicted, and performative violence is enacted by the musicians themselves, systemic violence situates musician characters as the victims of their circumstances. In addition, by focusing on the role of jazz in these characters’ lives, the history of the music itself reinforces the social violence that renders the characters as victims.

The history of victimisation explains flaws in the musician characters. By representing their struggle against the trials of systemic violence, the novels can show us how the characters have arrived at the circumstances of their drug use, isolation or mistreatment of others. Although they might find ways in their music to speak to the violence they have witnessed, and may treat their fellow musicians appallingly, we are likely to understand their actions, because they have suffered years of hardship. Thus, an important element of my argument is the idea that writers of jazz fiction ask the reader to empathise with their main characters through their history of violence.
As Suzanne Keen posits, ‘readers’ and authors’ empathy certainly contributes to the emotional resonance of fiction’, which reinforces the idea that the evocation of empathy is a device through which authors invite the reader to engage with the text (vii). Indeed, Blakey Vermeule concedes that authors use many tools for ‘sharpening and focusing our interest and for holding it intensely for a time’(xiii). I suggest that in these jazz novels, the tool that evokes empathy and our resulting intense interest is systemic violence.

Yet this emotional device also has a strong historical foundation. The music of jazz was born from violence, and the lives of many real jazz musicians have been recorded as having such harsh beginnings that it is hard to believe they ever survived. As a result, we feel empathy for the characters who have come out the other side, who are often violent, but perhaps understandably so.

**From Blues to Freedom: Historical Foundations of Violence**

The evolution of these characters began with the origins of the music, and it is widely agreed that jazz was born in New Orleans some time in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Shipton 75). Its musical pre-cursors were African dances, ragtime, ‘nautical’ songs, Spanish and French folk music, Baptist hymns and arguably most importantly, the blues – to be precise, country or delta blues, and later what is known as the ‘classic’ blues (Gioia 11-33; Shipton 25-40). The development of jazz, however, was not simply a matter of blending styles; it was also a response to the social and political violence of the time. Ronald Radano argues that in fact all ‘Black’ music (e.g. blues, jazz and hip hop) is powerful because of its history:

Black music garners its strength and power from the integrity of a greater African-American culture forged under circumstances of enduring racial oppression (xii).

Because the music has ‘strength’ and ‘power’ according to Radano, there is an assumption that it has the capacity to move or inspire its audience. Thus he is suggesting that any emotional or psychological connection with the music is due to the origins of the music: the historical context of its development informs its capacity to have an impact.
While little has been recorded of the exact origins of the blues, critical studies of the genre have explored how both the lyrics and repetitive style are said to reflect the ‘enduring racial oppression’ and difficult lives of African-Americans who were primarily slaves and laborers throughout the 19th century (cf. Silverman 4). Adam Gussow argues that ‘black southerners evolved blues song as a way of speaking back to, and maintaining psychic health in the face of an ongoing threat of lynching’ (xii). Similarly, Ted Gioia suggests that ‘More than any of the other forms of early African-American music, the blues allowed the performer to present an individual statement of pain, oppression, poverty, longing and desire’ (12).

The blues was not only a reaction to oppression, but also a means of communication for African-Americans as, like many underprivileged cultures, few slaves and laborers were literate and stories were passed amongst communities orally and often musically. Like Radano, Paul Gilroy argues that this is part of what made the music so powerful – because it was one of the few pastimes slaves were allowed to indulge in freely, it was more than simply text and was invested with all the emotion and stories the black communities were otherwise unable to express:

Music, the grudging gift that supposedly compensated slaves not only for their exile from the ambiguous legacies of practical reason but for their complete exclusion from modern political society, has been refined and developed so that it provides an enhanced mode of communication beyond the petty power of words – spoken or written (76).

As the music was ‘beyond the petty power of words’, it became a way African-Americans could hold onto their own culture. Stories and fables were passed on through the music and gave the people their own voice and means of expression that existed, initially at least, outside of white American culture. In his consideration of the myths of the Signifyin(g) Monkey, Henry Louis Gates argues that in the passage from Africa to America, slave travellers held onto their stories and music because ‘they chose, by acts of will, not to forget’ (3-4). This decision to remember renders the music and stories powerful, as they were narratives of the

25 The stories Gates refers to involve the “trickster” figures of Esu-Elegubara and the Signifyin’ Monkey who are also often referred to in jazz literature and song lyrics such as Ralph Ellison’s short story, ‘A Coupla Scalped Indians’ (1956 Feinstein and Rife eds) and the 1943 hit written by Nat King Cole and Irving Mills ‘Straighten Up and Fly Right’. 
black vernacular tradition that, as Gates argues, ‘the black person has encoded [with] private yet communal cultural rituals’ (xix).

Though these African traditions had a considerable influence on the musical style, the blues was also born from racial prejudice, economic hardship and a lack of basic human rights that stemmed from the origins of slavery. As Jerry Silverman explains in his collection of blues songs, little concrete information exists about the origins of blues, but:

What we know is that out of poverty and oppression, out of broken homes and chain gangs, out of city slums and tenant farms came the Negro blues shouter, the street singer, the itinerant guitar picker (5).

These issues were of great importance to the musicians who then brought blues together with ragtime, African dances and European folk music to produce the music of jazz towards the end of the 19th century.

In considering the origins of the music, however, Paul Gilroy argues against the suggestion that all African-American culture has developed from the ‘inaugural experience’ of slavery (73). He posits that this viewpoint is simplistic and has created ambivalence towards the role of modernity in shaping black Atlantic culture. While he acknowledges that ‘the question of racial terror always remains in view when these modernisms are discussed because imaginative proximity to terror is their inaugural experience’, he also suggests that expressive cultural forms produced by black communities are both modern and western (73). While I agree that not all of African-American culture is derived from slavery, I argue that this history is important to the development of jazz specifically.

Ronald Radano also acknowledges that while black ‘music assumes cultural significance in its capacity to influence and reflect the legacy of racial relations in the United States’ (xiii) the music is both ‘intermusical’ and ‘interracial’ (2). This is particularly true of contemporary jazz and it is important to acknowledge the range of influences on the development of the music as it is played now. Although it can be argued that the origins of early jazz came in part from the oppressive nature of the lives of the African-American slaves, contemporary jazz has had a much wider range of social and cultural inspiration, as the following pages will suggest.
Around the time that jazz was first developed, New Orleans was in a state of serious economic decline, racial prejudice was at its peak and the vast majority of African-Americans were living in a state of extreme poverty. In 1876, state and local laws, known as the Jim Crow laws, were imposed to prevent the interaction of African-Americans and white Americans. In 1878 there was a devastating yellow fever epidemic, made worse by the lack of a sewage system in a damp warm climate (Gioia 30). By 1894 it was decreed in Louisiana that ‘anyone of African ancestry was a Negro’ (Gioia 34), including anyone of a mixed-race heritage, resulting in further segregation within the population of New Orleans.

The standard of living was so poor that the average lifespan for an African-American in 1880 New Orleans was thirty-six years (Gioia 30). Out of what could be described as this cesspool, the music of jazz appeared. Buddy Bolden, the subject of Michael Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter*, is widely regarded to be ‘the first jazz musician’ (cf. Gioia 31; Jarrett 27; Sidran 29) and the first to ‘bring explicitly African qualities’ to the music (Shipton 82). However, it is likely that the form of music now known as New Orleans Jazz was developed by many musicians all exploring a way in which they could respond to the harsh realities of life around them. Jazz is by nature collaborative, and musicians tend to play with many groups and many different musicians, so it is difficult to realistically pinpoint one person as the sole influence on the genre.

By the 1940s, jazz had reached the northern cities of America, primarily New York and Chicago, and transformed into a new form of music, but was still seen by musicians and critics alike to be a music created in response to difficult or violent lives. This was the music of bebop, a style that involved fundamental changes to the elements of the music previously established by swing bands. Shipton argues that the melodies became ‘jagged; full of dense, rapid figures’, the music was often ‘reharmonized’ to create dissonant effects and the rhythms became more complex with ‘unexpected off-center accentuations’ (438).

Dizzy Gillespie said of the early days of what is now known as bebop:

We refused to accept racism, poverty, or economic exploitation, nor would we live out uncreative humdrum lives merely for the sake of survival … If America wouldn’t honor its Constitution and respect us as men, we couldn’t give a shit about America (Grandt 48).
Implicit, if not directly stated in Gillespie’s remarks is the idea that the music of bebop was defiant in its breaking of convention, as well as in its ‘ignoring’ of popular American tastes. Ben Sidran also describes the music as emerging from the underground in a ‘self conscious separation from mainstream America’ (79). He claims, however, that though this exclusivity was not so much political as cultural, it was still ‘a potential base for social action’ and thus the underground nature of the music was seen to foster the possibility of a cultural or social uprising (79).

Yet there were many influences on bebop, which developed at a complex time in American history. Jurgen E Grandt argues that in fact, bebop, in its later form, came as a response to World War II, and that ‘It seemed indeed a music born out of the chaos of wartime’(48), suggesting that not only was the music filled with the violence of its origins, but that it was also evolving in response to contemporary international concerns. Shipton also highlights this connection with war, as he suggests that unexpected accents performed by the drummer were referred to as ‘dropping bombs’ (439). I agree that it is possible that jazz and bebop in particular evolved, like many of the arts, through the influence of modernism and as a response to the violence of war. However, it is unlikely that the ‘chaos of wartime’ was the only influence on the evolution of bebop and free jazz. Gioia suggests that the ‘beboppers [were] fired further by their marginal status as black Americans at a critical juncture in U.S. history’ and they ‘were intent on testing the limits as never before’ (205). Gioia’s argument here reinforces the idea that the music was developed in response to African-Americans’ systemic abuse in the form of social marginalisation through racial segregation.

Yet it was not only the musicians who saw jazz as a form of music that responded to, and sometimes embodied, violence. The media and critics sensationalized jazz in its early days as a music that was at once violent, savage and sexual. As Ryan Jerving identified from numerous press articles, they claimed, ‘It made “a splash like dynamite” (Lawson); it emitted a “cry like a racing car slipping away from a motorcyle cop” (Sandberg); it delivered “wails and howls like the smarting of a metal pig” (Gorky)’ (Jerving 656).

Of course, like many musicians today, it is possible that jazz musicians in the early twentieth century made specific attempts to appeal to the media in order
to draw attention to themselves and often sensationalised their playing and presentation. Louis Armstrong, in particular, made an effort to perform expressively to his audience at all times, and he was known for dressing in costumes himself, or inducing his band members to cross-dress for comic and shock effect (cf. Sidran 70).

The association between sex and violence is also reflected in the apparent origins of the word ‘jazz’. While there are many arguments for various origins, the Historical Dictionary of American Slang posits that early uses of the word in the form ‘jass’ were argued to be slang for ‘copulation’ or indeed ‘semen’ (258; Lighter). A less sexual possibility is that it was derived from the West African word jasi meaning ‘spirit; vigor; energy; excitement’ (258; Lighter). Yet definitions of ‘jazz’ as a verb include ‘to copulate with’ or ‘to move (a throttle) repeatedly back and forth’ (260; Lighter).

What is common among these theories of the origin of the word is that they can all be associated with sex. I argue that there is also a correlation between the stereotypes associated with the music, race, exoticism and eroticism embedded in the culture in which jazz blossomed. As Elisa Glick argues, the 1920s saw ‘record numbers’ of ‘white thrill-seekers’ drawn to the speakeasies and music of Harlem in New York because of a fascination with ‘a primitivist vision of the intensity, warmth and rhythm of black life’ as portrayed in musical reviews of the time (418). Glick goes further to argue that because of this influx of white tourists, Harlem itself became a commodity and also that:

White American primitivism was distinguished by its single-minded fetishizing of race as sex. Despite the intellectual and artistic efflorescence of the [Harlem] Renaissance, white American primitivists only saw African-Americans as a form of sexualized exoticism packaged and sold as blackness (418).

Indeed, Stuart Hall argues that the media and fiction have also perpetuated a positive image of the ‘primitive’, and that alongside negative representations of black populations of both the United Kingdom and the United States of

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26 Glick claims these positive associations with the “black life” were developed in African-American shows including Shuffle Along (1921), Runnin' Wild (1923), Chocolate Dandies (1925), and Porgy (1926) (Glick 418).

27 In fact, Hall argues that “The reality of race in any society is, to coin a phrase, ‘media-mediated’”, because of the representation of racial difference (Hall 14).
America, there is ‘a discourse that cannot seem to represent nobility or natural dignity or physical grace without summoning up the black primitive’ (17). This is reminiscent of the Renaissance concept of the noble savage that Ter Ellingson argues is ‘a mythic personification of natural goodness by a romantic glorification of savage life’ (1)\textsuperscript{28}.

This primitivist obsession with African-American culture and sex was also romanticised in 1957 by Norman Mailer in his claim that not only are jazz and sex closely associated, but that, ‘jazz is orgasm … it perverted, corrupted and almost killed … it was indeed a communication by art because it said, “I feel this, and now you do too.”’ (187 my emphasis). While I would argue that Mailer is pushing the association between sex and jazz too far, what is interesting about this theorising or even mythologising about what jazz is, is that it also reflects the characterisation of jazz musicians in literature throughout the twentieth century.

The willingness to associate jazz with lustful, high-energy sex reflects the way in which authors pander to audiences by depicting jazz musicians as stereotypes: they become characters who play a music that exists outside of acceptable society, that is forbidden, exotic and erotic. This is seen in characters such as Ondaatje’s Buddy Bolden who plays a haunting, forbidden music that ‘sounded like a battle between the Good Lord and the Devil,’ (Ondaatje 81), or Clellon Holmes’ Edgar Poole who intriguingly ‘smeared a few notes over a pretty idea – a crooked smile glimmering behind the mouthpiece, all turned in upon itself, all dark’(The Horn 10).

In novels, the musicians who play jazz embody these forbidden and exotic traits, and their situation on the edge of society is often based not only on their sexuality, but on their racial and economic status, as is the case with both of the characters mentioned above. Many, if not most, characters come from impoverished and racially segregated backgrounds. Like the music, these jazz musicians were been born into a world of violence. It is the response to hardship through their music that many writers explore, often perpetuating the romantic notion of jazz and emotional expression as a potentially healing force.

\textsuperscript{28} Although the concept of the “Noble Savage” is often attributed to Rousseau, many contemporary critics argue that this is a misrepresentation of the development of the term which may have, in fact, come from Renaissance European travel-ethnographers (Cf.(Ellingson 13))
It is undeniable that many real-life jazz musicians experienced significant violence in their lives. This violence is chronicled in numerous books and articles, and involves not only predictable drug- and alcohol-related incidents (discussed in the following chapter), but also many instances of racial abuse, such as the pianist Thelonious Monk having his hands and fingers crushed by a policeman, without provocation (cf. Fitterling 71). This event, as well as several others relating to musicians such as Charlie Mingus and Lester Young, are depicted in Dyer’s *But Beautiful*, which poetically explores the music that can come from violence.

The violent history of these real-life musicians also informs the representation of fictional jazz musicians. For instance, Dorothy Baker’s *Young Man With a Horn* is based on the life of Bix Biederbecke, which Paul Lopes argues was the epitome of ‘the basic elements of the jazz trope – alienation, rebellion, and race’ (1470). Lopes defines what he sees as the popular representation of jazz, or the ‘jazz trope’, as being based on ‘rebellion’ and ‘deviance – inarticulating aspects of race, class and the urban environment’ (1468). He argues that by the 1950s ‘racial conflict’ also became a part of the jazz trope ‘articulating both rebellion and tragedy’ (1469).

I suggest that this type of jazz trope has been derived not only from the lives of the musicians but also from the history of the music itself. In addition, the mythologising of the jazz life in this way has also led to the perpetuation of the relationship between jazz and deviance, rebellion, and racial conflict in literature. Paul Gilroy argues that because jazz is a ‘black’ artistic form, created by African-Americans, it has a ‘special power’ that ‘derives from a doubleness, their unsteady location simultaneously inside and outside the conventions, assumptions and aesthetic rules which distinguish and periodise modernity’ (73). I argue that like the relationships of jazz to modernity, jazz musicians in literature evoke an exoticism or perhaps even a ‘special power’ as they themselves exist ‘simultaneously inside and outside the conventions’ and assumptions of society. In this way, the music mirrors the lives of the characters. However, the characters’ situations on the edge of society are created not only by the unconventional nature

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29 For instance Johnson and Cloonan argue that “The history of jazz and its forerunners is punctuated with episodes of violence … The jazz chronicle is seasoned with every kind of violence from almost casual armed robbery [to] murder” (Johnson and Cloonan 74).
of the music, but also by the history of violence with which they are associated, and these situations therefore remain central to their characterisation.

The history of jazz is one that is threaded with violence and persecution. From the troubles of the Jim Crow south and the economic deprivation of the early twentieth century, to more contemporary prejudices relating to gender, musicians who have played and developed jazz have largely come from social environments surrounded by violence in various forms. This background has provided the means through which writers who explore the lives of fictional jazz musicians are able to represent the characters as victims of circumstance. While systemic violence comes in many forms, the primary ways in which writers explore the challenging backgrounds of their characters is through racial discrimination, economic hardship and gender discrimination.

**Racial Systemic Violence**

As discussed above, the suggested origins of jazz lie with the African-American population of the southern states of America. Yet, the first recorded jazz band was white (ironically lead by the band leader Paul Whiteman), and many of the first stars of jazz, the musicians who made jazz ‘acceptable’ for a middle-class audience, were white musicians (Jerving 651). However, the archetypal figure of the jazz musician in literature remains the African-American man, with some exceptions. In his examination of early jazz literature, Ryan Jerving argues that writing prior to 1945 is in fact rarely examined or included in anthologies because it features commercial and popular jazz music being performed by white musicians (651). Early literature about jazz also frequently reduces jazz to a form of entertainment (as opposed to art) and a reflection of modernity rather than an examination of African-American culture (657). Interestingly, the African-American writers of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s largely avoided exploring jazz themselves as they too did not consider it high art and worthy of exploration, with the notable exception of Langston Hughes, who wrote about jazz extensively at the time (Grandt 46).

Yet because of the history of jazz, and its birthplace in the heavily segregated city of New Orleans, racial identity is nearly always an issue in later novels and short stories. Novelists who explore racial identity through their jazz
musician characters highlight the link between racial prejudice and jazz. Racial prejudice in these novels is depicted primarily in the form of physical violence, but there are often psychological ramifications as the result of this physical abuse. When racism is directed towards jazz musician characters in novels, they often respond to this vilification through their music. Yet they can also be so affected by their abuse that they are provoked into acts of violence: towards themselves as well as others. Although these acts of violence may be reprehensible in many ways, ultimately the origin of the violence – systemic racial abuse – helps readers understand why the characters are destructive and how they were driven to this point.

As a popular mode of entertainment, jazz was a matter of pride in African-American communities because it was an indicator of creative achievement. As a result, literature about jazz reflected this pride and musicians were represented as characters who had the potential to break free of social bounds and gain respectful employment. In her exploration of the problem of perceptions of ‘hipness’ and racial identity, Ingrid Monson argues that post-World War II, for African-Americans, ‘Musical achievement had also become a symbol of racial achievement’ because music was one of the few professional arenas where African-Americans could become successful ("Problem with White Hipness" 410). Monson concludes that the concept of hipness has also led to a perpetuation of primitivist African-American stereotypes, which is problematic for the softening of the divide between black and white Americans ("Problem with White Hipness" 422).

Jazz and racial identity are continually associated in historical and critical material because of the origins of jazz, and also because of contrasting attitudes towards the popularisation of jazz. Some critics, such as Monson, argue that there can be no distinction between jazz and racial identity because African-American musicians wanted to exclude white musicians from their music ("Problem with White Hipness" 411). These critics suggest that through the development of bebop, African-American musicians were trying to create a music so complex that no one could copy what they did – particularly white musicians ("Problem with White Hipness" 411; Grandt 50; Sidran 60). Indeed, it could be argued that African-Americans made the music more complex as a way of reacting against the white popularisation of jazz. White band leaders, such as Whiteman and Benny
Goodman, dominated the music in its early form, and glamorised white soloists, such as Chet Baker, were also increasingly popular.

I would agree that as bebop became more complex musically, an increasing sense of exclusivity in the music developed as it began to move further and further away from the accessible dance music of the 1920s and ’30s. Modern jazz, was, after all, a complex blend of Kansas City Jazz and high art, as exemplified by the music of Charlie Parker whose playing on occasion blended expressionist or neoclassical music such as Hindemith or Varèse with his own improvisation (Gioia 205). This meant that the music potentially became more difficult for the musically uneducated to appreciate or perform: melodies became more oblique, references moved beyond the jazz idiom, and rhythms became more complex and less appropriate for dancing. Thus it may not be that the musicians were trying to exclude one another because of their race. Instead, it is possible they were inadvertently excluding others because of the complexity of the music.

It could also be argued that rather than trying to simply exclude white musicians, these African-American jazz musicians were actually trying to retain control over their own personal style. For instance, Charlie Parker described his own adjustment towards bebop in musical terms, unadorned by any sense of racial identity, politics or musical competition:

> By using the higher intervals in a chord as a melody line and backing them with appropriately related changes, I could play the thing I’d been hearing (Parker quoted in Shipton 454).

Parker’s emphasis is on the sound he wanted to make, which was unique to him. In addition, Alyn Shipton argues that when Parker began to collaborate with Dizzy Gillespie in The Hines band, they practised fastidiously, compared notes continually and developed their distinctive sound together (458).

As Monson and others suggest, the increase in complexity may be a way in which the African-American musicians attempted to retain ownership over the genre, but I argue it could also be that the music developed in complexity as the skills of the musicians improved and they pushed themselves to create new

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Admittedly, Parker’s quotation here does not necessarily exclude the possibility of a desire to exclude players of popular jazz, but it does emphasise the intellectual side of Parker’s musical development.
sounds. In addition, it may be possible that there was an economic motivation behind making the music distinctly African-American: white audiences may have had a primitivist perspective of the music and thus it could be seen as exotic and unique. Radano posits that American society as a whole actually sought this musical segregation:

> We as a nation and as an interracial people have sought to enact those [racial] differences in sound, just as African-American musicians in particular have been motivated and rewarded both socially and economically for realizing versions of black musical distinctiveness (xiii).

Regardless of the realities of the development of bebop or other contemporary music genres, the arguments put forward by these critics solidify the association between jazz and racial identity. By focusing on how African-American musicians have attempted retain ownership over the music, critics such as Monson and Radano reinforce the idea that the history of jazz is also a history of racial identity. In addition, the connection between racial identity and jazz is further reflected in the continuing focus on their correlation in contemporary jazz literature. Two novels that approach racial identity in relation to jazz in very different ways are Herbert Simmons’ *Man Walking on Eggshells* and, more recently, Rafi Zabor’s *The Bear Comes Home*.

*Man Walking on Eggshells* was first published in the United States in 1962, at a time when Martin Luther King was still alive, speaking for the US Civil Rights movement. At the time of publication, legally, anyone with black skin, or indeed any trace of African heritage in the southern states of America, suffered the effects of government-imposed segregation and were therefore politically determined to be of a different identity to those who were white (Radano 257). Simmons himself is African-American and was born in the city in which the novel is set, St Louis.

Through the portrayal of a musician whose music is deeply affected by his racial identity, Simmons reflects both the personal and social ramifications of racial systemic violence. Not only does racially based violence take many forms throughout the novel, but the responses to the violence are just as varied – from the passive to the militant, the characters of *Man Walking on Eggshells* all react differently. They are victims of systemic abuse and because of this their own violent responses are in some ways explained. What is interesting about
Simmons’ exploration of these differing reactions to violence is that the protagonist’s response always affects his music. Therefore, the jazz represented in the novel becomes a potent reflection of the personal, historical and social violence of the characters. The music not only provides a framework through which the protagonist can express his emotional response to his victimisation, but ultimately it also becomes a political tool through which he can potentially convey a civil rights message.

*Man Walking on Eggshells* primarily covers the forties and fifties in St Louis and follows the life of Raymond Douglas, an African-American trumpet player who was born in the middle of a tornado. Though his young life is marked by violent and brutal events, Raymond grows up to go to college as an athlete and later becomes a well-respected jazz musician. This path, however, is not a simple one, and is marred by drug use, the sadness of losing his wife in childbirth, and the guilt he has over the psychological demise of his mother, Mae, who has a pathological fear of jazz and the jazz life.

Raymond’s response to systemic violence and specifically racial prejudice shifts throughout the novel, suggesting three different responses to the violence: physical, psychological or political. Often intertwined with the other two, each response is explored through Raymond, his friends and family, and each response also has an impact on Raymond’s music. Raymond remains somewhat ambivalent in how he chooses to respond to each situation, but overall the exploration of systemic violence is comprehensive and shows many possible outcomes, including how it will affect music making.

In the introduction to the 1996 edition of *Man Walking on Eggshells*, Simmons himself acknowledges that the novel confronts racial discrimination ‘often violently’ (vii). This is evident in a particularly shocking incident when Raymond’s friend Lobo is driven to shoot a white policeman who had previously hit and abused the two boys simply because of their race (Simmons 89, 94). In contrast to Lobo, Raymond takes a non-violent approach and determines that he has to get out of St Louis and make a better life for himself. Lobo ends up in gaol and Raymond is accepted into college and leaves town.

In the early chapters of the novel, systemic violence occurs primarily as a result of racial discrimination. Raymond’s father is unable to get the work he wants because he is African-American and Raymond’s late teens are marked with
gang fights and the abovementioned shooting. Raymond’s passive response to these events is not the only impact this racial prejudice has on him; the sadness and loss he feels are ultimately what make Raymond a successful musician, as he begins to play in a new way:

He bombarded his emotions inward, into himself, and breathed out feelings on his horn like a sanctified soul shouting for salvation in a Baptist church and the blue note became his calling card … [he played] Blues for Lobo and Codene, and Jetan, and Wilbur, and his mother, and all the crumb-snatchers along Papin Avenue who looked at the movie houses with bulging eyes, and the gangs on the corners, and the two-dollar prostitutes (Simmons 134-5).

By playing all his history of violence into his music, Simmons shows us that, as Jerry Bryant argues, ‘moral character can grow there [in the ghetto], even out of the family brutality and the … warfare of the gangs’ (82). With respect to this argument it would be easy to see Man Walking on Eggshells as a fable about the restorative power of creativity. However, the function and effect of music changes throughout the novel: while it is always a priority for Raymond, it does not always heal his wounds.

What is common to the various representations of racial prejudice throughout Man Walking on Eggshells is that the relationship between black and white is one based on power. The policeman wields power over the black boys because of his race and his occupation, and Mae’s mother is dominated by white men because she is a prostitute, and therefore she is a victim because of her race, gender and occupation (which is symbolic of her economic desperation).

Authors establish relationships based around power when representing racism in fiction. Stuart Hall argues that historically, the ‘other’, or in this case, the African-American, became a symbol of that which must be controlled in order to maintain that which is considered ‘white’ culture. By looking at racism as based around opposites, he argues:

We come to understand the attempt to suppress and control, through the symbolic economy of a culture, everything that is different; the danger, the threat, that difference represents; the attempt to refuse, to repress, to fix, to know everything about ‘the different’ so that one can control it; the attempt to make what is different an object of the exercise of power (16).
Yet, as discussed earlier, music can also be a positive device through which characters can establish or explore power and strength (cf. Radano xii). Thus Raymond’s musical response to the racism he has experienced could be seen as a strong and defiant act, and indeed, as shown above, the music itself is made more powerful because of his attempt to process his emotions through the sound.

While the music may acquire power through its response to racial oppression, the oppression itself is also an attempt to establish dominance or power over ‘the other’. Thus a confrontational relationship between the suppressor and the suppressed is developed through acts of systemic violence and the responding music. Though the music may not be physically violent in its response, it can incite political or social upheaval, or altered psychological states.

Raymond’s musical development also suggests another response to racial violence: psychological change or deterioration. Through the demise of Raymond’s mother, and his own consequent intimate violence in the form of drug use, Simmons highlights how racial violence can produce severe psychological consequences. In addition, when Raymond is on drugs he is unable to perform and his music is thus affected negatively through his psychological response to violence.

Raymond’s mother Mae is defined by her hatred of two things: white people and jazz. Her father, Argustus, and her brother, Wilbur, are both jazz musicians and one of Mae’s greatest fears is that Raymond will become one too. She is tortured by the sounds of the music that bring back memories of her own mother’s life as a prostitute:

The flaming notes of Argustus’s trumpet bellowed up to haunt Mae again. The blues train rode the path of Mama’s scream in the freight yard. Yesterday’s voices punctured back through the veiled screen of memory.
‘Hey, save me a piece of that nigger woman!’
‘Hey, quit shoving, it’s my turn now!’
‘Aw she likes it! Don’t y’all like it? Tell him y’all likes it y’all black bitch!’ (Simmons 125 original emphasis).

Thus the connection between music and racial prejudice is solidified in Mae’s mind – jazz emulates her mother’s screams and provides the accompaniment for the abuse her mother suffered at the hands of white men. The link between racial violence and jazz is also highlighted in further flashes of memory that appear throughout the novel as Mae’s psychological condition
deteriorates. Raymond is affected by his mother’s madness, particularly as he is deemed to be the cause of her demise (Simmons 145), and the guilt of being blamed for his mother’s condition leads to excessive drug use and the inability to play music. He is not active in his response to this trauma, but rather passive, letting the drugs take over his life, and slowly abandoning his music. This is perhaps Raymond’s most extreme response to the systemic violence that occurs around him, suggesting that the psychological ramifications of racial prejudice are the most damaging ones.

Yet, Simmons does not represent this psychological damage as permanent in Raymond (though it is in his mother) and Raymond recovers from his drug addiction to become an even more successful musician. This implies that he has faced his demons, and like a true hero, he has become stronger and better.

Once Raymond is back on the road with his music and his friends, a third response to racial vilification is represented: political activism. Raymond’s fellow musicians in his band, the Splib Band, take it upon themselves to become extremist spokesmen for the civil rights movement of the late 1950s and early ’60s. Through this, Simmons highlights how music and performance can become a device for conveying a message. However, Raymond’s own hesitation about the manner in which his music can be used as a tool suggests that this musical and political endeavor will not necessarily be successful.

His friend, Teacher, initially uses comedy in their performances to highlight his political agenda. He tells a story of being approached by a policeman who asks him why he might be arrested and Teacher re-enacts his own reply:

What for, man, you kidding? Lots of things … Like waiting on the corner to catch a service car for instance, or trying to go to school to get an education, or trying to get a decent job to support my family, or trying to vote, or asking for equal rights, or trying to get cats like you to keep their hands off my women (Simmons 193).

As the band continues their tour, Teacher’s new comedy routine comes to be associated with Black Nationalist rhetoric. The result of this is a focus on Raymond, the band leader, as a political figure. The growing attention around the band then leads to racial protests around their performances: ‘One of the papers linked all the picketings, race riots, sit-ins and lawsuits that had occurred in the country in 1960 to the fact that the Splib Band had played in those cities’ (202).
Despite the fact that Raymond is depicted as somewhat ambivalent about using his music as a platform to express the need for racial equality, public perception of him suggests otherwise. In one newspaper, Raymond is called a ‘modern day Moses … a human atomic bomb radiating hope, determination and direction on a disheartened people’ (Simmons 199). Simmons is possibly attempting to provoke a debate about the political power of music and its use as a tool to inspire racial equality, but his account of media coverage in the novel can also be seen as a comment on the ability of the media to sensationalise the effect of this black band on the nation.

Stuart Hall argues that in fact, the media are responsible for the development of racist perceptions through their representations of race, such as Simmons’ fictional newspaper headlines. Hall posits that:

the media play a part in the formation, in the constitution, of the things that they reflect. It is not that there is a world outside, ‘out there,’ which exists free of the discourses of representation. What is ‘out there’ is, in part constituted by how it is represented. The reality of race in any society is, to coin a phrase, ‘media-mediated.’

Thus, through their representation of the band as political, the media forces the band, and Raymond, to become political. This is reflected in Raymond’s realisation that he was being ‘forced to spend more and more time studying history and law’ because ‘he had found out to his dismay that once the people chose you as their spokesman you couldn’t step down’ (202).

While the Black Panthers were not yet in existence at the time of Simmons’ publication, Raymond’s friends, Teacher and Lobo, engage in off-and-onstage antics that represent a militant response to the systemic violence around them that is similar to the tactics later employed by the Black Panthers (202). Their behaviour was more aggressive than the pacifist approach of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) that was the dominant African-American civil rights organisation at the time. Yet, just as Raymond could not completely avoid violence by being passive, the NAACP was not completely violence-free. Robert Williams, a former chapter leader of the NAACP wrote: ‘we grasped the relationship between violence and racism. The Afro-American is a ‘militant’ because he defends himself, his family, his home,
and his dignity’ (Williams in Sidran 140). Thus it was a kind of defensive militancy they were suggesting at the time.

Simmons’ exploration of music as a political tool also reflects saxophonist John Coltrane’s view that music can provoke change and is ‘an instrument which can create the initial thought patterns that can change the thinking of the people’ (Coltrane in Sidran 140). As Sidran argues, it is possible that because of this capacity to provoke change, musicians were inevitably ‘engaged in more primary, more direct and more assertive tactics’ (140) than the defensive action of the NAACP. Frank Kofsky has also written extensively on the emergence of Black Nationalism amongst jazz musicians, with a focus on Coltrane’s perspective (cf. Kofsky John Coltrane). Kofsky suggests that musicians were actually ahead of the majority of the population in their Black Nationalist ideology. In addition, he posits that young musicians in the mid-1960s were actually ‘attempting to challenge both the musical and political status quo’ through their music (“Black Nationalism in Jazz” 1).

While Raymond’s friends appear to be challenging the ‘political status quo’, Raymond is more focused on his musical development and takes a back seat with regards to the political activism (Simmons 208). Simmons therefore portrays Raymond as a reluctant hero: while his music has the capacity to further the advance of the civil rights movement, it is not necessarily what he wants to do.

This reluctance makes Raymond a potentially uninspiring choice as a figure to explore responses to systemic violence in the form of racial discrimination. The difference between Raymond’s friends’ militant, Malcolm X-style response to racial inequality, and Raymond’s more pacifist approach make him appear to have little conviction in terms of how he chooses to respond to systemic violence. Yet it is possible that Simmons is using Raymond as a reflection of the NAACP’s defensive approach.

This passivity is further highlighted when Raymond actually asks his friends to ease off on their racial equality rhetoric at gigs because there ‘Ain’t no sense in insulting everybody just ’cause you got a boss message to deliver’ (Simmons 208).\textsuperscript{31} Ironically, Raymond’s request for a more peaceful approach leads to violence. His friends respond to Raymond harshly and they eventually

\textsuperscript{31} “Boss message” refers to the political sentiments which are espoused by Teacher at the performances.
come to physical blows that lead to the splitting of the band. The violence they have experienced in their lives leads to the violent acts they commit against each other and this has broken up what was until then a successful musical collaboration. It seems the juxtaposition of militant and passive approaches within the band does not lend itself to a sustainable creative environment. In response to Teacher’s increasing dominance (he threatens Raymond’s position as band leader (204)), Raymond attempts to impose his own pacifist ideals on his friends.

The resulting violence suggests that there can be no mediation between the two responses to systemic violence, and that focusing on music alone is not enough to avoid violence altogether. By examining this conflict in this way, it is likely that Simmons is using the band is a reflection of the political dynamics of America in the late 1950s and early 1960s: although different civil rights movements may have the same end goal, the clash between the militant and pacifist approaches ultimately creates disharmony and potentially violent outcomes.

As a reinforcement of the idea that music cannot be used to avoid violence, Raymond’s girlfriend, Codene, sees a bleak future ahead of her, with his music still coming first and the possibility of violence remaining present:

She still had the impression he was more interested in blowing his horn than he was in making love to her. Well, they said that was the price you paid if you were foolish enough to fall for an artist. Everyone knew art came first with an artist. Not even a woman could fight that. She was a fool. Suppose the government locked him up after he made his appearance before the Senate Subcommittee investigating subversive activities in the entertainment profession? Suppose she was left to bring up the children she would give him alone, and at her age too, while he was rotting away in jail somewhere, or worse, dead? (212).

While this passage acts as a reminder of the hold Raymond’s music has over him, it also suggests that his future is not necessarily under control. He has yet to face a Senate enquiry into his past drug use and drug dealing and Codene sees a possible consequence of this as death. He could once again become a victim of systemic violence: a death in gaol after he is sentenced for a drug addiction that came as a result of his grief at his difficult life, and drug dealing which began out of economic necessity in order to survive. After everything the reader has seen Raymond do, fighting with friends, defying his parents, becoming
a drug addict, we are likely to forgive him now because of the violence that he has confronted and may yet face.

Raymond is a weak, often ambivalent character, so the strength of the novel lies not in the exploration of Raymond’s responses to systemic violence, but in the depiction of a range of possible reactions to racial prejudice such as that of Mae and Raymond’s friends. In addition, Raymond himself is a victim of several types of systemic violence and his music is always affected by the violence he witnesses: physical violence leads to Raymond finding a new sound in his music; psychological violence leaves him unable to play; and finally political violence suggests a means of conveying a civil rights message through the music. Simmons’ portrayal of Raymond’s music as being so deeply tied to his racial identity reflects an association represented in many other jazz fiction novels.

Although Raymond generally has a non-violent response to systemic violence, he is not always rewarded for his pacifist approach, and intimate violence is the result. In his psychological decline into drug use, Raymond can be seen as selfish and uninspiring, however, as Simmons has highlighted how both he and his family have been the victims of racial abuse, it is possible to empathise with him. In addition, Raymond’s choice to focus on his music rather than a civil rights campaign may render him passive to the point of ambivalence, but it serves as a reminder that he has been an unwilling participant in the fight to end the racial divide across America. Raymond always wanted his music to define him, yet his racial identity has also affected who he has become. Thus jazz and racial identity have become so intertwined that one cannot help but be affected by the other.

A very different approach to exploring the relationship between racial identity and jazz is made in Rafi Zabor’s 1998 novel, The Bear Comes Home. The primary difference between these two novels is the characterisation of the protagonists, however they also differ in how the characters’ identities are affected by the systemic violence they face. The persecution of The Bear leads to a personal existential crisis, not a political movement. However, like Raymond, the protagonist of Zabor’s novel also uses his music to respond to his victimisation.

This surreal exploration of a musician trying to find himself is essentially the story of a talking, saxophone-playing bear in New York City, who decides he
wants to become a jazz musician. Zabor is not African-American; he is the son of a Polish couple whom he spent much of his youth nursing through dementia (Valdes 24). Because of these family commitments, he grew up on the edge of society, became interested in Sufism, and journalist Marcela Valdes describes him as a perfectionist who suffers for his writing (25). He is also a jazz drummer and music critic, and it is these qualities that have given him the insight into the jazz community about which he writes.

The late 1990s was a very different time for jazz and racial identity compared to the time in which Simmons was writing. The US Civil Rights movement ended in 1968 with several Civil Rights Acts being passed between 1964 and 1968. The most contemporary racial conflict to the novel were the 1992 race riots, instigated by the police beating of African-American man, Rodney King, in Los Angeles. Significantly, at around the same time the United States became involved in the Persian Gulf War, which went some way to shifting the focus of racial discrimination in the US towards Iraqis, and to reducing the perception of African-Americans as the ‘other’ (Sidanius and Liu 685).

By the time of Zabor’s writing, jazz, having arguably reached its peak of popularity in the 1940s, was no longer the sound that represented popular tastes. In a recent study into the current state of jazz gigs, audience members agreed that ‘jazz venues should be small and intimate’ so that listeners can ‘immerse themselves in the experience’ (Burland and Pitts 527). Burland and Pitts’ study also argues that current audience members are ‘knowledgeable about jazz repertoire’ and therefore attend performances with specific expectations about what they will hear (523). This suggests that these audience members are unlike the large dance audiences of the 1930s and are more educated and critical. In addition, as Brand, Sloboda, Saul and Hathaway argue, jazz has been suffering ‘a noted decline in the prevalence of attendance at concerts particularly … in North America and Europe over the last decades of the 20th century and into the 21st century’ (635-6).

Thus jazz was almost seen as cult music by the late 1990s, existing largely in the underground scene of small bars with an air of exclusivity. Zabor draws on this underground world as a perfect setting for the arrival of The Bear who slips in and out of small dark clubs, avoiding too many questions because these are places where unusual characters are accepted.
As The Bear dons his hat and trench coat to step into jazz clubs and meet his idols, he also has to try and stay under the radar to avoid the police and the scientists who would like to study him. It is in this climate of hiding, suspicion and the need to play music that The Bear tries to find out who he really is and how he can exist within the human world. I argue that Zabor uses The Bear’s continual search for his place in society as a metaphor for the desire to have one’s racial identity accepted.

Until the beginning of the novel, The Bear has been working with his best friend, a human called Jones, as an ‘act’ – he is a street performer who is led by his master to do human-like things, such as dance, drink beer and playfully wrestle with Jones. When he is performing on the street, The Bear hides his true identity and pretends to be enslaved:

When Jones led him home toward evening, The Bear’s walk rolled him shoulder to shoulder, his head swayed genial and empty, his face was vacant and his eyes were glazed … The Bear knew how to behave in company (Zabor 9).

However, when The Bear arrives home, he relaxes, takes the chain out of his nose and puts his feet up to have a beer (10). When he is outside his home, he is performing and adhering to stereotypes of what people think a bear living in a metropolis should be. He performs the appearance of slavery, of dependence and disciplined behaviour. Yet he is not happy. This performance is something he desperately wants to shed. After one encouraging experience performing jazz with Lester Bowie, The Bear finds he is no longer able to keep up the performance of slavery, feeling as though he is about to ‘slip away’: ‘Time and the city were pounding him to a powder, and something weaker was fighting for life in his heart’ (Zabor 32). He chooses to drop the act and takes the ring from his nose and bleeds all over the back of a taxi. The rest of the novel leaves him searching for a way he can be defined now that he is no longer simply a dancing bear.

The Bear, as an animal trying to exist in the human world, is a symbol of the outsider, or the other, but is also a symbol of violence. In this case, Zabor continually makes us aware of his animal status by never giving him a name and always referring to him as ‘The Bear’. In addition, The Bear is always willing to show his teeth to get his way, and we are reminded that his huge form cannot be disguised. Jerome Stueart posits that The Bear is, however, not bear enough and is
‘like a man in a bear suit’ (198), arguing that we are only really made aware of his difference through the awkward sex scenes, as he fears hurting his human girlfriend, Iris, in the process of penetration. I argue that it is not only in the sex scenes, but also in the musical scenes that we are made aware of his ‘bearishness’. He bares his teeth at the audience, terrifying them with his potential violence, without even meaning to:

He reared his head back to take a larger breath, and had he been aware of his audience he would have realized that the sudden sight of his open jaws – great white tearing teeth, livid purple gums and broad, slavering tongue – had made it collectively gasp and jump back a foot (Zabor 23).

It seems at times as if The Bear is unaware of how terrifying and strange he can be – particularly once he has decided to drop the guise of being Jones’ slave. Yet it is after this scene described above that The Bear is able to begin to really consider where he stands in relation to the human world. Through using The Bear as a metaphor, Zabor poses an anti-essentialist perspective with regard to racial identity, as The Bear considers himself not in relation to other bears, but in relation to humans – it is his sharp mind and love of music that defines who he is, not his physical shape. Thus Zabor suggests that identifying yourself as one race or another has less to do with bloodlines and physical appearance and more to do with ethnicity: cultural experience and psychological connection.

Yet Stueart examines The Bear’s search for identity in terms of his awareness of being a bear:

The Bear in the novel is aware of this power, and the history of bears. Because of this awareness, he is conflicted by his own tribal affiliation and by the expectations of humans; identity for him turns into a card shuffle of all the past incarnations of bears (199).

This ‘card shuffle’ provides much of the conflict within The Bear, but I argue that his consideration of his identity is not only about the history of bears, but the history of humans. He constantly compares himself to human achievers, particularly musicians whom he admires. As he watches Arthur Blythe play, he thinks ‘I could never play like that,’ and later compares himself to Ornette Coleman, and mimics Thelonious Monk’s melodies (Zabor 21, 22, 474).

The Bear’s search suggests that even in 1998, society is still wary of the outsider, and the outsider still longs to find his place. Humans react to The Bear in
many different ways: some are curious, others terrified, some are lustful and others simply desire to control him. The Bear is ostracised from society, threatened by police because of what he is (not what he does). He is seen by his colleagues as an anomaly and takes a long time to prove that he is an equal to them as a musician.

It is necessary to clarify what type of jazz The Bear plays, as it is quite different to the music of many of the other novels I will be discussing. As The Bear performs with the real musician Lester Bowie, the suggestion is initially that he is playing a form of postmodern free jazz, particularly as he joins the famous Art Ensemble of Chicago for a gig. Gioia describes the Art Ensemble as a band that incorporated performance art with jazz in a postmodern pastiche, ‘Fragments of gospel or funk might rub shoulders with dissonance and noise. A stately waltz might disintegrate into musical anarchy’ (357). In addition, Bowie was famous for wearing a costume when he performed: a white lab coat and his goatee fashioned into two points. Indeed because of the ‘performance art’ inherent in the Art Ensemble’s performances, The Bear is able to stay on stage for nearly a whole performance. Though this form of postmodern jazz retains some of the vaudevillian aspects of early jazz, the music itself is the furthest from its New Orleans roots. However, elements of rupture and destruction are retained through its complete defiance of convention, the shattering of audience expectations and the breaking apart of musical structures.

When The Bear forms his own group, however, his music is suggested to be not quite as avant-garde as the Art Ensemble, but definitely showing traces of both bebop and free jazz. In his discussion of one of the landmark albums of the free jazz era, Coltrane’s *Ascension*, Alyn Shipton argues that the ‘collective free playing’ had ‘power, collective passion, and primal screaming qualities’ (740). While Shipton admits that free jazz can be inaccessible or difficult to understand, he suggests another way of listening to the music:

> If preconceptions about harmony, melody, and swing are suspended, and the music is approached in its own terms, it becomes a series of profound, impressive and frequently uncomfortable statements (741).

Thus while the music may be both ‘profound’ and ‘uncomfortable’, it has the capacity to be heard as a collection of statements or claims. It is almost as
though it is a search for a sound, experimental and explorative. Ornette Coleman, who was partly responsible for the development of free jazz, is described by an old friend, Dewey Redman, as having a ‘a restless, questioning mind’, which not only reflects free jazz, but the characterisation of Zabor’s The Bear (Shipton 774). Coltrane himself, who is one of The Bear’s idols, also described the music as a process of searching (cf. Shipton 759).

Indeed, The Bear often uses the music as a means of searching for answers and exploring the anomaly that is his existence. Therefore, the music becomes a tool through which he can search for answers and Zabor describes this process as somewhat destructive. The Bear breaks apart the music that he knows to make something new in an effort to understand his desire to create music. In addition, through this process, he hopes to discover something about his own identity. As he records some music, he slips into this kind of philosophising:

> There was a kind of shuttered tumult in him, as if all this equivocal music were being generated by a drama taking place from behind the closed doors of a room somewhere deeper in the house of his nature than he could bodily reach … but all he could do here … was use what he knew about music and the horn to make some sense out of such [an] echo of [the] real(173).

But by the end of the novel, as his band members sit between sets with bleeding fingers (literally) he is convinced this search for identity through his music has led to nothing but violence:

> What have I done? The Bear asked himself … Violence to everyone around me, the usual price of my obtaining any kind of pleasure at all. Does making an artistic statement sufficient to the fundamental questions my existence has proposed really require this much breakage? (457).

Therefore by the conclusion he has not found his identity, but instead, like Raymond, has found that his musical response to the discrimination he has faced has led him to enact both intimate and performative violence upon others. His own acts of violence are explained as being a response to his identity crisis, which he attempts to solve through music. Therefore Zabor portrays the creative process as a violent act that is influenced by, and has influence upon, the psychological state of the performer.

In addition, The Bear has no answers: the uncertainty of who he is in relation to the human world remains. If the novel is viewed as a commentary on
racial identity in the late twentieth century, Zabor seems to suggest that creative collaboration is not necessarily enough to bridge the gap between different ethnicities because of the imbalance of power – physically and socially. An underlying concept here is also that creative expression cannot define who we are as individuals and how we relate to one another.

The primary ways The Bear hopes to define himself is by comparing himself to other musicians, and by being accepted by them. Musicians initially don’t take him seriously, as many are afraid to play with him or think he is just a ‘novelty act’ (Zabor 43), reflecting the history of early black minstrel performers in America (Gioia 8). Once most musicians and audiences do accept him, however, it is as a musician and not as a bear. He is respected and even admired, embarking on a big performance opportunity at the end of the novel. Stueart argues that the reason the musicians finally accept him is not only because of his musical ability, but also because of the fact that he is a bear:

Other jazz musicians are the only ones taking him seriously, and this might stem from the fact that jazz is improvisation – working off the material you have to create something new. The Bear is an improvisation of a jazz musician, literally. A playful detour from the mainstream melody, an offbeat that still works, a harmony only heard if one modulates the right chords. The Bear, being improvisation on his own part and Zabor’s improv, fits in well with the other improvisos who play instruments with him in various gigs throughout the book (207).

Thus Stueart suggests that The Bear himself is a kind of improvisation, and as such, he ‘fits in’ because of the fact that he is a bear. While I agree that there is a possibility that his fellow musicians’ acceptance of him does come from their willingness to accept new ideas, I would dispute Stueart’s equating of jazz improvisation with Zabor’s ‘improvisation’ of The Bear as a character. As previously argued, one of the qualities that makes jazz improvisation so arresting is that it is immediate and live; it evolves unpredictably and is only repeated if it is recorded and can be played back. Perhaps this is the manner in which Zabor wrote the character, but it seems simplistic to equate the two so fully.

Nevertheless, as Stueart suggests, The Bear, like African-American jazz musicians before him, finds some acceptance through jazz. Ultimately, it seems to be a legitimate occupation for him, as it was for early black jazz musicians struggling to find their place in society in the early twentieth century (Sidran 31).
By the end of the novel, although he has found a place where he can be accepted, The Bear remains dissatisfied: he fears the violence of his music and has an incomplete love affair with Iris, his white lover. He muses over ‘this lucky-in-music-unlucky-in-love routine: I won’t have it’ (Zabor 473), reflecting the pattern of so many jazz musicians’ lives (as explored more fully in the next chapter). His identity as a bear has finally been made redundant in his professional career, but it still has an impact on how he relates to women and perhaps the human race generally – where the human race represents the dominant race, that is, the white population of America.

Race-based violence is common in novels about jazz musicians, not only in the two forms I have mentioned here, but through more subtle systems of exclusion from society and lack of respect for the craft. Where both Raymond and The Bear respond to systemic violence in different ways, in both cases their history of violence and racial discrimination is reflected in where and how they perform and how they relate to their fellow musicians. Ultimately, these characters are linked not only by their music but because they are victims of prejudice, and as such we sympathise with their own violent and selfish tendencies – their urge towards intimate and performative violence. Yet another systemic problem that causes the violence common to nearly all of these novels is economic deprivation: the financial constraints placed upon jazz musicians and what they have to do to overcome them.

**Economic Systemic Violence**

Often closely related to racial discrimination in the lives of both real and fictional jazz musicians is the problem of economics. The life of a musician of any genre has, historically, most often been a life of economic deprivation, with a perception that a musician can either have artistic credibility or economic stability – and rarely, if ever, both. Again like racial systemic violence, the economic systemic violence explored in novels such as John Clellon Holmes’ *The Horn* and Ann Petry’s *The Street* reflects the real-life circumstances of many musicians, particularly from a historical perspective.

Yet I would argue that this exploration does more than simply reflect reality. Economic hardship in fiction adds drama, a level of desperation and need
in the characters, and also renders them victims of a social system into which they don’t quite fit. These characters are unable to get real jobs and earn ‘acceptable’ incomes because they love music so much they can do nothing else: it is what they were born to do. This is a highly romantic vision of the artist that also reflects Simmons’ character Codene’s belief that ‘Everyone knew art came first with an artist’ (Simmons 212). I argue that narratives of economic hardship portray musicians as victims of systemic violence, inviting empathy with the musician characters in order that they be released from any blame for subsequent acts of violence which are a response to their deprivation.

This life of impoverishment is not exclusive to musicians, but is applicable to artists of all kinds, stemming from the legacy of bohemianism. It has become part of the myth of what it takes to be a real artist, and suggests a willingness to sacrifice material pleasures for one’s art. Indeed, as Elizabeth Wilson argues, to be successful economically was seen to be a failure as a bohemian because it meant your art was publicly liked, and therefore could not be ‘proof of the artist’s originality and genius’ (Bohemians 18). Yet it is hard to believe that in reality many people would choose a life of poverty simply to adhere to a stereotype.

Market analysts, Bradshaw and Holbrook, suggest that jazz musicians actually choose to work against the market – or the market’s form of ‘popular music’ – in order to maintain their bohemian integrity:

We are inspired by musicians who are seen to resist the market in favor of bohemian ideals – even at the expense of artistic self-destruction – because therein lies the possibility, for us Romantic consumers, of complete market emancipation and abstention from bourgeois conformity (132).

So although they argue that it is the musician’s desire to appear to work against the market that allows them to reach their bohemian ideal of the jazz life, albeit economically unstable, it is also what ‘romantic consumers’ want. Ironically, the claim is therefore that consumers want the makers of their desired product (music) to be economically unstable, but the very consumption of the product offers financial stability. It is possible that Bradshaw and Holbrook’s ‘romantic consumers’ are the same consumers as the readers to whom writers of jazz fiction are appealing. There is a certain expectation that these characters fill
some of the same ideals of the bohemian life that Bradshaw and Holbrook suggest we want to see in our real jazz musicians.

However, this argument relies on the premise that if the musicians do choose to adhere to market demands, they will become more successful, at least economically speaking. This is clearly not the case. As David Throsby and Virginia Hollister posit through their empirical study into the economic realities of being an artist in Australia, few, if any professional musicians make a living from their music alone (45, 51)\textsuperscript{32}, and indeed ‘almost two thirds of Australian professional artists have more than one job’ (79). Similarly, Richard Caves suggests that few recording musicians in America make enough money to cover the costs of recording an album (61), and the average musician must take ‘the highest paying day-job’ they can find and work a minimum of hours at a ‘humdrum task’ in order to devote the rest of their time to their creative pursuit (78).

Regardless of the realities of working as a musician historically or today in Australia and America, authors continue to represent musicians as trying to make a living from their music alone. As a result, they are shown to be financially unstable, and often struggle to pay rent or buy food on a day-to-day basis. Yet, like racial systemic violence, in these novels economic violence is not necessarily seen as a form of violence which is self-inflicted, but rather, something that artists have to put up with: that is, they are victims of economic instability. This instability is not caused by one person inflicting violence upon them but is actually a systemic concern. As discussed in the introduction, Žižek defines systemic violence as being the result of the ‘smooth functioning of our economic and political systems’(2), in this case, the result of a long history of musicians living on the edge of society and barely being able to scrape together a living from their music.

The representation of financial difficulties in the lives of fictional musicians also relates to the subject matter of my next chapter on intimate violence. This is because the musicians’ decisions to try to survive solely on the income of their music can be seen as a form of sacrifice for the sake of the music. That is, they choose not to work in a profession that provides them with a stable

\textsuperscript{32} This study makes reference to data collected over a fifteen-year period in Australia (1986-2001)
income because they need time to work on their creative practice. The economic instability of these characters also often arises from other problems such as drug and alcohol addiction. However, I argue that these addictions are primarily the result of the systemic violence the characters have faced in their complex pasts. The systemic violence of the past, such as racial discrimination, combined with poor pay and irregular work, means the characters are often frustrated and driven to drugs or alcohol as a means of escaping their harsh reality.

John Clellon Holmes published *The Horn* in 1958, six years after his landmark treatise ‘This is the Beat Generation’ was published in *The New York Times*. Part of his definition of what makes someone a beat is when a man ‘goes for broke and wagers the sum of his resources on a single number’ ("Beat Gen." 110). While he is speaking figuratively about the amount of energy put into one’s work here, it is easy to also apply this concept literally to economics. It is a statement about risk, and can be seen as a representation of someone willing to sacrifice everything for an artistic endeavour. Another quality that defined Holmes and his fellow beat writers such as Kerouac, Ginsberg and Cassady was that they lived through economic hardship and grew up ‘during the collective bad circumstances of a dreary depression’ ("Beat Gen." 110). This suggests that economic struggle was something that was familiar to Holmes personally and it is one of the main forms of systemic violence in his seminal jazz novel, *The Horn*.

Holmes’ Edgar ‘The Horn’ Pool, is a largely unlikable character, and throughout the novel he is abusive, neglectful and embodies desperate behaviour. Yet he is also depicted as a brilliant musician and someone whom all other musicians admire greatly. This almost seems to be a contradiction, and it is one of the primary questions throughout the novel: how did so successful a musician come to have so many unpleasant characteristics? Holmes reveals the answer slowly: he has been systemically, racially and economically abused throughout his life, and his actions reflect the anger and desperation this has caused.

Throughout the novel, set on his last day alive, Poole struggles to try and raise some money for a bus fare as he wanders through New York in a drunken

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33 “The Horn” in Holmes’ novel refers to the instrument Edgar Poole plays: the saxophone. This is a common term for the instrument, although it is also on occasion used to refer to the trumpet (such as in Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter*).
stupor, and finally dies. He was once a great saxophone player but now, old and ill, has been outplayed by younger musicians and is left with nothing. He continually talks about money through the novel, ‘I don’t care as long as I get together that fifty bucks,’ (The Horn 48) and only calls or approaches friends to ask them for money, not for help of any other kind. Thus his last day, as we witness it, is guided only by economic need, or perhaps even economic obsession.

We witness his end primarily through the eyes of other musicians who have either known him in his heyday or are young and idolise him now. One such musician, Walden, attempts to compete with Poole on stage in a kind of saxophone duel and despite the violence of their musical interaction (explored in Chapter Four), he looks at Poole, ‘loving him even in all his savage, smearing mockery, battling not him but the dark side of that Black-angel soul’ (The Horn 18). Poole is continually presented as unlikable, sneering, begging and desperate, yet one character, Wing, likens him to a harsh parent:

He was everybody’s evil, worldly father: the father never seen enough to evoke love, the father you envy and cannot impress, the father who sees through your accomplishments and does not even need your admiration (The Horn 36).

While this is a severe image, the fact that he is described as a ‘father’ does suggest a degree of love: of commitment and respect. Indeed, by the end of Wing’s chapter, he decides he does care for Poole and will help search for him, lost somewhere in New York. The love the other characters feel for Poole makes us see him as someone to be admired. As his past is revealed throughout the novel, his harsh beginnings and desperate and impoverished end unexpectedly evoke the sympathy of the other characters. Indeed, the musical colleagues he treated so poorly throughout the novel conclude the narrative with forgiveness: ‘No, he is dead, and we can love him now’ (The Horn 243). It is as though all his distasteful and abusive actions dissipate with his death, and he becomes human again.

In novels where economic deprivation is important to the lives of the characters, money becomes a form of power. Those who have money wield influence over those who have not, and this influence is often abused to the point that it incites violence. Yet the economics described in these novels is not always based on the white economy that is the governing force of American society. Ben
Sidran argues that as a result of racial segregation there occurred the ‘establishment of a peculiarly black economic system’; that is, because African-Americans were excluded from the white economy, they had to establish their own economic system. Sidran suggests that this was where hustlers and the like were at the top of the pyramid (37). This black economy is the primary focus in one of the most harrowing novels of economic hardship in the jazz fiction genre, Ann Petry’s, *The Street*, first published in 1946. *The Street* won Petry the Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship and was the first novel written by an African-American woman to sell more than one million copies in America.

Lutie Johnson, a beautiful African-American single mother, moves into a rough apartment in Harlem, having been abandoned by her husband several years before. Yet she doesn’t blame her ex-husband for her situation; she blames poverty. As she explains, ‘We were too poor. And we were too young to stand being poor’ (163). They are impoverished not only because of bad luck, but also because her husband cannot get a job in a world dominated by white employers. Economic hardship is also linked to race and racial prejudice in many of the novels. Although being a jazz musician may have been one of the few professions an African-American could aspire to, its Afrocentric history was perhaps also one of the reasons the musicians were poorly paid (Sidran 37).

Despite trying to be a decent person, Lutie becomes embroiled in a corrupt world of musicians, band leaders, bar owners and men who desire her only for her looks. Ultimately trying to fight for her right to earn a living as a singer, she is driven to murder. Once again, this otherwise horrendous act (she beats a man to death), is explained through the systemic violence we have witnessed her suffer. It is a complex moral issue, clearly, but the systemic violence allows the reader to empathise with Lutie’s plight.

The one respite from her situation that Lutie has occurs when she sings and the music becomes an escape for her:

Though she sang the words of the song, it was of something entirely different that she was thinking and putting into the music: she was leaving the street with its dark passages, its mean shabby rooms; she was taking Bub [her son] away with her (Petry 160).

It is this contrast between poverty and dreaming that marks the positive effects of jazz in so many of these novels. It justifies what the musicians do – they
pay the price, literally, for their art, and this, as Bradshaw and Holbrook argue, is what the reader admires (132).

It is therefore perhaps the systemic violence in the characters’ lives that makes them forgivable. In addition, the music they play often becomes a device for good: it is a means of escape and relief from the realities of their harsh lives, providing a contrast in mood and tone that elevates the character to the bohemian ideal of the artist.

**Gendered Systemic Violence**

When discussing *The Street*, gender cannot be overlooked. Because Lutie Johnson is a woman, and an attractive one at that, her struggle for survival, economically and socially, is made all the more difficult. There can be little doubt of the systemic nature of gender discrimination, as Jeannette King argues: ‘History ... provides ample evidence that gender has limited individual life choices, particularly for women, acting as a kind of prison, which someone might well aspire to escape or transcend’ (101). This is the case for Lutie, who constantly comes up against men who try to control her. She cannot get a better job than the one she has, she is relatively defenseless against the men who desire her, and she has no support when her circumstances turn violent.

Gender in relation to jazz is an area of discourse that has been left largely unexamined until recently. From a historical perspective, it wasn’t until World War II, when there was a reduction in the number of men performing due to military duties, that women and all-female jazz groups really began to have successful careers as jazz musicians (Tucker 37). Not only did these groups subvert convention by being female, but they were often made up of women from both black and white backgrounds who would paint their faces either darker or lighter so that authorities enforcing the Jim Crow laws of segregation were unable to tell the races apart (Ceraso 48). Steph Ceraso argues that these women dressed provocatively, but played ‘masculine’ instruments as a way of promoting novelty, in order that they might be successful (48). She suggests that:

> These women used mimicry to obtain lucrative careers and independence. And, although political freedom for black musicians was impossible under Jim Crow, performances of race did allow for political subversion (50).
In this way they are rather like Zabor’s Bear – their musical achievements came second to their appearance.

As Ceraso acknowledges, Judith Butler’s concept of gender as performance also can be applied to race as performance in the case of these all female bands of the 1940s (Ceraso 49). The women of these swing groups dressed not only to accentuate their womanhood, but also to hide or alter their racial identity. Butler argues with regard to gender that:

such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means (136, emphasis original).

It could be argued that the performance of identity was empowering to these women because they had the ability to break free of their domestic sphere, travel and earn an income. Yet the primary reason for their performances of race and gender was a background of violence: they were responding to gender discrimination on a global scale. In enhancing their femininity through their clothes and make-up, they marked themselves as different from the male jazz bands of the time, to be judged not for their musical ability alone but as a performance ‘act’. They adhered (as much as possible) to their gender roles in order to be accepted in the profession and to be able to earn an income and independence. In contrast, these women did disrupt racial stereotypes by painting their faces darker or lighter, which was a direct response to the threat of being arrested in the South due to Jim Crow laws.

This performance of gender is also embraced by Lutie Johnson who, in The Street, takes much care with her appearance before she goes on stage, carefully selecting her clothes and making sure she doesn’t look like she comes from the rough areas of Harlem (Petry 153). She attempts to hide her background of deprivation in order to embrace the illusion of an escape from that harsh reality. Yet, it is in fact her singing career that brings violence into her life: by not being there to protect her son, and by gently encouraging the advances of the band leader, Boots, Lutie sets in train the events what cause her life to unravel. In The Street, it is not only the economic difficulties and racism that bring Lutie undone, but her gender and class that renders her vulnerable to violence; as Amanda Davis argues, ‘Petry is careful to demonstrate that it is the intersection of racial
discrimination, class oppression, and sexist exploitation that serves to disempower and threaten [Lutie] most’ (36, my emphasis).

In two nights, this intersection of racial, economic and gender discrimination shatters Lutie’s dreams. Old Man Junto, a white admirer of Lutie, uses his influence as a casino owner to disempower Lutie by refusing to pay her, rendering her economically vulnerable so he can court her (301). In addition, the physical threat of the Super of the building in which she lives, who has lusted after her for some time, finally comes to fruition. As she returns home from her first triumphant performance, she is accosted by him in the stairwell, and is only saved from being brutally raped because of the madam, Mrs Hedges, who lives down the hall (169-71). On saving Lutie, Mrs Hedges offers her a job as one of her prostitutes, a fate that Lutie refuses to accept as a possibility as she becomes ‘filled with a sick loathing of herself, wondering if there was something about her that subtly suggested … she would leap at the opportunity to make money sleeping with white men’ (173). In this proposition of prostitution, Petry highlights Lutie’s disgust towards one of the few ways a black woman could earn an income within that community.

The Super gets his revenge by incriminating Lutie’s son, Bub, in the theft of mail and the culmination of all these events is the frustration and horror that leads Lutie to kill the band leader, Boots. As she beats him with an iron candlestick, her past forces her to hit harder:

A lifetime of pent-up resentment went into the blows … Then the limp figure on the sofa became … the insult in the moist-eyed glances of white men on the subway; became the unconcealed hostility in the eyes of white women; became the greasy lecherous man at the Crosse School … she was striking at the white world which thrust black people into a walled enclosure from which there was no escape (308).

She has been so disempowered by her gender, economic status and racial identity that she has no other option. Although music has provided a possible means of escape for Lutie, it has in the end provoked violence from her.

Again, parallels can be drawn between Lutie and Zabor’s bear who was initially disempowered because of his species but found a possible escape through music. Yet, as with Lutie, the music exposed The Bear to more forms of violence:
he is chased, captured, detained and drugged by scientists, and he has to face the consequences of his own urges towards violence.

Perhaps a more complex examination of systemic violence in the form of gender discrimination is seen in Jackie Kay’s 1998 novel, Trumpet. Trumpet follows the aftermath of the death of a renowned trumpet player, Joss Moody. Upon his death it is discovered by the coroner that he was in fact a woman who lived her life as a man (I will refer to the character as a man henceforth). He married, had an adopted son and was only known to be a woman by his wife, Milly, from whose perspective the majority of the novel is told.

Not only is Trumpet one of the most contemporary novels analysed for this research, it is also unique in both its country of origin and the setting: the United Kingdom, with a focus on London and rural Scotland. This provides a landscape and social background for the characters which is a contrast to many of the novels written and set in the United States. Moody is half African, which provides a link to the African-American musicians through the history of jazz, yet his Scottish heritage also places him in a uniquely British context. Significantly, while many of the American novels focus on the impact of the music on the rest of America, Moody’s professional career is much more international as Milly lists sixteen countries covered in his tours, which even include Australia (34). It is suggested that Moody’s travels are part of what makes his music unique: ‘The minute we came back from one of those places, he somehow managed to capture the atmosphere of the place and slide that into his music’ (34). This contemporary international setting lifts Trumpet out of the history of African-American violence and refocuses the origins of violence onto systemic discrimination relating to gender and sexuality.

The character of Joss Moody is based on the real life circumstances of trumpeter Billy (Dorothy) Tipton who lived and performed in America in the 1930s (King 102). Moody’s story is largely set in England in the 1960s, so the circumstances are different to Tipton’s – not least because the case of a woman playing a trumpet would have been far more acceptable in the 1960s than in the 1930s. Yet there is the feeling that both of these men may have kept their gender transformation a secret because of the time in which they lived. Socially, cross

34 The present time of Trumpet is actually 1997, but the descriptions of Moody’s music and performances are primarily from the 1960s, when his music was at its most popular.
dressing in either the 1930s or the 1960s would have been quite shocking and may have left them ostracised from society. Thus there is an implicit undertone of a fear of social prejudice in Moody’s decision to go to such great lengths to hide his transgender identity.

While this is a remarkable story, it may seem that this transformation of gender is not an act of violence. Yet the sense of repression, guilt and the concealment of Moody’s true identity that are embedded in the narrative suggest that this transformation of genders was a destructive force in Moody’s life. I suggest that in fact he is diligent with his transformation because he is afraid of the judgment of others – he is terrified of the systemic violence his gender performance may provoke. In addition, a letter at the end of the novel suggests that keeping the secret from his son, Coleman, was painful for Moody, as he was fearful about how Coleman would react: ‘You will keep me or lose me. You will hate me or love me’ (277). Moody’s fear about Coleman can be seen as a representation of his fear of society’s reaction to his transgender identity.

Indeed, throughout the novel there is a suggestion that the fear of revelation is a form of torture for Moody. The reader is first made aware of Moody’s transgender identity with the description of him revealing himself to Milly for the first time. At first, Milly describes Moody’s fear: ‘He was afraid that if I knew I would stop seeing him’, and he looks as though he will cry as he tells her he cannot see her anymore because of his secret (19). The implication is that he would prefer to leave the woman he loves rather than have to tell her the truth about his gender. His fear of how people will react to his transgender identity stifles him. His dread also manifests in anger and aggressive behaviour, and thus his transgendered performance threatens to destabilise him and his relationships.

It is an unexpected and shocking moment for Milly and the reader as Moody slowly undresses and unwraps his breasts which had been tightly bound beneath his suit (Kay 21). At first Milly thinks the bandages are covering a scar and she is relieved, ‘He should know my love goes deeper than a wound’ (21), even though this suggests some violence in his past. Instead, when the first of the breasts is exposed, Kay describes it as revealing ‘itself’ to Milly, rather than Moody revealing it to her: it is as though the breast wants to be seen, to come out from its bondage and it is somehow not a part of Moody the man. This separation
of breast and man highlights the separation of identity in Moody. He is split in two; the exposed man and the hidden woman are distinct from each other.

Yet if, as Butler argues, gender is performative, it can be argued that Moody should be read as a man, as that is how he lives and performs his identity (Barker 245). In discussing *Trumpet* in relation to Butler, Jeannette King also points out: ‘Paradoxically, disguising one's gender in order to achieve one's goals confirms gender's power even in the act of apparently transcending it’ (106). Thus it can be argued that Moody is completely controlled by his identity as both man and woman, even as he attempts to choose one identity and live by the gender conventions specific to it.

The concealment of his second self, or his biological sex, becomes an act of repression, the evidence of which is only revealed to the rest of the world upon his death. The exposure of his body in death provokes violence and self-destruction in his adopted son, Coleman, when he discovers the truth (Kay 115). Other characters who learn of his true gender are shocked, and confused (160) while some, such as the reporter Sophie Stones, want to use this sense of horror and shock to make a profit, as she considers writing a biography about Moody: ‘They should have no problem selling this book. People are interested in weirdoes, sex-changes, all that stuff’ (125). It seems the revelation of Moody’s identity has brought out the worst in many people around him – perhaps justifying his fear of systemic violence and social marginalisation.

As the majority of the novel is told from perspectives other than Moody’s, there is a distance between the reader and Moody the musician, making him not so much unlikable as perhaps unknowable. The effect of this is that we empathise with the other characters in the novel, particularly his son, Coleman, who feels the revelation of Moody’s sex shatters his notion of who his father was.

While Coleman’s accounts of his own childhood and Milly’s memory of Moody reveal something of Moody’s character, it is not until the chapter titled ‘Music’ halfway through the novel that Moody’s perspective emerges. As is the case for Lutie Johnson and Raymond Douglas, music provides an escape for Moody, releasing him from both the social constraints and the gender constraints he places on himself. Kay describes this as a process of travelling downwards and inwards:
When he gets down … he loses his sex, his race, his memory. He strips himself bare, takes everything off, till he’s barely human… He goes down, swirling and whirling till he's right down at the very pinpoint of himself. A small black mark (131).

This sense of exposure, or of finding the ‘pinpoint of himself’, is also a moment of release for the reader. We see Moody’s internal thought processes at last, and learn what the music meant for him. This places the gender repression in the context of his life as a musician, and we are given a glimmer of an idea as to why he might be torturing himself by keeping his secret. He needs to be able to perform in order to access who he really is.

By looking at a passage such as this through Butler’s aforementioned discussion of gender as performative, a correlation can be found between Moody’s cross-dressing and his music as modes of performance. Butler argues that gender is a signification ‘on the surface’ which reflects internal beliefs or desires, as she suggests that the ‘figure of the interior soul understood as “within” the body is signified through its inscription on the body’ (135 original emphasis). Yet the musical passage in Kay’s novel implies that it is not only Moody’s gender ‘performance’ that exposes his ‘interior soul’, but his music. In fact, through the process of music making he ‘loses his sex’, suggesting that the music is more powerful than his gender as it surpasses gender definitions. However, this neutralising of gender is perhaps part of Moody’s identity or ‘interior soul’: he is neither man nor woman, but both.

Indeed, by further examining Moody through Butler’s argument that cross-dressing or ‘drag’ is a performance that plays with the distinction between anatomy and exterior appearance, he may in fact be seen as split into three. Butler argues that through considering the identity of someone in drag, ‘we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance’ (137). Thus Moody can perhaps be viewed as anatomically a woman, but in terms of both gender identity and performance, he is a man. Yet I suggest that Moody’s gender identity (what he feels) and gender performance (what he does) are not distinct but are rather intertwined because he is a performer. He is identified as a musician and as a man, and both qualities are indicative of what he feels and what he does. His ‘performance’ of gender enables his performance of music because he is able to
work in a field dominated by men. As previously discussed, even in the 1960s it would have been very difficult for a woman to perform jazz much less be a critically acclaimed leader of a band, without merely being a spectacle,— with the exception of some singers. In addition, the actual music-making provides a platform through which his male and female qualities are rendered irrelevant, as he ‘loses his sex’.

Interestingly, the precise reasons for his hiding and changing his gender are never explicitly explained in the novel. It could be that he felt he needed to be a man to play jazz, it could be that he is transgender and psychologically he sees himself as a man and prefers the clothes of men, or it could be that he is in fact a lesbian using a manly appearance to relate to women in a way in which he feels comfortable. None of these possibilities is made explicit — dressing and behaving as a man are simply what he does. His motives are perhaps a combination of these three things, but Kay’s refusal to explain the precise reasons leaves the reader unsure of Moody but fully aware of his love of music. It also makes Moody an intriguing character and enhances the enigma of the musician: he is at once unknowable, untouchable and mysterious.

Admittedly, none of these possible motivations for cross-dressing sounds violent or necessarily repressive. It is the threat of how society would react to the duality of his identity that makes Moody the victim of systemic violence and he is unable to tell the truth about his identity to those closest to him (aside from Milly): his band mates, his mother and his own son. Moody is a man who uses many techniques to remain unexposed, and the final chapter suggests Moody is afraid his son will hate him because of the lies he has kept, implying that maintaining his transgender identity and keeping his biological gender hidden was difficult and possibly emotionally painful. Yet it is likely that the decision to not cross-dress would, due to its consequences, be more of a repression.

I argue that either way, Moody’s complex relationship to his gender makes him an excessively private, protective, and secretive man, willing to damage his permanent relationships (especially with his son) in order to keep his secret and avoid being ostracised by society. In his final letter to his son, he promises to tell the truth, yet the letter is still shrouded in secrecy, as the story telling is oblique. He confesses that he nearly burnt all the evidence of his previous life as a woman, but decides not to because ‘If I do that I’d literally be burning myself” (277). Thus
he retains a concept of himself as a woman, and carries it with him as a burden, terrified of exposure.

A similar mystery as to the motivation for cross-dressing surrounds the real-life version of Moody, Billy Tipton. While some critics argue that he dressed as a man purely to have the opportunity to play jazz seriously, others argue that his situation was far more complex and involved his gender and sexuality (Ceraso 52). Regardless of the reason behind the gender ‘performance’ of both the real Tipton and the fictional Moody, their whole lives enact a gendered performance and thus their lives become a reflection of their profession: they are continually on stage, performing. The performance becomes their life and for Moody at least, there is no distinction between the stage and the street.

As Moody is defined and controlled by his performance of gender, which I argue is linked to his musical performance, I suggest that he is also defined and controlled by his desire to play music. However, whereas he hides and disguises his sex to change his gender, through the music he finds clarity and is able to locate the ‘pinpoint of himself’. In this way, Kay gives the music the power to overcome systemic violence. It is a performance of the true self, stripped bare, without the need for political or social ‘dressing’ that is otherwise required for Moody to function in society.

Again, ethnicity is important here as Moody is a Scottish man living in London, but his father was African and ‘came off a boat’ (277). Kay presents a character who is proud of his biracial identity, as he asserts both his Scottish and African heritage as much as he can. Moody tells his son, Coleman, ‘you are Scottish, you were born in Scotland’ (190), as a defining feature of his identity, but also links himself to his African heritage through his music by asking, ‘what would the world be without black people and music?’ (190).

However, as outlined above, we never have much of a sense of Moody except through his music. While this means that he becomes a romantic and enigmatic figure, it also keeps the reader at a distance, perhaps hindering the empathy we might hope to feel for him. There is a feeling that his music, the suppression of his sexuality, and the alteration of his gender are the most dominant characteristics of Moody. Yet ultimately, it is the systemic violence in the form of assumptions about gender in 1960s England that define who this
character is and how his fear causes isolation and distance from many of those he loves most.

Suffering for Empathy

Systemic violence in novels about jazz musicians takes many forms. Characters work against the system, against convention, and often against logic in order to be able to play their music. This is in part why we love them: the sacrifice and the idealism. Yet it is also the systemic violence itself that makes us sympathetic towards these characters. As we are made aware of their history of struggle, be it because of their race, their economic deprivation, their gender or a combination of all three, we become sympathetic to their plight. The authors of these texts use systemic violence to prepare us to empathise with characters who become drug addicts, adulterers and even murderers.

Jazz is the link between these self-destructive characters because the music was born out of a time that was full of poverty, cruelty, racial prejudice and gender discrimination. Jazz was developed as a form of music that would give the musicians a sense of power as it released them from what was most difficult about life, as Adam Gussow argues in relation to the blues:

Blues was a mode of resistance: a way of bearing coded and overt witness to terror, easing troubled minds, making a living outside a sharecropper’s exploited condition, clearing a space for pleasure, fantasizing revenge – a way of bringing oneself and one’s community back to life by getting loud, fierce and down (Gussow 15-16).

The history of the music is often a mirror to the personal histories of characters that are born into states of poverty and discrimination. Yet, these characters are more than simply victims, and the manner in which they choose to react to systemic violence affects their lives and their music.

Similarly, jazz is much more than simply a music born from hardship. It has developed into a complex art form that has improvisation at its core. The representation of improvisation in novels about jazz musicians is a crucial element that determines so much about the characterisation and the way in which these characters live their lives. The link between improvisation and violence will be
expanded upon in Chapter Four. This link is intrinsic to the foundations of this exploration of systemic violence in the novels.
Chapter 3 – Cults: Intimate Violence

As discussed in the introduction, one of the most prevalent forms of violence in novels about jazz musicians is intimate violence. Intimate violence relates to self-harm in a physical sense, and often leads to suicide. It can also take the form of emotional violence or harm inflicted by the protagonist upon those closest to the protagonist,– usually the musician’s friends and family. But the most common form of intimate violence takes the form of addiction to drugs and alcohol. There are obvious links between these three types of intimate violence, however they can be distinguished as independent forms of self-harm.

Isolation is a fourth element that is significant in the exploration of intimate violence in these novels. While isolation itself does not necessarily induce violence, it does have a significant impact on these characters’ lives and often enhances the effects of intimate violence.

Many authors discussed in this study seem to suggest that like systemic violence, intimate violence is actually part of what it takes to be a jazz musician. These characters often face so much social and economic hardship or racial prejudice, that in order to escape from or respond to their condition, they turn the violence inwards. Therefore, it is often the case that intimate violence is the result of years of systemic abuse. The abuse embedded in their pasts leads to a lifestyle that involves intimate violence and, more often than not, this is what ultimately destroys their music, their relationships, or even their lives.

I argue that intimate violence in novels about jazz musicians is a narrative device and is so important that it is possible to view some of these novels as being more about self-harm than music. However, the self-destruction that these characters face is also often a tool used to reflect the breaking down or rupture that may be required for creative innovation. In addition, by portraying characters who are vulnerable to their own psychological states, the authors highlight how the music is affected by the interior lives of the musicians.

The representations of isolation and of the use of drugs also reflect the Romantic and bohemian concern with the search for the sublime through the creative process. The concept of living on the edge of society and using illicit
substances to find new ways of seeing the world mirrors the bohemian search for the path to creative expression. As I will argue, part of this search involves losing a sense of self, breaking apart what you know and building something anew. Therefore these novels suggest, as do many others, that the artist’s pursuit of creation necessarily involves self-destruction.

Fictional representations of the jazz lifestyle commonly involve drugs, alcohol, isolation and physical violence, and these are also elements that make up what many call the ‘jazz life’ (cf. Gabbard; Macdonald and Wilson; Spaulding). The jazz life, these authors intimate, is not based purely on fiction, of course, but reflects the lives of many of the great jazz musicians of the twentieth century. From Billie Holiday’s heroin addiction and heavy drinking (Gioia 181), to Miles Davis’s inexplicably leaving a promising romance and also using heroin (Gioia 293), real life stories of isolation and drug addiction permeate the history of the great jazz players. While some significant players, admittedly, did not succumb to this destructive version of the jazz life, it is the stories of those who lived with intimate violence in their lives that are replicated in fiction.

In 1987, American author and essayist, Vance Bourjaily, published an article about the ‘jazz story’, claiming that many of the stories written about jazz musicians follow a particular pattern that he calls ‘The Story’:

The Story goes like this: a musician of genius, frustrated by the discrepancy between what he can achieve and the crummy life musicians lead (because of racial discrimination, or the demand that the music be made commercial, or because he has a potential he can't reach), goes mad, or destroys himself with alcohol and drugs (44).

This description is applicable to both systemic and intimate violence, yet suggests intimate violence is the only endpoint to these narratives. As I argue in the following chapter, performative violence is also an important possible outcome of these stories, but it is an element that Bourjaily fails to recognise here. However, Bourjaily’s assessment of the primary cause of intimate violence, or ‘destroying themselves’ in these novels is accurate: systemic violence, described by Bourjaily as ‘racial discrimination’ or economic hardship. He also identifies a third cause – ‘a potential he can’t reach’ – which suggests that if creative ability is squandered or suppressed, it can also lead to self-destruction. This is another form

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35 Such as Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong.
of self-harm that can also be linked to concerns with the commercial demands of working as a full-time musician.

Bourjaily suggests that this exact pattern of frustration leading to madness and self-harm may occur in ‘more than half’ of these texts (44). However, I argue that the incorporation of systemic and intimate violence is even more common if examined outside of the context of Bourjaily’s pattern. For instance, if *The Bear Comes Home* is looked at as an example of the ‘musician of genius’ who is ‘frustrated’ because of systemic violence, The Bear fits Bourjaily’s pattern except that he doesn’t go ‘mad’ or destroy himself. Instead, The Bear channels his frustration into his music, creating a performance of violence. While elements of Bourjaily’s story do apply here, others do not. Thus, I suggest that the role of violence in narratives about jazz musicians is a much more frequently used device than Bourjaily’s pattern.

Bourjaily’s framework for ‘The Story’ is limited by its simplicity, but it provides a useful starting point for discussing how common intimate violence is in literature about jazz musicians. Yet through his somewhat playful tone in his definition of The Story, he also implies that there is perhaps an element of fable about these patterns. By looking at The Story as a fable, it is also possible to argue that through the repetition of the narrative pattern, these characters are becoming stereotypes. I suggest that while they may not all go that far, many do reflect Romantic and bohemian ideals of what it means to be an artist, and this has the potential to lead to stereotypical representations.

**Romantic Myths**

In examining representations of jazz musicians as parabolic figures, it is also important to acknowledge the significance of the Romantic myth of the artist as one of the origins of this romanticised perception of the musician. I suggest that Romantic, mythical representations of artists include the following traits: a potential for genius; a devotion to creative practice (at all costs); an inclination towards both solitude and self-harm; moments of clarity which suggest they are wise or even prophetic; often experiencing altered states; and recurring unpredictable passions. These qualities render these characters as enigmatic and hence intriguing figures to explore in literature, film and many other art forms.
Montouri and Purser argue that prior to the fifteenth century, artists were not as venerated as they may be today. They suggest that after this date creative ‘persons’ were ‘defined as special individuals, whose work distinguished them as persons set apart from, or, better, above, the masses’ (73). In contrast, Elizabeth Wilson argues that the Romantic obsession with the artist developed in the early nineteenth century. She suggests that the ‘cult of the artist’ began with archetypal romantic figures such as Lord Byron and Rimbaud, who evoked a fascination with the artistic (Bohemians 52). The origins of the idealisation of the artist may in fact be a combination of the two: creativity began to be valued in the fifteenth century, and specific individuals were then idolised in the Romantic era, when great poets embodied these myths.

However, the perception that the artist is above, or outside ordinary society goes back much further – to Apollo, the god of poetry and music. Apollo was one of the twelve Greek gods of Olympus, and therefore ranked highly in the structure of gods and demigods within Greek mythology (cf. Dowden 46). Significantly, Apollo was also the god of the prophets and was also responsible for ‘regulation and good order’. The concept of the musician or poet as a prophet is an important part of the mythologising of artists, as it suggests that the artist figure has a heightened sensibility and can perhaps have an enhanced understanding of the world through their art. In contrast, the role of overseeing regulations and laws is not consistent with how artists are generally viewed today, however Dowden argues that in Greek culture the prophets or oracles provided a sense of law and order for men, hence the association (50).

Jacques Attali also argues that historically, the musician has been cast as visionary, ‘prophet’ and even ‘sorcerer’ (12). As a result, he suggests that in the ‘majority of civilizations’, the musician has been:

- simultaneously excluded (relegated to a place near the bottom of the social hierarchy) and superhuman (the genius, the adored and deified star) (12 original emphasis).

Indeed, fictional representations of artists are based not only upon this view of someone who is elite, but also upon the view of the artist as someone who is outside of society. Their very creativity sets them apart from the general population.
Having established what they consider to be a modern perspective on the artist, Montouri and Purser argue that the image of the lone artist is romanticised because of their fight against the ‘limiting, stultifying forces of the conforming masses’ (74). However, I argue that the Romantic myth may also have been reiterated in literature because art and jazz are something the ‘masses’ feel they cannot always understand. For instance, in his discussion of the myth of Robert Johnson, Eric Rothenbuhler argues that because Johnson ‘escaped the culture of every day life’, he had to be ‘mythologized’ (201). He suggests that when considering artists of great talent such as Robert Johnson, Niccolò Paganini, Franz Liszt or even Jimi Hendrix, there is an urge to account for their skills in ‘extraordinary ways’ (201). Thus these myths are developed. Myths about phenomenal creative skills, enigmatic personalities and unconventional lifestyles continually recur in literature about jazz musicians. As a result of the repetition of these traits, jazz characters start to become stereotypes.

Paul Lopes discusses the characteristics of fictional representations of jazz musicians in terms of what he calls the ‘jazz trope’. While acknowledging that elements of these portrayals are romantic, Lopes argues that the ‘deviant’ qualities that became associated with jazz life emerged in journalism, film and literature in the 1930s (1468). He suggests that in fact, these qualities, such as isolation, drug use, ‘illicit sex’, and ‘the general romantic theme of the alienated artist attempting to survive the often-dark underbelly of urban life’ have continued to recur throughout literature about jazz into the mid-2000s (1474). While I agree that these characteristics have continued through literature in this period, I would suggest that what Lopes describes as the ‘jazz trope’ can also be applied to representations of artists from other disciplines, as they are part of the Romantic myth of the artist.

Thus it may be possible that some elements of the systemic-intimate-performative framework can be applied to the examination of representations of other artists, not only jazz musicians. Indeed, intimate violence reflects the lifestyle myths around Romantic perceptions of jazz characters and can be related to the lifestyle of bohemians generally, as well as many other characters that are creative. Painters such as Vincent Van Gough, who went mad towards the end of

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36 Robert Johnson is said to have sold his soul to the devil in exchange for his prodigious guitar playing talent (Rothenbuhler 199).
his life, or Jackson Pollock who was a chronic alcoholic, also embody these narratives of intimate violence. However, as shown in Chapter Two, the history of the music invests jazz characters with a background of violence. This suggests their creativity and creative practice come from an inherently violent place, unlike many other art forms. In addition, in Chapter Four I argue that the representation of the performance of jazz provides more potential to dramatically reflect violence in relation to creativity than any other art form.

**Turning the Violence Inwards**

Bourjaily mentions many texts throughout his article, but names Holmes’ *The Horn* (1958) as ‘The Story raised from paradigm to parable’. Bourjaily argues that in addition to replicating the pattern, *The Horn* explores ‘some provocative things about [American] culture’ (45). This exploration includes what he calls an examination of the ‘demonic element in American culture’ and the main character, Edgar Poole is a demon of sorts – a withered alcoholic causing havoc through New York at the end of his life (Bourjaily 45). As discussed in Chapter Two, the intimate violence of *The Horn* is largely the result of the systemic violence Poole has suffered throughout his life. However, Poole’s response to his systemic abuse is ultimately to turn the violence inwards, so the demise he suffers, in the form of alcoholism and isolation, is ultimately self-inflicted. Indeed, his urge towards self-destruction is the one thing that survives his collapse: ‘Something in him was indestructible, some merciless pride with which he chose to victimize himself’ (Holmes *The Horn* 13).

Early in the novel, a young saxophonist, known as Walden, attempts to ‘cut’ Poole, in an onstage battle of saxophones to see who is the better player. As they play, Walden becomes aware that Poole is speaking through his horn, and ‘thereby he was placing himself outside their mercy and their judgment, in a no man’s land where he must go alone’ (Holmes *The Horn* 17). This moment becomes the beginning of Poole’s isolation and final descent. From this point onwards, he blazes a drunken trail through New York, spiralling downwards until he dies in the arms of Geordie, his former lover. At Poole’s death, Holmes makes reference to the deaths of many great jazz musicians. This reinforces a pattern that
is similar to Bourjaily’s ‘Story’, and places Poole amongst some of the greatest musicians of the twentieth century:

He will join the others who obsess us still: Bessie moaning in her blood as they carted her crosstown; King puttering away his days forgotten in Savannah; Bix coughing in his horn or glass; old Fats gone finally to sleep in the ultimate lower berth; young black Fats grown pale and thin; Wardell killed down hard in a snarling bar; Bunk finding he could still pick cotton; Tesche dead in an auto crash; Brownie dead in an auto crash; Bird dead, Horn dead – tuberculosis, narcosis, arteriosclerosis, neurosis – It does not matter what carried them off. Once they blew the truth (Holmes The Horn 242).

In this musing on death, Holmes reminds us that these were not only ill-fated musicians who lived hard and dangerous lives, but also that they were seen almost as prophets who ‘blew the truth’, or showed their audiences something honest. In this description, the rhyming cluster of ‘tuberculosis, narcosis, arteriosclerosis, neurosis’ suggests that this is a mere sample of the disease and excesses that have killed these musicians. Poole’s life has reflected this world of excess and living hard, and it has been encapsulated through his death.

In addition, at the end of his life his music has faltered and there is a suggestion that he has perhaps squandered his creative potential. He is no longer the best. He has lost the battle of the saxophones to the younger musician Walden and this loss pushes him over the edge. Holmes uses the simile of an alcoholic to describe Poole’s defeat, indicating the root cause of Poole’s physical decline:

Edgar had horrified himself, like a drunk who sees, in the single, focused moment of a hangover, the twitching blotchy ruin of his own face, the shadow across his eyes – knowing all along that the horror will not fight down the thirst (The Horn 20).

Poole is horrified at what he has played and knows that more playing will not ease his humiliation. This simile is also poignant because Poole’s musical ability has not been able to withstand the destructiveness of his alcoholism. The demise of the music also leads to more intimate violence: drinking, isolation and finally death. For many of the characters in The Horn, music represents life in this way, as Holmes emphasises through the character of Walden, to whom ‘the saxophone was, at once, his key to the world in which he found himself’ (The Horn 5). Holmes intertwines jazz and life, and in so doing shows that violence in life brings violence to music and vice versa.
The Jazz Life and the Bohemian Life

The pattern or ideal of the jazz life is based on an older lifestyle perception around musicians and artists – the bohemian life. The bohemian life was one of excess, and arguably can also be associated with Dionysus, the god of wine. Dionysus is also commonly associated with ‘frenetic dancing’ and ‘sleep’ or ‘altered states’ (cf. Cole 333). The result of living a life of excess in Dionysian stories is self-destruction or madness. Elizabeth Wilson argues that for the bohemians, the ‘madness of excess’ was also connected to artistic production because the ‘genius’ needed ‘heightened experience’, and this came in the form of drugs and alcohol (or Dionysian ‘altered states’) (Bohemians 196). Wilson also suggests that the destruction inherent in living a life of excess also provided an excuse for those who were not creative themselves, but still wanted to be bohemian: if they failed at their artistic pursuit, they could blame their lifestyle, rather than their lack of talent (Bohemians 196).

This is seen clearly in James Baldwin’s exploration of bohemianism in Another Country (1962), which begins with the demise of Rufus Scott, an African-American jazz drummer, who falls victim to his own propensity towards violence and alcoholism. Rufus’s friends encourage this lifestyle and are unashamedly bohemian. They are writers, musicians and actors who drink a lot, use illicit drugs, discuss art and literature, and make some attempt at resisting convention. However, they are not necessarily successful in their careers.

David Brooks, discussing the development of the ‘Bobo’, considers the ‘radical 1960s’ and describes bohemian counterculture as being populated by ‘free spirits who flouted convention. They were the artists and the intellectuals – the hippies and the Beats’ (10). It is these bohemian qualities that the main characters of Another Country embody, while the violence of Rufus’s death seeps into their lives. In addition, Baldwin’s bohemians push themselves to try unconventional ways of living by deviating from socially acceptable conceptions of racial relations and sex. As Elizabeth Wilson suggests, the bohemian was ‘a deep sea diver who plunged into an alien element and exposed himself to its dangers in order to extract its treasure, the truth of experience’ (Bohemians 29). As the characters of Another Country search for the ‘truth of experience’, they attempt to
form a counterculture through the ‘alien element’ of new attitudes to race and sex, two elements that ultimately impact on Rufus in such a way as to cause the psychosis that leads to his suicide.

At the time of the publication of *Another Country* in 1962, Baldwin was ‘deeply engaged with the larger conversation and debate between black nationalism and the civil rights movement’ (Reddinger 117). Keith Mitchell argues that it is in fact ‘the dehumanizing legacy of slavery, southern violence, racial oppression and Jim Crow [that] haunts Baldwin's urban landscapes and threatens to destroy the relationships between all of the characters in *Another Country*’ (26). I agree that once again, this systemic violence, or the fear of such violence, is what drives these character’s actions. Yet it is also the sense of living outside of society, on the edge of both the black and white communities, that informs how the characters choose to live. Violence hovers around their choice to exist in the bohemian counterculture of New York. The result of this violence for Rufus, however, is in fact intimate violence in the form of physical self-harm.

The novel is permeated by a sense that love and violence are linked. Through this association, the novel also explores the second form of intimate violence – violence occurring between lovers, family and friends. Aggression is represented through depictions of lovers and friends accusing each other of racial condescension and violence, even as they acknowledge their love for one another.

Rufus is tormented by his love–hate relationship with his male friend Vivaldo. As Rufus wanders through the New York night, he remembers a night with his white friend Vivaldo and Vivaldo’s ex-girlfriend, Jane, who is also white. On this night, both Rufus and Vivaldo are beaten to a point close to death because Jane provokes some white men into attacking Rufus because of his race. Even after Vivaldo and Rufus stagger out of the bar, they argue but still reassure each other of their love for one another, as Vivaldo, half dead, assures Rufus, ‘I love you, you shithead. I really do’ (*Another Country* 44). The intimate violence in this scene of extreme racial tension arises from systemic violence. Yet it is an event which builds to the psychological violence Rufus later inflicts upon himself.

Another instance of emotional violence associated with love occurs earlier in the novel, when Rufus first meets his white girlfriend Leona. Not long after meeting, they have violent sex on a balcony at a bohemian party after the ‘squares were beginning to drift away’ (Baldwin *Another Country* 26). As Rufus begins to
take off Leona’s clothes he says to her, ‘Go ahead, fight. I like it’ and she begins to cry (Another Country 30). As their lovemaking progresses, it becomes more and more violent until ‘he felt himself strangling, about to explode or die’, as though he would either orgasm or die – love and death intertwined in the one act (Another Country 31).

Significantly, Leona is from the southern states of America, and Rufus’s feelings towards her are made more complex by the legacy of Jim Crow:

to remember Leona was also – somehow – to remember the eyes of his mother, the rage of his father, the beauty of his sister. It was to remember the streets of Harlem… the white policeman who had taught him how to hate (Another Country 16).

The memory of his mother and sister shows that Rufus feels tenderness towards Leona, but he also associates her with anger and violence as suggested by the memory of his father and racial prejudice. After this violent beginning, their relationship deteriorates considerably until one night Vivaldo saves Leona from Rufus’s violent beating. However it is too late: Leona has already gone mad and this sends Rufus on a month of homelessness and degradation, culminating in death.

Even after Rufus’s death, Baldwin continues to blend the violence of racial tension with love and desire. As Ida, Rufus’s sister and Vivaldo’s lover in the latter part of the novel, rests on her couch with the door open, a young white boy watches her and masturbates. As Amy Reddinger suggests, the ‘hate-filled neighbors who protest her presence’ because of her race ‘simultaneously make her a spectacle of desire within her own home’ (122). Yet it is not only in her own home that she is both hated and a ‘spectacle of desire’, but on the streets and in the club in which she sings.

As this incident shows, African-American characters are eroticised in the eyes of the white community in the novel. They are also representatives of a subculture that the white bohemian characters wish to access through their contact with them. This reflects Norman Mailer’s polemic in ‘The White Negro’, published just three years before Another Country. In describing white hipsters and bohemians, Mailer argues that they are ‘urban adventurers who drifted out at night looking for action with a black man’s code’ (187). He claims that these ‘white Negros’ wanted to access the energy of the African-American life, and that
part of this lifestyle necessarily involved sex, or the ‘primitive’ and ‘obligatory pleasures of the body’ (187). As mentioned in Chapter One, Mailer also links this hypersexuality with music, arguing that that the music of jazz is a ‘Negro’ art form, that it is eroticised and that ‘jazz is orgasm’ (Mailer 187).

Many of Baldwin’s characters also seem to be drawn to the exoticism of the African-American characters, though Baldwin is less drawn to stereotypes. Rufus’s psychosis comes partly from a fear of this bohemian admiration of his race and its association with sex. As Rufus tries to tell Vivaldo what went wrong with his relationship with Leona, he aggressively describes what he sees as her racial sexual obsession:

‘She loves the coloured folks so much,’ said Rufus, ‘sometimes I just can’t stand it. You know all that chick knows about me? The only thing she knows?’ He put his hand on his sex, brutally, as though he would tear it out, and seemed pleased to see Vivaldo wince. He sat down on the bed again. ‘That’s all.’ (Another Country 75 original emphasis)

It is as though Rufus is actually scared of Leona’s desire for him, and that he thinks she only wants to be with him sexually because he is black. This passage suggests that because Rufus believes Leona knows nothing about him, in her eyes he is defined only by his racial identity and sexuality: he is simply a body and a symbol of the exotic and erotic. Brandon Gordon agrees with Rufus’s assessment of Leona and argues that in fact, both Leona and Vivaldo are examples of primitivists who have an ‘erotic fixation with blackness’ and that ‘Rufus’s insistent complaint that Leona views him merely as a walking phallus applies equally to Vivaldo as well’ (82). But whether this is true of Leona is not made apparent in Another Country, though she does seem to be more in love with Rufus than he is willing to acknowledge, suggesting both Rufus’s and Brandon’s assessments are too simplistic. For instance, as Vivaldo tries to help Leona after a particularly brutal beating from Rufus, Leona still defends Rufus’ actions, showing her devotion to him:

‘I love him,’ she said helplessly, ‘I love him, I can’t help it. No matter what he does to me. He’s just lost and he beats me because he can’t find nothing else to hit.’ (Another Country 66)

Vivaldo thwarts racial convention by living with his African-American girlfriend, Ida, and he may indeed be erotically fixated on both Ida and Rufus. Yet
he is perhaps also invested in his relationships with Ida and Rufus because of their music. Mailer concludes his argument with the claim that ‘the Negro jazzman … was the cultural mentor of a people’ (194). If Mailer’s comments are presumed to be an accurate portrayal of bohemian attitudes towards African-Americans at the time, it could be argued that Baldwin’s bohemians, such as Vivaldo, reflect this admiration of jazz musicians through the encouragement of their ‘cultural’ output: their music. Vivaldo supports both Rufus and Ida in their musical pursuits, and yet is frustrated because he is still kept at a distance from the black musical community because he is white. As Ida prepares to perform in a club, and Vivaldo watches on, his role as lover is mocked by Ida’s fellow musicians, and he has an ‘uncertain bravado; as though there were an incipient war going on between himself and the [black] musicians, having to do with rank and colour and authority’ (Another Country 249).

Early in their relationship, Rufus realises he is apprehensive about walking down the street with his white girlfriend Leona; as they begin an outing he becomes tense because ‘he had not thought at all about this world and its power to hate and destroy’ (Another Country 36). This scene reminds us that this is a socially unacceptable relationship, and yet the white characters persist in their pursuit of such relationships until their lives fall apart. Their longing for erotic relationships with the African-American characters leads them towards intimate violence that ruptures their otherwise comfortable lives.

Wilson also discusses how this longing for erotic love can have the potential to be intertwined with violence. She argues that bohemians embraced exotic and erotic love outside of conventional marital relationships ‘since it was always a fatal and a forbidden passion: erotic love as transgression, destiny and death’ (Bohemians 181 original emphasis). Similarly, in the brief passages depicting jazz in Another Country, Baldwin describes the music as intertwined with love and aggression. In a moment of performative violence, the saxophonist screamed through the horn ‘Do you love me? Do you love me?’ while the audience were ‘assaulted’ by him, as he ‘hurled his outrage at them’ (Baldwin Another Country 18 original emphasis).

37 Wilson suggests that these transgressive relationships (such as homosexual or interracial relationships) were considered to be dangerous and fatal because they were sinful and damnable (Bohemians 181).
The other way characters attempt to break convention in the novel, and thereby gain access to a bohemian lifestyle, is through their sexual orientation. While the only overtly gay characters are Rufus’s former lover, Eric, and his boyfriend Yves, both Vivaldo and Rufus have homosexual encounters. Yet even homosexuality is not strictly adhered to: Eric becomes bisexual as he also has an affair with a woman, Cass Selinski. Reddinger describes Cass as a cliché: ‘the white, bohemian, middle-class mother of two who cheats on her husband’ (119). Yet, as the sexual relationship is with a gay man, Baldwin pushes past this cliché into more unexpected territory, as Reddinger further argues, Cass enters a much more complex and opaque world of sexual and emotional affiliation and proximity. It is an affair that neither the reader nor the characters can understand as it exists entirely off the grid of intelligible sexuality, falling between the binaries of normative and deviant sexualities (119).

In this way, the boundaries around conventions are continually challenged throughout the book, reminding us that these characters are living bohemian lives. Yet the disruption of binaries, such as through the representation of bisexuality, also reflects the experimentation of the music that surrounds the characters. Baldwin represents music as having the capacity to simultaneously enforce stillness, create light, assault the audience and repeat ‘unbearably endlessly’, as in the abovementioned example of a young performer playing a solo:

*Do you love me? Do you love me?* This, anyway, was the question Rufus heard, the same phrase, unbearably endlessly, and variously repeated with all the force the boy had. The silence became strict with abruptly focused attention, cigarettes were unlit, and drinks stayed on the tables; and in all of the faces, even the most ruined and the most dull, a curious, wary light appeared … And yet the question was terrible and real; the boy was blowing with his lungs and guts out of his own short past; somewhere in that past, in the gutters or the gang fights, behind marijuana or the needle… he had received a blow from which he never would recover (*Another Country* 18 original emphasis).

The performer is not restrained by the limits of conventional melodic movement and through extreme repetition it creates a new and powerful emotive, narrative, and physical sound. This is an example of the character’s past being performed into the music, and the suggested systemic and intimate violence has led to this moment of performative violence.
By the end of the novel, it is clear that while the bohemian and jazz lifestyles are compatible, they only lead to intimate violence. Vivaldo and Ida do survive their unconventional relationship, but only because what began as infatuation with ‘the other’ turns to real love. Even after Ida has cheated on Vivaldo, they remain together, though Baldwin continues to blend love and violence through their interaction:

‘Vivaldo,’ she said, wearily, ‘just one thing. I don’t want you to be understanding. I don’t want you to be kind, okay?’ She looked directly at him, and an unnameable heat and tension flashed violently alive between them, as close to hatred as it was to love (Another Country 420 original emphasis).

Thus, while this relationship does survive the intimate violence they have so far inflicted upon one another through promiscuousness and racial stereotyping, there is a suggestion that the violence will continue, even as their love grows.

The link between the jazz life and bohemian life in Another Country suggests jazz musicians and bohemian artists are one and the same; they have the same concerns and have the potential to fall victim to the same forms of violence. Yet in this novel it is the jazz musician, Rufus, who falls the hardest. His story, placed at the beginning of the novel, functions as a kind of warning to the other characters, and is a parable of the potential destruction they could face. Rufus drinks the most, has the most unlikely girlfriend, is the most violent, descends into the deepest psychosis, and finally suffers the greatest demise: death. All the characters suffer because of their attempts to exist outside of society’s conventions, and they reflect many of Rufus’s life choices, but none push themselves as hard as him. The jazz musician is the pinnacle of excess.

**The Precipice**

*Another Country* is divided into three books and Rufus’s suicide heralds the end of the first book within the novel. While the rest of the novel follows the lives of these other bohemians, who are predominantly writers, their lives are all deeply affected by what Rufus has done. However, as Rufus is the character of interest here, I will now focus on the first book of the novel that charts Rufus’s last night alive in New York, much like the journey of Holmes’ Edgar Poole. Both
novels explore a character on the edge, walking a path that could lead one of two ways – death or salvation – and this reflects the internal conflict between two states that is frequently represented in novels about artists and musicians. This complex internal conflict is often the final stage of psychosis before these characters reach their frequently unhappy end points.

Unlike Poole, as Rufus finds and meets with his friends it seems that potentially the worst of his troubles are behind him. There is hope because he is young and handsome and has friends who love him despite his terrible treatment of Leona. Yet while he tells his friend Cass, ‘I’m going to try to pull myself together … and get back to work’, in reality he finds it ‘unimaginable that he would ever work again’ indicating his inability to return to his music (Another Country 86).

This internal dialogue is indicative of the manner in which many novelists represent artists as tortured: the attempt to find the balance between two states. Often, these characters are trying to find a balance between their relationships and their music, or their lifestyle and their livelihood, which are frequently at conflict with one another. For instance, characters such as Buddy Bolden and Edgar Poole struggle to balance alcoholism and their ability to play, and both The Bear and Moody seek a sense of balance between their personal identities and their musical identities. Here, Rufus is walking a precipice between stability and instability, and potentially between sanity and insanity. Even as he sits on the train travelling to his parent’s home, he switches between the urge to go home, and the seeming inevitability of his death:

He had thought that he would get off here and go home; but he watched the girl who reminded him of his sister as she moved sullenly past white people and stood for a moment on the platform before walking up the steps. Suddenly he knew that he was never going home any more (Another Country 92).

Prompted by the reminder of his sister, who is apparently saddened by living in a white world, Rufus decides he will commit suicide. It is evident that it is the systemic violence of his past, the tension he feels towards the white population of America, that triggers this step towards intimate violence in the form of suicide. While Baldwin foregrounds systemic violence throughout Another Country, the psychological aspects of intimate violence are very clear,
making it a more immediate and dominant theme throughout the novel. It is also what makes the novel a compelling and well-crafted representation of the harsh realities of both the African-American life and the jazz life, and not all novels bring out both these elements so effectively.

In addition, Baldwin lets the psychological conflict within Rufus impact on his music, which again is something few authors successfully portray. Indeed, the last time Rufus played music was the night he met Leona, who, as previously mentioned, reminded him of the racial prejudice in his past because she is from the South. It is unclear why Rufus does not return to music after this point, but there is a suggestion that it is his relationship with Leona that is to blame. ‘She’s destroying me,’ he explains to Vivaldo (Another Country 75). Their violent relationship has consumed him and he is no longer a musician, so it has virtually made him disappear; his identity obliterated. Then, when Leona is taken away, he really does disappear into the streets of New York, and leaves everything he knows behind.

His homelessness is a form of self-inflicted torture as he has other options, but he chooses to punish himself in this isolating way. The novel begins with Rufus’s desolate position: ‘He was so tired, he had fallen so low, that he scarcely had the energy to be angry;’ but we quickly learn that it is his choice to be here, as he ‘hoped he would not be recognized’ and has the option of asking for help from a friend, but hesitates to visit him (Another Country 13).

Throughout this first book, Rufus is portrayed as a man walking a precipice. As he meanders through the streets of New York, he considers his possibilities, alternating between returning home, prostituting himself, asking friends for help, and finally killing himself. When he does go to Vivaldo for help, he considers what could end his pain:

Yet, he was aware, perhaps for the first time in his life, that nothing would stop it, nothing: this was himself. Rufus was aware of every inch of Rufus … His body was controlled by laws he did not understand. Nor did he understand what force within this body had driven him into such a desolate place. The most impenetrable of mysteries moved in this darkness for less than a second, hinting of reconciliation (Another Country 61).

38 For instance, many novels, such as Bart Schneider’s Blue Bossa or Dorothy Baker’s Young Man with a Horn, describe the music-making process but do not invest it with the psychological concerns relevant to the characters in the novels.
This passage suggests that at some point, he may be able to reconnect his physical self with his mental self and if he can make it home these two sides of him will be reconciled. As he tries to connect his internal struggle with his actions in the physical, real world, he is also hovering between salvation and death, trying to decide what his next move will be. Brandon Gordon argues that this tension within Rufus is ultimately what destroys him:

In fact, part of the reason for Rufus's demise lies in his estrangement from his own interior self... Rufus's heightened awareness of the physical makeup of his body does not necessarily translate into greater self-knowledge or consciousness of what drives it. He is, paradoxically, both absolutely present in his body, conscious of every component of his physical self, and at the same time entirely alienated from it, unable to grasp the drives, impulses, and desires that motivate him to action and bring him to his present, ruined state (Gordon 84).

Rufus is thus poised between understanding himself and being alienated from himself and even as he stands on the bridge about to jump, it is as though his physical body and his mind are separate. While 'something in him screamed, Why? Why?' as though he can't understand his own actions, his body still lets go of the railing and 'he felt himself going over, head down, the wind, the stars, the lights, the water, all rolled together' (Another Country 93). Choosing to begin this description with 'he felt' mediates the perception, and distances Rufus from what is happening, as though he is conscious of his physical body while his mind moves elsewhere.

Dualities are of great importance to Baldwin’s novel, black and white, mind and body, sanity and insanity, and they are issues that affect all of the characters, not least Rufus. A concern with balancing between two states or dualities is a theme that dominates literature about bohemianism and its ideals. As Elizabeth Wilson argues, bohemians are often superficially stereotyped as ‘jolly fornicators, roisterers and barflies’, but these traits do not account for the philosophy of excess in their lives (Bohemians 195). In reference to Baudelaire’s claim that bohemians have a ‘taste for the infinite’ (cf. Wilson 195), Wilson explores the notion of excess through a discussion of the unknown path:

If Bohemia was a journey as well as a destination, it was a journey in the dark to a land of danger as well as pleasure. It promised a path along the
edge of a precipice, and it was impossible to know in advance whether that path led to revelation or madness, triumph or oblivion (Bohemians 195).

This is also a concern common to many jazz musician characters. As we see with Rufus, he is on a journey that leads to madness and finally oblivion, but there is hope along the way that he may find his feet again. Once again Baldwin uses the physical demise of Rufus to explore his psychological downfall and adds greater depth to the characterisation of the jazz musician in this way. Rufus is also a solitary character and lives on the streets of New York alone for a month before he kills himself in a private and unwitnessed act. This portrayal of the artist in isolation is a very common image in novels about jazz musicians.

Isolation and the Wilderness

In the novels I have so far discussed in the thesis: Holmes’ Edgar Poole vanishes and walks the streets in isolation; Simmons’ Raymond Douglas hides from his family and friends as he avoids the loss he has experienced; Petry’s Lutie Johnson is alone from the beginning of the novel to the end; and Ondaatje’s Buddy Bolden leaves New Orleans for two years before he makes his final, catastrophic comeback. Many more novels and short stories about jazz musicians include these times of significant isolation. Isolation is not violence in and of itself, but rather, it complicates the characters’ personal relationships and has the potential to increase the impact of their psychological and pathological conditions. It is through their isolation, and being left alone with their thoughts, that these characters will often turn their violence inwards. In addition, by isolating these musician characters, authors draw on the myth of the solitary artist.

This myth dates back to the earliest depictions of the artist in literature, and solitary musicians include characterisations dating back to the Austrian author, Johann Beer’s Amusing Summer Days (Die kurtzweiligen Sommer-Täge 1683) and Thomas Mann’s Doctor Faustus (1947), through to Janette Turner Hospital’s Orpheus Lost (2007) and Sonia Orchard’s The Virtuoso (2009). Jacques Attali argues that this myth relates to the earliest conception of the musician: the vagabond or troubadour who does not move within society, but rather outside it, passing through and commenting on what he sees (14). Of course, the myth of the solitary artist exists in all the arts, not just music and, as
discussed earlier, potentially dates back to the fifteenth century and the turn towards self-expression in the visual arts (cf. Montuori and Purser 74), or even earlier, to the Greco-Roman myth of Apollo.

Linda Rauch suggests that ‘creative types’ are on the whole hypersensitive to the world, and so need to isolate themselves in order to have a break from the overstimulation they experience (343). She posits that they isolate themselves through both physical isolation and drug use in order to deal with the psychological problem she calls ‘the poet syndrome’ that ‘suggests that the psychological difficulty is associated with the sensitivity inherent in creative expression’ (345).

Rauch is assuming both that artists are hypersensitive, and that they are unable to deal with their hypersensitivities without drugs or isolation, which clearly is not the case for all artists. However, hypersensitivity and the use of drugs and periods of isolation are also common in these novels, and thus it is an idea willingly perpetuated by literature. In her article, ‘The Cultural Framing of Addiction’, Robin Room argues that, in fact, addiction is a useful narrative device:

As symbolically charged behaviors, drinking and drug use serve many functions in telling a story: in setting a context, as indicators of character, as motivators of the plot, and sometimes simply as a technical device for the storyteller (229).

I argue that isolating the main character is also a ‘symbolically charged’ authorial decision as it provides the characters with an escape from responsibility, an opportunity to look inwards and emphasise interiority, or a time to renew their sense of self.

In contrast to Raunch’s argument that artists require isolation for relief from their artistic lives, Janet Lyon suggests that artists and bohemians actually need social environments. While bohemians may have once been social outcasts by definition, Lyon argues that in fact it was in the social realm of the modern salon that bohemians thrived, and this realm was ‘a living theater, a collaborative

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39 Felix Pyat, a French journalist in 1834 described bohemians as young artists whose ideas and customs “puts them outside the law, banished from society…” quoted in (Wilson Bohemians 21)
and palimpsestic space for the display of evolving metropolitan style through … vague but unmistakable signifying practices of cultural vanguardism’ (Lyon 690).

Lyon discusses Georg Simmel’s concern with the isolation of modernity, also reflected in these novels, as only capable of being broken by the sociability of the modern salon:

Where urban modernity taints social contact through its defining emphasis on objective content, the play form of sociability cultivates interrelational potential through a fluid structure of intimacy. This structure may be generated within certain settings where individualism is balanced by collectivity, where creative extensibility finds its source and its limits in ethical (other-honoring) contact (Lyon 689).

This conflict between Rauch’s concept of the isolated artist and Lyon’s argument for the need for intimacy is encapsulated by the pattern of these jazz novels. While writers portray artists as characters who isolate themselves, the music of the characters in jazz novels is necessarily collaborative. So the musicians, in many of these novels, leave their families and friends for the world of music – they find a new intimacy in the collaboration with fellow musicians, in an environment where they will not be judged by their gender, race, or even, in the case of the Zabor, their species.

A novel that reflects this pattern of isolation is followed by musical collaboration is Bart Schneider’s Blue Bossa. Published in 1998, this novel is rarely addressed in critical literature, perhaps because of its simplicity, but it is perhaps one of the clearest depictions of intimate violence and the jazz life. Unashamedly based on the later life of Chet Baker, Blue Bossa follows the story of Ronnie Reboulet’s return from obscurity to fame. Once a trumpeter of renown, he had stopped playing when he lost all his teeth to his heroin addiction and finally cleaned himself up. However, on the return of his long-lost daughter, he decides to begin playing again.

In order to begin to play, he chooses to leave his new, clean life behind. He has a partner, a daughter and a grandson, but he leaves them all to disappear into the woods to re-train his embouchure. This is very similar to Ondaatje’s portrayal of Buddy Bolden who also goes to a cabin in the woods to re-train before he returns to New Orleans to make his comeback. In addition, Rafi Zabor’s
The Bear has several periods alone in the woods when he practices his saxophone, trying to find new sounds and perfect his playing.

This clean-living isolation is different to the isolation the characters achieve through drugs and alcohol and the discipline involved is palpable. Reboulet ‘doesn’t leave the cabin during the first two weeks’ and ‘plays long tones and scales, and works on articulation exercises’ (Schneider 144). Bolden writes to his friend Webb and tells him, ‘After breakfast I train. Mouth and lips and breathing. Exercises. Scales. For hours till my jaws and stomach ache’ (Ondaatje 100). The representation of discipline is in stark contrast to the portrayal of these characters as men living a life of excess. The discipline thus highlights their commitment to the music – they are capable of great focus when it comes to their musical development, but not when it comes to anything else in their lives. Therefore the music is represented as the most important part of their lives and the only rules to which they will adhere are those of practice.

The fact that all three characters are in the wilderness and have a disciplined approach to practising their art reflects Romantic and pagan beliefs about the restorative powers of nature, as discussed by Rousseau (Sage 31). In her examination of the wilderness in relation to literature, Vanessa Sage argues that in literature, the ‘encounter with nature constitutes a new connection for the individual, a connection to something bigger than oneself, perhaps even to the divine’ (24). Thus while these characters are isolating themselves from the modern world, thereby often destroying important relationships they have forged, they are also represented as potentially doing something positive for their music. While they focus on the discipline of their practice, they also embrace this connection with nature and often find new ways of playing.

Indeed, Zabor’s Bear immerses himself in nature as he communicates through song with a catbird in the woods. Sage argues also that through the their connections with nature, the protagonists ‘hope to be able to hear nature’ and this is what The Bear does (41 my emphasis). At the end of the novel, he whistles a Thelonious Monk song ‘Well You Needn’t’ to the bird, and it replies to him with the end of the phrase, which would be the word ‘needn’t’, if it were sung with words (Zabor 474). As the bird repeats the notes over and over, The Bear finally becomes frustrated, telling the bird to, ‘Stop impersonating the voice of wisdom’ (476).
Admittedly, because he is a Bear, Zabor suggests that he is more likely to be able to communicate with nature in a way that humans cannot (as he is also able to speak to dogs). However, this special power also renders him as a kind of hero with abilities above and beyond what humans have, further reinforcing his status as a heroic genius. This moment with the bird is The Bear’s final scene of isolation, and he is alone with nature when the book ends. Though he may have touched the sublime, or even the divine, he has ruined his personal relationships and remains alone. While he may have improved his music and found a connection with nature, the isolation has caused intimate violence in that it has destroyed his personal relationship with Iris.

Schneider’s Reboulet also ruins his personal relationships through isolation. When he decides he will begin performing again, he befriends a young piano player in an inconspicuous bar and starts performing there, forming a new collaboration. He doesn’t write to his partner, Betty, but simply sends her poems written by someone else. When Betty finally complains that the poems ‘did not satisfy’ her, Reboulet stops writing altogether (Schneider 150). This refusal to participate in their relationship, even as it begins to fall apart, highlights Reboulet’s willingness to isolate himself and his destructive self-obsession.

Reboulet and his new collaborator, Artie, move to Los Angeles for a more permanent gig with two more musicians and they adjust to their new lifestyle quickly. Not long after this move, Reboulet is recognised as a famous musician and he begins to use heroin again. Significantly, the chapter in which we are told of Reboulet’s return to drugs is titled ‘The End of Anonymity’, and it is the fame and recognition that seems to allow Reboulet the licence to begin using again (Schneider 204). His decision to start using is played down by the narrator, ‘He’s been using for a few weeks now’ is all we are told, and ‘If you’re going to use, Ronnie decides, you may as well use something that you like’ is an indicator that it is heroin to which he has returned.

Although the renewal of his drug habit is represented in a low-key way, it does not imply that the drug use is not important, but rather that it is inevitable and therefore unsurprising. Schneider represents this decision as one that is neither dramatic nor sentimental. It is as though Reboulet thinks nothing of the

40 The association between music and the search for the sublime will be discussed in more detail shortly.
fact that he had been clean for six years prior to this, after having survived a very strong addiction. While this is perhaps unsatisfying for the reader, as there is a feeling Reboulet is letting us, and his partner Betty, down, it does suggest that perhaps this is normal behaviour, that being a famous jazz musician necessarily involves drug use. Although he has left his clean and happy life behind, he has found a new and potentially destructive collaboration with his fellow musicians, his fame, and drugs.

**Craving an Escape: Addiction**

As previously discussed, many of the most prominent jazz musicians of the twentieth century were addicts, and any homage to Chet Baker such as the one written by Schneider, heroin use had to be addressed. Nevertheless, it is remarkable how many jazz musician characters in fiction are addicts of some kind. Once again I return to Bourjaily’s assessment of ‘The Story’ which concludes with the musician character ‘destroy[ing] himself with alcohol and drugs’ (2). As suggested earlier, Bourjaily’s parable is a simplification of the types of intimate violence I am discussing here, but it is a useful framework from which to garner more nuanced implications of the downfall of these jazz musicians – particularly in relation to addiction.

Another novel that Bourjaily refers to as a landmark example of ‘The Story’ is Dorothy Baker’s 1942 novel, *Young Man With a Horn* (though he does assert that ‘the best thing about it is the title’ (44)). Like many of the novels I discuss, Baker’s exploration of the life of Rick Martin is a reflection on the life of a real musician, in this case, trumpeter Leon ‘Bix’ Beiderbecke, who died an alcoholic in 1931 (Chilton 29). Like Beiderbecke, Martin is a white trumpet player who becomes a big success, having learnt his craft from African-American musicians.

Baker provides us with a synopsis of the narrative in the prologue for the novel, which highlights Martin’s experience of the jazz life:

> He pushed it too far. He didn’t sleep and he didn’t eat because he could do so many other things. He could drink, for instance, and before he knew it he was drinking almost constantly in order to keep everything else going (3).
The narrator does not blame the alcohol itself, but rather Martin’s ‘[in]ability to keep the body in check while the spirit goes on being what it must be’ (6). The music, or his commitment to it, is also to blame for his death:

In Rick Martin’s music there was, from the first, an element of self-destruction. He expected too much from it and he came to it with too great a need (4).

This is reflected in an incident towards the end of Martin’s life and career, when he records an album on which he tries to hit a ‘killer’ note, but fails (Baker 229). He has been out all night drinking and playing and hits a new point of exhaustion, collapsing after the end of the track. We are reminded of the narrator’s warning at the beginning of the novel, as one of the other musician’s remarks:

I don’t know what the hell that boy thinks a trumpet will do. That note he was going for, that thing he was trying for – there isn’t any such thing. Not on a horn (Baker 230).

Martin has played himself into oblivion at this point, and his physical body is unable to keep up with his desire to play and the sound he wishes to make. Baker portrays the musician as willing to sacrifice everything for his music, and yet describes him as a victim of his addiction and desire to create because he is, ‘burdened with difficult baggage, the soul of an artist’ (6). Martin’s life becomes secondary to his creative impulse. In making him a tragic victim, Baker provides a potential justification for his alcohol addiction, which is really the cause of his demise.

The suggestion that the musician is vulnerable to drugs or alcohol because of their creative work is similar to what is explored in addiction discourse such as Rauch’s ‘Poet Syndrome’ discussed above (also cf. Knafo). However, in most narratives about jazz musicians, it is not only the creative mind of the artist that leads to their propensity towards addiction, but also their background of systemic violence and their participation in the jazz life.

It would perhaps be too simple an explanation if we were to accept that the addictions of these musician characters are a result of what Danielle Knafo describes as the burden of many creative individuals who are:
exquisitely, even painfully, sensitive, and they frequently experience sensory overload as a result of having to attend to every aspect of their environment. Substances often moderate or extinguish the ‘afferent’ side of their talent, emancipating the person from the tyranny of mind, senses and memory (582).

Yet Baker does not suggest that Martin has sensory overload; rather, he indicates that he was full of life and played hard. It was not his creative desire that drove him to drink, but rather participating in the jazz life that did so. Similarly, Reboulet in Blue Bossa does not use drugs to dull the overstimulation, but rather because he has returned to the social environment of the jazz life, and the drugs were part of that life.

Perhaps these novels are as much about addiction as they are about music. It may be the case that exploring the lives of musicians as addicts is one of the only ways we can connect with addicts in our society – because through their music they still contribute something. Derrida argues that the normal drug addict ‘produces nothing, nothing true or real’, as he ‘cuts himself off from the world, in exile from reality … he escapes into a world of simulacrum and fiction’ that is an ‘experience without truth’ (Derrida 25-6). The only time, Derrida argues, that an addict is ‘legitimate’ is when ‘he participates, at least indirectly, in the production and consumption of goods’ (26). That is, as long as the musician continues to perform, he or she can be accepted by society.

As with systemic violence, it is possible to see the intimate violence in the form of drug addiction in these characters as a device that engenders empathy in the reader. As Derrida suggests, although the drug addicts are isolated from those around them, through music we can still connect with them and perhaps make an attempt at understanding their condition.

There is also potential for empathising with the figure of the addict if the addict is portrayed as a victim. In both literature and contemporary addiction discourse, such as the discourse by Rauch discussed above, this is often the case. Gerda Reith argues that the very use of the term ‘addiction’ in addiction discourse implies a lack of agency in the addict:

This image of ‘addiction’ is underpinned by what can be described as a deification of the commodity, whereby a substance — usually described as a ‘drug’ — is attributed with influential powers — no less than the ability to
overwhelm the sovereign individual and transform them into something else entirely – an addict (286).

The idea Reith espouses here is that addiction discourse makes the substance of addiction (in this case drugs or alcohol), the ‘demon’, and the addict becomes the victim of its powers. By pathologising addiction in discourses of consumption, the addict is no longer to blame for their addiction (Reith 284). While novels about jazz musicians don’t necessarily portray the drug itself as the demon the character may fight, they do perpetuate this lack of agency discussed in addiction discourse, though part of the character’s pathology of vulnerability is also due to their music, as in Rick Martin’s case.

Addiction also provides a justification for other forms of violence and self-harm, as Room discusses:

The character will lie, cheat, steal and indeed betray, maim or kill while in the grip of craving or withdrawal and of the addiction. Often these terrible things break the normal expectations of trust in intimate relationships: they are done to parents, lovers or children (229).

Thus, while the addiction may be the result of systemic violence, it also often causes further intimate violence in different forms. In James Baldwin’s landmark short story, ‘Sonny’s Blues’, the desire to play jazz is described by Sonny as being like a drug addiction (of which he also has experience). He tells his brother:

‘Sometimes you’ll do anything to play, even cut your mother’s throat.’ He laughed and looked at me. ‘Or your brother’s.’ Then he sobered. ‘Or your own’ (“Sb” 42).

Baldwin simultaneously examines the violence of drug use and music in this one description: the need to play becomes as physical and violent as a heroin craving. It is perhaps a Romantic view of music making, as the music becomes not just a desire but a need that consumes the musician to the point of self-destruction and the most brutal intimate violence, such as suicide or matricide.
Further to this, I would argue that aside from reflecting the ‘jazz life’, addiction also enhances the characterisation of jazz musician characters by making them more enigmatic. This inexplicable behaviour – using drugs or alcohol, even when they are destroying the user and the music – is part of what makes the characters intriguing to read about. They are often contradictory, irrational and emotional, but are also most commonly portrayed as amongst the best practitioners of their chosen instrument. This complexity in the portrayal (however many times it is repeated across these novels) also makes these characters human and therefore sympathetic.

While evoking empathy may not be an unusual literary device, what is different about these novels is that in many ways we empathise with these characters because of their addictions, not despite them. In fact, the addiction can often frame the character as a kind of hero who must overcome their internal struggle. This is due to the tendency of these novels to portray addiction as something that victimises them. As Room suggests, when the addict is portrayed as a victim of their addiction, ‘the addict can be a basically sympathetic character’ (230). She argues that in fiction that features an addict, the character will often have fallen into addiction, and is thus portrayed as being not really to blame (230). This renders the addict, in this case the jazz musician, heroic in what Room calls the ‘lonely battle’ against their inner demons (230).

Yet this theory of the addict as a kind of tragic hero is too simplistic as it leaves the character’s addiction divorced from social and political influence. As previously shown, more often than not, it is not the case that these characters ‘fall into’ addiction, but rather that they use drugs and alcohol as either an escape or response to violence they have faced in their past, or as a response to the social environment in which they live. Therefore the cause of their addiction, or ‘inner demon’ is not one factor, but many.

Despite this, the artist may still be seen as a hero, bringing us back to the links between the jazz life and bohemianism. Elizabeth Wilson discusses how artistic personalities played a ‘crucial part’ in the creation of the bohemian myth (Bohemians 52). Early in the development of bohemianism, one such personality was the ‘poet and aristocratic outlaw, political radical and sexual deviant, fatal
man and tragic genius,’ Lord Byron (Wilson *Bohemians* 52). However, by the 1950s, a new version of the bohemian arrived in the ‘personality’ of saxophonist Charlie ‘Bird’ Parker. Wilson claims that the bohemian culture of this period was ‘influenced by the jazz philosophy of “cool”, spontaneity and drugs’, and that this reflects the cult of the artist in the Romantic era, and the fascination of artists such as Byron with death (Wilson *Bohemians* 81).

Parker, as representative of the ‘jazz life’, is said to be one of the most complex ‘personalities’ in the jazz era. Ted Gioia claims that ‘Jazz’s past and future intersect in the life and times of this seminal figure’ (205). John Maynard takes Parker’s influence as a cult figure in the bohemian world so far as to suggest that ‘when the jazz musician Charlie Parker killed himself through several sorts of excess, including heroin, it became … obligatory to produce a poem about it’ (quoted in Wilson *Bohemians* 81).

Parker’s influence, musically and socially, means that he has become a figure that writers emulate in their portrayals of musicians. Bourjaily’s version of ‘The Story’ could in fact be a brief description of Parker’s life. As I have shown, many novels about jazz musicians are roughly based on, or inspired by, the lives of real musicians, and these patterns of ‘excess’ in the lives of jazz musicians and indeed, bohemians generally, are reflected in the novels. Thus these forms of intimate violence can be seen as narrative devices used to create enigmatic characters that emulate the heroes of the jazz world. Authors push their characters to the extremes of intimate violence through isolation and drug use, and these fictional characters become ‘damaged’ by the violence they inflict upon themselves. In the reflection of the lives of some of the most distinguished jazz musicians, and indeed through the violence and drug use they face, authors frame these musician characters as heroes who engage us with their dramatic lives.

### Towards Performative Violence

The relationship between intimate violence and music cuts both ways. While often it is intimate violence that inspires the music, such as in Ronnie Reboulet’s isolation, it is also occasionally the case that the music making is damaged by the intimate violence, as seen in Rick Martin’s alcoholic demise. In addition, Edgar Poole’s isolation has caused his end, as ‘time and much music and
going alone through the American night had weakened the bird’ (Holmes The Horn 8).

After these isolating factors – physical isolation, as well as isolation in the form of drug use – come into play, the characters often need to break free of the isolation, and in fact crave contact. I discussed this in relation to Schneider’s Blue Bossa earlier, when Reboulet chooses to come out of isolation and return to the jazz world (though he is still isolated from his lover and family in this act). The other way some of these characters break out of their isolation is actually through more violence.

When Michael Ondaatje’s Buddy Bolden in Coming Through Slaughter returns to New Orleans after having been isolated in the woods, he appears in a parade and then goes mad during a performance (Ondaatje 108). The only way he could break out of isolation was through his final violent performance, attacking his audience and finally destroying himself.

Lisa Downing explores this notion of breaking out of isolation to contact others in her discussion of murder in fiction, arguing that in the modern world, identity is based on individuality, and is thus isolating, and ‘in a world in which the self is radically separated from others, contact becomes violence’ (199). In addition, Downing sees murder, or violence, as an attempt to ‘touch the sublime of death’ (198), where the sublime is that which is beyond representation. Again this links to the Romantics’ fascination with death, and the cult of suicide amongst early bohemians (Wilson Bohemians 23).

If music is seen as the sublime, or that which is beyond representation, and musicians feel the need to break out of their self-imposed isolation, then the performance of music itself may become an act of violence. The characters use music to connect with others, and thus the music becomes violent and has the ability to make physical as well as emotional contact with the audience through

41 Downing’s discussion is based on Pauline Réage’s theory that individualism leads to isolation, and violence upon others represents the "desire to break out of this numbing encaissement" (Downing 199).
42 This is a complex idea in itself, discussed at length by Werner Wolf, who bases his study on the idea that both “the suggestion of the existence of musicalized fiction” and “the impossibility of such an enterprise” are ideas which need to be taken “seriously” and considered in depth (Wolf 4). Jean-Francoise Lyotard also makes reference to this, by suggesting that art must connect with the body but also “transcend knowledge itself” and connect with the soul or the sublime (41).
sound alone. As I will show in the following chapter, the most successful novels about jazz musicians represent this violence through the music the characters play. Thus music becomes a way for the characters to have contact with others and potentially touch the sublime.

The search for the sublime is a pursuit that consumes these musicians, so much so that their life and their art become one. The jazz life takes over, as they attempt to find new ways of expressing themselves through their music. Once again, Wilson links this search to bohemian lives:

the search for experience that could be translated into art took some artists into realms of excess and transgression, and ultimately involved a blurring of life and art that was characteristic of bohemian circles ("Bohemian Love" 111).

In the next chapter I explore this relationship further, and examine what happens when life and art become blurred and the art takes on the violence of the lives these characters lead.
Chapter 4 – Creativity and Destruction: Performative Violence

As there is evidence that violence in novels about jazz musicians is a recurring narrative device, it is clear that in these novels there is an inherent association between jazz and violence. The previous chapters have shown that both the social history of jazz and the personal histories of jazz musicians in novels are riddled with violence. Yet the question of the relationship between violence and the music itself is yet to be addressed. The reiteration of this relationship shows that when authors explore creativity and the artistic life through jazz characters, some element of this exploration suggests violence. By looking at occurrences of performative violence in these novels, we find a possible answer to the question of why this relationship recurs: jazz musicians in fiction are provoked into performing acts of violence, ironically, through the desire to find balance in their lives. While this search for balance may not always be an obvious concern for these characters, I argue that the provocation to commit acts of violence occurs particularly through the need to find balance between creativity and destruction.

In their representations of jazz musicians in fiction, authors continually suggest that to be truly creative you have to break down the musical parameters that have been established. In pushing themselves to create music on the one hand and to destroy convention on the other, these characters are driven to acts of violence; they explode through and out of the music, destroying themselves and attacking their audiences. In this discussion it is necessary to explore the types of performative violence, when and how they occur, and who they affect. Yet significant questions remain: why do writers use performative violence in their narratives and how does its implementation relate to the music of jazz?
Performative Violence

Despite arguing that the word performative is ‘a new word and an ugly word’, British writer John L. Austin suggests that the term is neither complex nor profound (239). Austin posits that a ‘performative utterance’ occurs when a statement is also an act; the statement entails a person ‘doing something rather than merely saying something’ (240 original emphasis).43 Austin’s emphasis on the act of ‘doing’ highlights the importance of action in my discussion of performative violence. Performative violence occurs when fictional musicians attack each other or the audience through their music. Thus, when performative violence occurs, the music becomes an action and has an impact on either the performer or the audience beyond a simple auditory impression.

This correlates with Judith Butler’s use of the word ‘performative’ in her definition of gender as a construct of culturally prescribed patterns of behaviour. She argues that: “‘performative’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning’ (139). Thus again, when paired with ‘violence’, performativity implies a violent or destructive act that constructs or develops meaning. This relates back to Lawrence Kramer’s argument that music has the capacity to communicate meaning, and that this is what makes performative violence so powerful (1). In literature, representations of performative violence give the musician the ability to channel their histories of violence into their music and out into the audience.

Alice Lagaay and Michael Lorber argue that the word ‘performative’ can in fact be used in very different ways depending on the discipline of study. They suggest that this is partly because the origin of performativity ‘is rooted in a variety of theoretical perspectives combining linguistic, cultural-sociological as well as aesthetic concerns’ (9). This could also be said of the phrase ‘performative violence’, which has been used in relation to sociological literature on political activism (Rhodes 4).44 In this context, the term refers to a mode of public protest in which activists’ ‘violent actions became a political text’ (Rhodes 4). For instance, performative violence may occur when a destructive act is performed

43 Austin uses the example of the phrase “I do” in a wedding ceremony or “I promise”. Both are phrases which in themselves are an act – therefore, saying is doing in each case.
44 For instance, the phrase has been used in the research of critics such as Allen Feldman and Joel P. Rhodes.
upon a symbol of oppression, such as white-owned business (Rhodes 4). It could be argued that the production of music in response to violence can also become a political text. However, literary representations of performative violence are not exclusively defined by their response to systemic violence and, as I argue below, many other types of narrative events lead to moments of violent music making.

There is nothing about the term ‘performative violence’ that restricts its application to jazz alone. Indeed, by the above definitions, performative violence could occur in representations of any of the performing arts. However it is the history of systemic and intimate violence in jazz characters that adds layers of psychological depth to the acts of performative violence. Thus the mode of performance – jazz – is part of what gives both narrative and psychological significance to fictional representations of performative violence. In addition the improvisation in jazz means there is an element of spontaneity in its performance, which results in musical expression that has the capacity to be unexpected and more akin to rupture.

When performative violence occurs the performers are able to give sound the capacity to physically or psychologically damage the audience, their fellow musicians and even themselves. This form of violence also occurs when the performers attack the music. Many authors depict the making of music in jazz as a process of dissecting, cutting up, breaking down and reassembling melody and harmony to create something new. Patrick Neate depicts a cornet player in this way:

He took that simple melody and he twisted its hope inside out until it wailed a warning to the faithful from his brass mouth. He upturned its melancholy until the clarity of the minor key sang hope to the desperate (338).

Neate’s character, Lick, takes the ‘simple melody’ and transforms the music into something new, turning it ‘inside out’ to change the tone and mood of what he is playing. This transformation is at once destructive because the original melody is disrupted, and creative because something new is developed. Neate also evokes this creative process as simultaneously disruptive and positive, as Lick is portrayed as being capable of turning ‘melancholy’ into ‘hope’. In this process of playing, Lick is also taken outside of himself, as he ‘felt his music transcend his person and he wasn’t sure what he felt’ anymore (338). In reshaping the music in
this way, the character disrupts his sense of self and his emotions become unstable. This is a common occurrence in characters who break up music, and it is a narrative technique that allows for the representation of characters’ psychological deterioration through their music. The music therefore embodies their personal unravelling. This is no more evident than in Michael Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter*.

Throughout *Coming Through Slaughter*, the main character, Charles ‘Buddy’ Bolden refers to what he wants to achieve through his music, ‘I had wanted to be the reservoir where the engines and people drank, blood sperm music pouring out and getting hooked in someone’s ear’ (112), suggesting his belief that music is something which can be imbibed, or which can become physically attached to the body. Blood and sperm are also life-giving sources of renewal and symbolically highlight Bolden’s music making as the creation of something new, a new form of music perhaps. It is also a psychological connection to the music that Bolden craves, as the phrase ‘getting hooked’, suggests an addiction-like attachment to the music with both a physical and psychological dependence. It is the representation of this type of connection between music and both the physical body and psychological state of the performer that makes performative violence so effective in these novels. When this type of connection is achieved, the episodes of music making necessarily take on a narrative purpose beyond simply depicting the occupation of the characters: they become a means of exploring personal history and emotional conflict.

While many narrative events may be capable of this task, it is perhaps unusual that descriptions of musical expression are chosen as the tool through which the exploration of character is made in these novels. For instance a character could simply discuss their concerns with another character, or their psychological dilemmas could be represented through first-person internal dialogue in the text. I suggest that adopting musical expression as a metaphor for exploring a character’s identity is a more oblique approach.

In some novels, such as Baldwin’s *Another Country*, the musicians attack one another, and this has the potential to work against the collaborative nature of jazz: ‘The musicians sweated on the stand, like horses, played loudly and badly, with a kind of reckless contempt, and failed, during their first number, to agree on anything’ (*Another Country* 249). It is as though the performers argue with one
another through the music. In failing to collaborate, the musicians destroy the music and the atmosphere of the bar in which they play. Baldwin emphasises this with the image of sweating ‘like horses’, so that the musicians are rendered bestial and therefore implicitly unable to create art. Their contempt for each other, and the unprofessional manner in which they are playing, leads these musicians to a moment of performative violence.

Similarly Zabor suggests musicians are capable of attacking one another through music, as The Bear responds to some unwilling collaborators by unsettling their sense of the music. Zabor portrays this attack as violence against both the music and the musicians:

First thing he did was start dismantling the tune. He played a series of violent lower-register honks, then some angry, disordered runs that violated the cadence at the end of the chorus. And there went the tempo: the rhythm section was forced to break ranks and stutter to make it look as if they might be playing free. As the Bear applied more pressure, the time splintered like boxwood beneath the weight of his phrasing and the home key collided smartly with two or three others, motivic fragments flying off at the edges like electrons from a critical mass about to go fission.

In the ‘dismantling’ of the music, The Bear not only attacks his colleagues, but, like Lick, he is represented as actually attacking the music itself: he ‘violate[s] the cadence’, he splinters time and makes the key collide with others. In this way the ruptured music is represented as a weapon with which he can control his fellow musicians; he unsettles them to the point that they are forced to comply with the way he wants to play. In the context of the narrative, The Bear performs with violence in order to claim his place as a serious musician. Therefore the music becomes a means of fighting for respect, and for breaking down assumptions that he is a gimmick. It becomes the means for him to prove that he is not simply a saxophone playing Bear, but rather, an accomplished musician.

However, towards the end of the novel, when The Bear has finally established himself as a musician first, and a bear second, there is still violence in the music that he plays, and he hurts the musicians he works with – though with a different intention and outcome (457). Zabor thus explores a form of performative violence that occurs when performing music physically hurts the musicians. After The Bear takes a long solo at a gig, one musician says to him, ‘Next time you
want to kill us use a gun, all right?’ (457), suggesting he has pushed the rest of the band too far, exhausting them with his stamina. This question causes The Bear some self-doubt, unsure if he should be collaborating with humans at all:

What have I done? ... Violence to everyone around me, the usual price of my obtaining any kind of pleasure at all. Does making an artistic statement sufficient to the fundamental questions of my existence has [sic] proposed really require this much breakage? (457).

The Bear fears his own potential to do damage with his body and his sound. He does not want to hurt people, and this concern is emblematic of his personal struggle throughout the novel: how can a bear relate to humans without destroying them? He fears causing harm in his friendship with Jones, who may be incarcerated for helping him. He fears physically hurting Iris, his human lover, when they have intercourse, and finally he fears hurting his fellow musicians as they perform.

By the end of the novel, he hides himself away, disappearing into the wilderness to be alone and unable to ‘budge [a] brute rock with [a] bit of misremembered, half-accomplished song’ (478). This line suggests that The Bear has tried to use music to change the ‘brute rock’ of his existence and his complex relationship with humans. However, he has found that his music is not enough to actually change his world, no matter how much he would like it to have an impact. The music has enabled a dialogue between himself and human beings, but it has not actually solved the problem of his relationship with humanity – he is still a bear, and he is still stronger, bigger and more violent than a human.

The Bear’s consideration of a ‘misremembered, half-accomplished song’ suggests that this is how he sees the jazz he plays: broken, fragmentary and perhaps unfinished. He sees his own performance ability as having not yet reached its peak, and therefore his own narrative is unfinished, and the music reflects this. His feeling that his song cannot move the physical world suggests that perhaps the meaning of the music is not enough. Despite the violence of his playing – in the breaking up of the music and the physical violence his body suggests – he is unable to make the impact he desires. Though The Bear has faced numerous crises in his personal and musical life, the music has not solved his problems and instead it has potentially created more distance between himself and his human friends.
This highlights the idea that the music is not a tool for healing and solving problems, and it can be the opposite. The Bear’s music making is not only destructive in terms of technique, but is a source of rupture and breakage in his life. It has failed to produce the bond he hoped to create with his human friends, and the suggestion is that perhaps he was asking too much of the music. If examined in the context of music making as a representation of the creative process, The Bear’s position at the end of the novel suggests that if artists have an expectation that their craft will improve their life, they will be disappointed.

**A Life in Crisis**

Scenes of performative violence habitually occur at a crisis or turning point of the narrative and often signpost a significant change in a character’s fate. Rufus in Baldwin’s *Another Country* plays violently before he begins his decline (Baldwin *Another Country* 18) and with a similar result, Holmes’ Edgar Poole faces a violent musical battle early in *The Horn*. This sends Poole on his downward spiral towards death and he becomes a demonic figure:

> Edgar slouched there beside him, as if playing with one hand, yawping, honking, aping him; and only his bead eyes were alive, and they were sharp, black points of irony and rage (*The Horn* 18).

The audience responds to Poole’s demise with hoots and an ovation for his opponent Walden, as Poole skulks away into the night (*The Horn* 20). Similarly, Zabor’s Bear realises he is a talented musician early in the novel, when he creates a violent sound:

> He began his solo with violent, almost inchoate downward smears of sound … which bled down over bar lines and the beat but stayed somehow within the statutory framework of a B-flat twelve-bar blues … the conventions, like the notes and phrases themselves, had been bent, bled and burned away: they were collapsing houses and flaming cities of themselves, they were flying doorways and bursting lives, they were pretty damn good (22).

This scene prompts The Bear to change his life and attempt to become a professional musician. In each of these examples of performing violently, the authors depict their musicians as creating such extreme performances that their very existence is turned upside-down. In Baldwin and Holmes, the characters
rapidly decline after their experiences with performative violence, but for The Bear it is the foreshadowing of a new start.

Through acts of performative violence the lives of these characters have changed. The implication of this is that jazz musicians are capable of such extreme musical performances that they break boundaries between what they create and how they live. This shattering of borders primarily affects the musicians themselves, though on occasion the audience is also affected. In addition, these authors represent jazz music as an art form that has the capacity to transform sound into a means of manipulating people both physically and psychologically.

**Causes: Personal History**

Performative violence often reflects the psychological concerns of the musicians who enact violence through their music. Yet these concerns most often come from other forms of violence in the characters’ past: systemic or intimate. Many characters that are violent on stage have complex histories of abuse and suffering, as explored in Chapters Two and Three. These histories do not always lead to performative violence, as they sometimes instead evoke either sadness or a sense of release through the music. However, when the characters do translate their personal stories into performative violence, the music has a stronger physical and psychological impact on the fictional musicians and audience alike.

Rather than simply represent the musicians as playing their pain through the music, some of these authors create the link between systemic violence and music through the context of the performance and the musicians’ relationship with the audience. For instance John Clellon Holmes makes reference to the history of systemic violence through *The Horn* by examining the social laws of the musical world:

> there was a complex protocol to ‘after hours,’ unwritten, inarticulate, but accepted by even the most beardless tyro with the second-hand horn for which he did not even own a case. There was a protocol, and it did not countenance an uninvited intrusion from watchers, no matter who (Holmes *The Horn* 17).

By highlighting this system of showing respect for fellow musicians, Holmes suggests the jazz world has its own social structure. This structure exists
outside the wider society of America, as implied by Holmes’ use of the term ‘after hours’, which refers to jazz gigs often being performed late at night, when everyone else has gone home. The focus on this nighttime jazz world is also a reminder that these characters don’t exist within mainstream society, instead earning their living outside of conventional pursuits. The very fact that these musicians live and play ‘after hours’ suggests they may already be victims of systemic violence who are rejected by the daylight world. Holmes has already suggested that jazz musicians are outcasts because of their racial identity at the beginning of the description of this scene:

jazz was a kind of growing Old Testament of the Negro race – and of all lost tribes in America, too – a testament being written night after night by unknown, vagrant poets (The Horn 11).

As a new society, the musical society, these ‘vagrants’ have established their own rules. By breaking the laws of this new society, they risk being doubly outcast and twice the victims of systemic violence. Though this protocol does not hinder creative output, as Holmes clarifies, the superior players can push the boundaries, ‘for though the victor’ of a musical competition, ‘might venture outside the law, the victim, having nothing left, must abide by it’ (The Horn 19).

When a young musician, Walden, does break ‘protocol’ by intruding on an Edgar Poole performance without invitation, Walden leaves himself outside of musical society and ‘outside their mercy and their judgment’ (Holmes The Horn 17). Because of his youth and inexperience, Walden is rendered vulnerable to the violence of the music of Poole:

Edgar, reed still between loose lips, gave him a startled, then slyly amused glance, telling Walden, all in a flash, that for the audacity and the stupidity of the move he would do him the honor of ‘cutting’ him to pieces, bar to bar, horn to horn (The Horn 17 punctuation original).

Poole attempts to defend his honour against this young musician by ‘cutting’ him, a term which means he will outplay his opponent on stage. They battle each other through a process of improvisation, each playing a few bars at a time, until one unsettles or unbalances the other and emerges as the better player (Holmes The Horn 18). This is a system of musical competition, a kind of performative violence that also exists in real jazz society and is a necessary part of the jazz life. The term ‘cutting session’ is violent, and as Philip Alperson explains,
the process can lead to performers displaying ‘a kind of aggression and mean-spiritedness’ (278). However, on being questioned about cutting sessions, Tommy Turrentine, a trumpet player from the 1940s claimed, ‘It wasn’t with malice. It was no put-down; it was just friendly competition’ (Berliner 44). Paul Berliner also argues that these sessions in fact ‘provided aspiring artists with stimulus for their own growth as improvisers’ (44).

So although the idea of competing with one another is a valid reflection of the development of jazz and its musicians, Holmes has chosen to represent this process as less friendly and more befitting of the violence of its name. Edgar is ‘savage’ and he plays with a ‘furious, scornful bleat’ with ‘some final dead-wall impact’ (The Horn 18-19). Holmes also uses this performance as a reflection of the violence Poole has faced in the rest of his life: everyone has always tried to cut him, and until now, he has fought back successfully. As the two musicians play they become equal in the expression of their histories, ‘in the terrible equality of art, pouring into each wild break … the substance of their separated lives’ (The Horn 19). When Poole fails and Walden defeats him in the cutting competition, Poole is left without support and vulnerable to his other vices: pride and alcoholism.

A similar occurrence of a young musician replacing an older one occurs in Ondaatje’s Coming Through Slaughter, though it is not in a direct cutting session. After Bolden’s violent attack on a pimp, he is replaced by Bunk Johnson, a seventeen-year-old cornet player and as is the case with Poole, this hurts Bolden’s pride (80). Coming Through Slaughter is set fifty years prior to Holmes’ novel and the protocols and social parameters of the jazz society depicted in The Horn are not yet established, so the relationship between musicians is less defined. In many ways, Ondaatje’s novel reflects this lack of the basic social structure that Holmes’ novel, in contrast, does represent. Instead, through the text Ondaatje captures the atmosphere of the birthplace and pioneers of jazz: it does not adhere to chronology, the characters are unpredictable, and the music lends itself to violence in more ways than one.

Coming Through Slaughter tracks the demise of Buddy Bolden, a famous African-American cornet player in New Orleans in the first decade of the twentieth century. The novel is filled with violence. From a razor attack to strangling and suicide, scenes of physical violence provide significant turning
points within the narrative and reflect the harsh world of systemic violence from which Bolden has emerged.

While there are no recordings of the real Buddy Bolden, he was reported to be the loudest player New Orleans had ever seen (Marquis 44-45). Other than that, little was known about Bolden at the time of Ondaatje’s publication, except for some small family details and the fact that he was committed to Louisiana State insane asylum with acute alcoholic psychosis in 1907 where he remained until he died in 1931 (Gioia 36). Donald Marquis published a detailed account of Bolden’s life, *In Search of Buddy Bolden: First Man of Jazz* in 1978, two years after *Coming Through Slaughter* was published.

With so little known about the real person, Ondaatje drew on myths about the musician and created many of his own. Ondaatje has taken small clues, such as Bolden’s incarceration and the reported volume of his playing, as triggers for a character that experiences systemic, intimate, and performative violence. Throughout the course of the novel, Bolden questions his role as a musician, attacks a man he suspects of sleeping with his wife, and then leaves New Orleans to begin an affair which lasts for two years in a small coastal town. When Bolden returns to New Orleans, he performs in one last parade and plays so hard he is deemed to have gone mad and, as in his real life, he is locked in an insane asylum for the rest of his life.

Ondaatje does not overtly emphasise issues of race in the novel. Indeed, one of Bolden’s closest friends, Webb, is a white detective, and the interracial nature of their friendship is not highlighted. Yet there are subtle hints of the history of systemic racial abuse that was a defining feature of New Orleans at the turn of the century. Joel Deshaye argues that the very setting of New Orleans implies racial segregation and associated discrimination, and therefore ‘his eventual insanity is caused in part by geography, and, by association, race’ (480). Deshaye is perhaps exaggerating when he blames geography for Bolden’s insanity, as there are many other more significant causes of his demise. However, although this link between racial identity and geography is not made explicit in

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45 A musician who frequently worked with Bolden, Willy Cornish, once claimed that there was one cylinder recording made of Bolden, however it has never been found.
46 Marquis did debunk many of the myths upon which Ondaatje based his character, however Ondaatje would not have had access to these arguments at the time of his writing.
the novel, it is a valid insight to use as a basis for examining the subtle history of systemic violence.

Ondaatje does reference the history of slavery in New Orleans briefly in the novel. When Bolden imagines cutting the throats of his customers at the barber shop (just one of many violent imaginings he has), he considers his job as his ‘slavery’ (48). While he is technically a free man, he does have to work at the shop to earn a living, and this fact suggests that, perhaps because he is black, he will never earn enough money from his music alone. In the same way, Bolden is also a slave to his audiences: he is economically dependent upon them.

In what is perhaps a more brutal reference to racial violence, Buddy Bolden’s incarceration and subsequent rape at the end of the novel reminds us of the persecution of African-Americans in the South. It is made clear that Louisiana State Insane Asylum has ‘no black employees’ (137) and Bolden becomes a victim of sexual assaults from the staff within two days of his arrival at the institution (139). Ondaatje reinforces the impact of this systemic abuse by frequently referring to rape in the final pages of the novel, with Bolden depicted as ‘[taking] rapes from what he thought were ladies in blue pyjamas’ (148).

In contrast to the portrayal of Bolden’s largely unstructured lifestyle through most of the novel, Ondaatje uses lists of dates and times to represent the institutional structure of Bolden’s final years (138, 43-4), highlighting the lack of choice in how he went about his day. In addition, a description of Bolden by his friend Cornish describes him as being unresponsive and mute: ‘He does nothing, nothing at all. Never speaks, goes around touching things’ (149). This conclusion is brutal as the lists of facts, descriptions of rape and the shutting down of Bolden’s once vibrant personality dehumanises the once great musician in the eyes of his friend. The novel therefore ends with a portrayal of Bolden as silent, submissive and bound to regime, replicating the image of a well-behaved slave. Bolden’s final experience with violence is therefore systemic, though it was his performative violence that drove him to madness.

It can also be assumed that systemic violence would have existed for a black musician at the turn of the century. This may be the reason that Ondaatje doesn’t spend time emphasising racial tension explicitly, and instead uses this history to inform the manner in which Bolden approaches his music making. When Bolden attempts to attack his audience with his sound, playing ‘like a
javelin through the brain and down into the stomach’ (131), this act of performative violence could be a reaction to the systemic abuse he has previously faced, though the reason he plays like this is never made explicit.

**Causes: Narrative Development**

Ondaatje’s Buddy Bolden is also a victim of intimate violence. He is an alcoholic, however this is not the only cause of his self-destruction: it is also his obsession with music and his audience that drives him to insanity. This is where performative and intimate violence intertwine – he plays his music so hard, with such power and commitment, that nearly every other aspect of his life falls apart. Bolden is not the only literary character to whom this type of performative self-harm occurs. Jackie Kay’s Moody breaks himself down in order to play, ‘He tears himself apart. He explodes. Then he brings himself back. Slowly, slowly, piecing himself together’ (136).

There is a suggestion here that in order to access the intuitive elements of improvisation, the musicians need to sacrifice something of themselves. The implication of this is that great art (as these are great musicians) requires sacrifice and possibly suffering. This is a reinforcement of the Romantic vision of the self-destructive artist in a modern context.

Bolden’s obsession with music dominates every other survival instinct. As Frank Lewis explains of Bolden, ‘his music was immediately on top of his own life’ (Ondaatje 37). His performative violence is also born of systemic violence, as the act of performance becomes a way of temporarily breaking free of social bounds – it is a performance which is so unexpected, so violent and so strong, that it breaks through audience expectations of what music is. Towards the end of Bolden’s life and sanity, he is not even constrained by the collaboration with the musicians with whom he performs, ‘his music separates from the band, and though the whole procession is still together Bolden is now stained untouchable, powerful’ (108).

The music is also violent in the way it touches the audience with its stories of lust and death. Bolden’s close friend Webb watches him perform, and witnesses the immediacy of the music and narratives of violence within the music:
The music was coarse and rough, immediate, dated in half an hour, was about bodies in the river, knives, lovepains, cockiness. Up there on stage he was showing all the possibilities in the middle of the story (43).

This ‘coarse and rough’ music embodies the atmosphere of the opening pages of the novel which describe Bolden’s world, ‘his geography’, as being populated by whores, gamblers and murderers (8). In this way, the novel is established as a narrative of violence from the outset, and Bolden’s musical narratives echo Ondaatje’s tone. Similarly, James Baldwin explores the notion of expressing violent stories through music in the character of Ida in Another Country. Ida uses music to communicate her discontent with the intimate violence she is experiencing in her relationship with her boyfriend Vivaldo. He listens to her singing around the apartment and feels that she sings, ‘in order to flaunt before her privacies which he could never hope to penetrate and to convey accusations which he could never hope to decipher, much less deny’ (Baldwin Another Country 308). Music is acting as both a messenger and a form of self-restraint for Ida, helping her suppress violent feelings while also blocking out her lover, Vivaldo, as a form of punishment of him.

This type of musical response to violence results in the most subtle form of performative violence, and gives the characters a means of coping with the violence in their lives. On occasion, this expression eases the psychological damage, and that is certainly the suggestion with Ida. When she finishes a performance, she is calm and quiet, having performed her ‘passionate, triumphant rage and agony’ over her brother’s death, releasing the tension through song (Baldwin Another Country 252). However, in characters such as Bolden, the expression of a narrative of violence only adds fuel to the fire, provoking a further need for a more visceral expression or experience of violence.

Intimate violence is also linked with performance through Bolden’s affair with the character Robin Brewitt. Their love making is surrounded by images of violence intertwined with music and performance, such as their last night together when they ‘tear into each other, as if to wound’ and give ‘each other a performance, the wound of ice’ (87). Jaelin Brewitt, Robin’s husband, also contributes to the musical intimate violence, as he plays piano while they make love with ‘Bullets of music delivered onto the bed’ (92). Jaelin’s musical attack is subtle, and is arguably simply a non-violent reaction to the adultery. However,
this is a perfect representation of performative violence combined with intimate violence. Jaelin has been betrayed, but he loves his wife and respects Bolden, so this performative violence, a ‘dance in the auditorium of enemies’, is the only way he knows how to respond. Therefore the music making represents the complexity of the ‘heartbreaking and beautiful’ anger Jaelin feels and Bolden loves him for it. These characters speak to each other through the emotion of the music, which in this case is both violent and tender – much like the love making of Robin and Bolden.

When Performative Violence Occurs: Making and Destroying

Performative violence in Ondaatje’s Coming Through Slaughter is an expression of what happens when the boundary between creativity and destruction is blurred. As discussed by Žižek, Heidegger argues that creativity itself is a necessarily violent act, as it is about breaking boundaries and moving people beyond the ‘normal’ (Žižek 68; Heidegger 65, 169-71). This is exactly what Bolden does as he urges his fellow musicians to ‘put [their] hands through the window’(14) and play with as much force as possible.

It is the urge to both create and destroy that drives Bolden to form his friendship with the photographer, Bellocq, who has frequently been described by critics as the catalyst for Bolden’s madness in the novel (cf. De Smyter 682; Solecki 6; Scobie 7). EJ Bellocq was a real photographer, living and working in New Orleans at the same time as Bolden was performing, but there is no evidence that the two knew each other in reality. The real Bellocq is known for his haunting photographs of prostitutes, many of whom have their faces hidden behind masks or their figures in the photographs have been literally defaced. Someone, possibly Bellocq himself, has scratched and cut away their faces (cf. Sontag ii; Harrison 21, 55). When Bolden looks at these photos in the novel, he sees the violation of their bodies as making sense, understanding that ‘Making and destroying [come] from the same source, the same lust’ (55). The fact that this urge to make and destroy is described as ‘lust’ by Bolden suggests that it is somehow primal and it is not something over which the photographer, and Bolden himself, has control.

Ondaatje equates art and violence through the interplay between Bellocq and Bolden, as they both create and destroy throughout the novel. Christian Bok
argues that the violence of the characters in *Coming Through Slaughter* ‘parallels the chaotic intensity of their art’ (114). Yet while Bellocq’s art has an air of immediacy – he takes a ‘casual shot’ or ‘one snap quickly’ (54) – it does not appear to be chaotic as he is also depicted as being careful with the defacement of the negatives: ‘You can see that the care he took in defiling the beauty he had forced in them was as precise and clean as his good hands’ (55).

The ‘art’ of other characters in the novel is jazz, and as a music that features improvisation, it may appear to be chaos. Yet it is widely agreed that jazz is much more than Bok’s suggested chaotic intensity (cf. De Smyter; Kamoche and Cunha; Dean and Smith). It is impulsive and adaptive, but there is also, necessarily, order. Particularly in the form of early jazz that Bolden plays, there is always a defined structure and pulse from which the lead instruments can launch their music (Berliner 129).

In exploring the notion of creativity through a jazz musician, Ondaatje, and many other authors, situate the creative process in a public and immediate context. As pianist Albert Murray explains, ‘When you see a jazz musician play, you’re looking at a pioneer, you’re looking at an explorer, you’re looking at an experimenter, you’re looking at a scientist, you’re looking at all those things because it’s the creative process incarnate’ (Burns ‘Gumbo’). I agree that performing jazz live is an immediate representation of creative process, but it is also necessarily a combination of both the past and the present: referencing that which has come before and making it new at the same time. In their discussion of creativity and the solitude of the artist, Montouri and Purser argue that this combination, or this attempt to find a balance, is a kind of violence in itself:

> The vital question is ... the nature of the relationship between innovation and tradition, between constraints and possibilities. In simple terms, this relationship can be viewed as a fight, a war, a revolution or as an ongoing process of change and dialogue (74 original emphasis).

Ondaatje reflects this through descriptions of Bolden’s need for order, and it is suggested that the other musicians do not necessarily know this about him when they are performing with him: ‘there was a discipline, it was just that we

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47 This is of course subjective and dependent upon the listener’s familiarity with the genre. Even if it may not appear to be “chaotic” as Bok suggests, it may be at times complex enough to be difficult to easily identify musical patterns and recognisable elements.
didn’t understand. We thought he was formless, but I think now he was tormented by order, what was outside it’ (37). Bolden, in fact, relies on his fellow musicians to hold their form so that he may be released from it. For instance Bolden appreciates the way Cornish ‘played the same note the same way every time’ and ‘was our frame our diving board that we leapt off’ (112).

At the beginning of the twentieth century in New Orleans, musicians were experimenting with a blending of ragtime, blues and European forms to develop the sound that is now considered to be jazz (Berliner 132). As Ted Gioia argues, ‘At first, these techniques were probably used merely to ornament composed melodies, but at some point these elaborations grew into even more free-form improvisations’ (36). Jazz musicians, particularly in the context of early New Orleans jazz, performed publicly on stage and took risks. They were in touch with both their bands and the audiences and were required to break the parameters of established musical forms there and then. They were immersed in the immediate. Through improvisation, they used familiar melodies as departure points, then applied their own riffs and patterns, reshaping them to reconstruct melodies and break through harmonies to create new, instantaneous, and adaptive music. This is where the performative violence begins to take its shape in the novel: the need to find a balance between adhering to a defined structure and the intuitive journey of improvisation becomes torture to Bolden.

While structure and intuition are not necessarily in opposition to one another, in Bolden’s case, he struggles to find equilibrium between them. In his final parade, Ondaatje depicts Bolden’s playing as a metaphor for his approach to life, as he pushes against the rest of the Henry Allen band ‘till most of them drop off and just march behind’ (129). He leaves everyone behind in his attempt to create something new, and cannot stay within the structure of the band, or the society, in which he lives and works.

**Fighting with Structure**

Many critics find parallels between Ondaatje and Bolden in *Coming Through Slaughter* (cf. Bok; Deshaye; Petermann). Ondaatje himself goes so far as to place an author/narrator in the text in the final section of the novel, describing his process of research and seeking connections between the musician
and the narrator: ‘When he went mad he was the same age as I am now’ (133). Ondaatje even equates Bolden’s obsession with suicide with his own neuroses: ‘For I had done that. Stood, with a razorblade cut into cheeks and forehead, shaved hair. Defiling people we did not wish to be’ (133).

Yet Bolden and Bellocq mirror each other, so the implication of the parallels between Ondaatje, Bellocq and Bolden is that Ondaatje is exploring or representing his own creative process through the novel. Bolden, as a performer, is therefore the public representation of Ondaatje’s literary expression. Bellocq is perhaps a reflection of his internal process, as he is a lonely and private man. The suggestion is that Ondaatje’s creative process is also one of destruction. If Bolden is the mirror to Ondaatje, the author’s own attempt to create has possibly resulted in an attack on himself and on the form of the novel – in the same way that Bolden destroys himself and Bellocq attacks the photos.

This is reflected in the fragmented form of the novel, which could be viewed as a ruptured, dismembered and reassembled text: a kind of self-reflexive postmodern pastiche. The novel has a disrupted chronology and is made up of multiple forms of writing, from song lyrics to poems, interviews, lists of apparent facts and letters, many of which do not even take up a whole page. In this way the writing not only emulates Bellocq’s photographs, but reflects Bolden’s jazz that ‘would be describing something in 27 ways’ (Ondaatje 37). There is also a postmodern metanarrative here: the text self-consciously reflects the nature of the music it tries to represent. Emily Petermann suggests that ‘the text seeks to recreate an absent other, in this case, the other medium or art form’ that is, jazz (223). In considering how the descriptions of music reflect the fragmented structure, Petermann concludes; ‘Bolden’s music, like Ondaatje’s postmodern novel, does not believe in just one beginning or ending. Both are multiple, and history/ the story becomes fragmentary’ (229).

Ondaatje’s decision to rupture the chronology in the representation of Bolden’s life highlights the violence inherent in both the music and the events of the character’s last few years. In providing a narrative that is a disruption of chronology and is literally scattered and unevenly spaced across the pages, Ondaatje offers an image of Bolden’s life that, as Sam Solecki argues, ‘expresses both the anarchy and ambiguity of the musician's life. He has placed the reader within the mental and physical geography of Buddy Bolden’ (5).
Ondaatje’s collation of fragments reveals the enigma of Bolden’s life. Time is fractured through these segments, suggesting that the text is not constrained by order, but rather ‘what was outside it’ or the overarching concepts of creativity and destruction – much like Bolden himself (Ondaatje 37). Having said this, it is evident that the narrative structure still dramatically leads the reader towards the parade scene that signals Bolden’s end and the climax of the novel. I argue that this process of fragmenting and reordering is partly based on narrative intuition, as it is not bound by the constraints of chronology. Thus, like Bolden, the text is pulled between following a chronological structure and surrendering to the fragmentation implied by the ‘anarchy’ of Bolden’s life.

This concern with how a narrative may reflect musical structures is discussed in relation to many jazz novels – not only those specifically about jazz musicians. One novel that has inspired much debate is Toni Morrison’s Jazz. Although there is no central jazz musician character in the novel and therefore it is not a focus of this study, it is interesting to note that Morrison herself has claimed that the music of jazz did provide a structural framework for the narrative (Ludigkeit 167). Like Coming Through Slaughter, the novel shifts perspective and allows for multiple interpretations, much like the jazz that provides the soundtrack for the era in which it is set.

Using jazz to form the structure of a novel has the potential to add meaning to the writing, as it reflects how the music often consumes these characters psychologically. Structural representations of the music, such as Holmes’ chapter titles ‘Riff’ or ‘Chorus’, remind the reader that the characters live within the world of jazz and the novel may be written as a kind of homage to that world. It could be argued that the structures of novels such as these embody the thinking of the characters that inhabit them.

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48 This could also be discussed as a narrative technique, and there may be many more influences on this structure, such as postmodern narrative techniques.

49 While the structure of novels about jazz musicians is occasionally relevant to the forms of violence discussed, this is not common in the novels relevant to this study. Structure is also a narrative element that does not always affect the characterisation of the musician protagonists, therefore it is not discussed in more detail here.
The Audience

Jazz is important to Morrison’s novel in more ways than simply guiding the structure. In the context of the jazz-filled streets of 1926 New York, she suggests there is something in the music that propels listeners towards acts of violence:

it did not make her feel generous, this juke joint, barrel hooch, tonk house, music. It made her hold her hand in the pocket of her apron to keep from smashing it through the glass pane to snatch the world in her fist and squeeze the life out of it for doing what it did and did and did to her and everybody else she knew or knew about (59).

Although Morrison does not write specifically about musicians in her novel Jazz, she does imply there is an unnamable quality in the sound of the music that may push the audience into violence. One of her characters, the conservative Alice Manfred, goes so far as to claim that ‘Just hearing [jazz] was like violating the law’ (58). These descriptions emphasise the fact that it is not simply the process of cutting up and reassembling the music, or improvising through personal and social histories of violence that leads to violence, but that there is perhaps something in the sound of jazz that suggests violence or aggression.

Given the emphasis on the immediacy and live performance of jazz, the portrayal of the audience is crucial to these novels. It is often the audience who suffers the blows of the experimental force these musicians embrace. Yet perhaps more significantly, it is also frequently the audience that urges the musicians to perform acts of violence: be it in the form of self-harm by playing to the edge of their physical and psychological capacity, or in creating a potent, physical and aggressive sound.

As Jackie Kay points out, the audience is often willing to participate in the violence of a performance. They have chosen to come and see the musicians and have expectations of what the performance will show them: ‘every single face in this place is prepared to go the distance. All attention rapt, euphoric, dedicated. They will follow the sax down to the deep dark place, wherever it leads them, disciples to the cool blue’ (17). In this situation the members of the audience are ‘disciples’ of a cult-like figure, ‘rapt’ and ‘dedicated’ to the musician’s sound, reminding us of the cult of the artist, or the bohemian and Romantic concept of
the artist as visionary. They follow Moody down to a ‘dark place’ suggesting hell or inner demons, regardless of the potential danger there. In this case the music does not have a physical impact on the audience, but there is metaphorical violence inherent in the sound that Moody makes. While it is enticing, it is also threatening and makes the listeners vulnerable to him.

Yet, as well as this blind devotion, Kay also suggests that the audience pushes Moody into the extremes of performative violence, ‘Stomping, stamping, hooting, whistling, cheering. They want more of him … They want more blood’ (134). The fact that they want more of his blood suggests that they are urging him towards physical sacrifice, as though his music is not enough. In response, Moody pushes himself further until ‘There’s the sensation of falling without ever stopping. Each time like dying … It is painful’ (134). Sam Solecki discusses the urge to sacrifice oneself through the performance of music as being the result of modern audiences responding to extremist art – audiences want artists to explore the ‘ultimate in human experience’:

> the modern audience anticipates, even demands, that this kind of [artist] take greater and greater risks with his own sanity in order to produce work closer to what the audience regards as the psychological and emotional ultimate in human experience (24).

However, Moody’s playing evokes a more visceral response, and the audience has an almost primitive urge for blood – an urge that is perhaps less complex than Solecki’s description of the modern audience. In Kay’s novel, the audience’s demands for violence implies that Moody is not in complete control of his performance. It is a reminder that the audience has power over the musicians, both psychologically and financially. The audience is the outlet for the musicians’ expression, but, in addition, without them the musicians would have no performance opportunities and importantly, no income.

Like Moody, Ondaatje’s Bolden is always conscious of his audience as he performs, aware that he has to please and connect with them. In this way, the audience becomes an agent of systemic violence, as Ondaatje highlights Bolden’s economic reliance on the audience by making comparisons to prostitution. As Bolden wanders the seedier streets of New Orleans in the district of Storyville, he equates the sex acts of scarred prostitutes with his performances:
All that masturbation of practice each morning and refusing to play and these gypsy feet wanting to play you but drummed back onto the edge of the water by your rich sticks and your rich laws (119).

The ‘gypsy feet’ or ‘mattress whores’ are prostitutes who are so riddled with disease that pimps break their ankles as a warning to customers not to employ their services (118). In comparing himself to these prostitutes, Bolden sees himself as crippled and broken down. As I argue in my own article on performance in *Coming Through Slaughter*, through this walk of shame, we are reminded that Bolden’s music, like these women’s bodies, is a commodity and the audience, as customers, determine his financial status (Ianniello 132). Without them, he cannot support his family, his drinking or his music making. He is constrained by his audiences’ desires: caged and unable to push the boundaries of his creativity.

Yet Bolden is also constrained by his egotistical relationship to the audience: ‘You’d play and people would grab you and grab you till you began to – you couldn’t help it – believe you were doing something important’ (59). The audience not only provides him with economic stability, but with psychological support, aiding his desire for fame and stardom. The novel begins with Bolden at the peak of his success and with his life in order, ‘his life at this time had a fine and precise balance to it, with a careful allotment of hours’ (13). But this balance begins to be unsettled when he realises that he is too controlled by his financial and psychological dependence on his audience. This realisation comes through his admiration for Bellocq, ‘a friend who scorned all the giraffes of fame’ and who ‘tempted [Bolden] out of the world of audiences where [he] had tried to catch everything thrown at [him]’ (91). Bellocq is an image of a pure artist, working for himself, and unconcerned with others’ admiration for his art. He is also an anti-audience, and a relief for Bolden because he is uninterested in music and they do not have to discuss his playing (91). Thus Bellocq is a kind of escape for Bolden – a potential saviour from himself – because in their friendship, Bolden is shown a world outside of his music. As Solecki suggests, Bellocq makes ‘Bolden self-conscious of the inherent contradiction in his situation: he must go on playing yet his playing will eventually destroy him’ (38).

Many other characters suffer from their relationship with their audience. In a foreshadowing of The Bear’s own feeling of pressure from the audience, Zabor
depicts more experienced and established musicians attacking their audience in *The Bear Comes Home*. This occurs in a scene in which The Bear performs with a fictional representation of the real life band, the Art Ensemble, led by the extravagant Lester Bowie. Bowie shoots a gun (filled with blanks) out into the audience as part of the performance, and this terrifies the crowd:

Bowie played last, pulled out his pistol at the end of his outing and emptied his clip of blanks into the lights … then Bowie, looking as if he’d gone mad, … reached into his pocket, loaded another clip into the automatic and fired another brace of blanks into the avid, crowded tables of the nightclub yelling, ‘Bang bang bang motherfuckers,’ and a busload of tourists at a row of tables near the front … who had been only mildly alarmed at the first shots and the presence of what seemed to be an actual bear onstage now went into blind panic, flinging chairs aside and bolting through the tightly packed crowd for the exit (40).

The effect of this is to imply that these musicians have come so far that they no longer really care what the audience thinks, and perhaps do not need them. Bowie and the Art Ensemble use confronting postmodern, performance-art techniques to break down the barriers between the performers and the audience. This is arguably a socio-political comment on the distance between fame and reality or the vulnerability of the audience to manipulation. After the room is cleared of patrons in Zabor’s scene, the band goes backstage and laughs about their antics. The Bear is not so blasé about the effect on the audience, but accepts that this is the way the ensemble works: the making and destroying are at the core of the performance.

Like Bowie, Bolden targets the audience in his performance, but he does this through the music alone, not through stunts or aggressive yelling. He does not do this to make a political or social statement as Bowie does, but rather as a means of expression: pushing the sound as far as it will go. Bolden turns the audience into victims of his creativity as he sees the ‘notes burning through and off everyone,’ as though he was scarring them, his music touching their skin in hot waves. In fact, there is an implicit violence in most of the descriptions of music throughout the novel:

On into the night and into blue mornings, growing louder the notes burning through and off everyone … sending them forward and forth and forth till, as he could see them, their bursts of air were animals fighting in the room (14).
These images of the music attacking the audience reflect Jacques Attali’s exploration of noise as a form of violence that has the ability to disconnect and disturb (26). In exploring the early role of music in society, before music entered what he calls the ‘commodity exchange’ and was accepted as a profession in society, Attali argues that when noise is channelled or organised into music, it becomes a kind of weapon because of its ability to inflict pain or discomfort on the auditory senses (14). Music can, of course, also induce a feeling of pleasure in the listener, but it is the musician’s capacity to control pleasure and pain that makes the music a weapon. In Bolden’s mind, this concept becomes literal; he sees the music as physically able to inflict pain upon the audience: ‘I aim at them to bring them down’ (130).

Ondaatje suggests the commodification of Bolden’s music is one of the elements that drives him to sacrifice himself; he is so desperate to connect with his audience that he pushes himself to play harder than he is physically able to maintain. This is clear in Bolden’s final performance. Bolden leads a wild parade through the streets of New Orleans, exploding with huge roaring notes and attempting to control his audience, pushing and pulling them with his sound. Bolden watches a lone woman dancing and convulsing to his music and he seems to reach the point of the sublime in a perfect performance, as he thinks: ‘God this is what I wanted to play for, if no one else I always guessed there would be this, this mirror somewhere’ (130).

This line suggests that Bolden’s search for the perfect audience, the ‘mirror’, is part of his search for the sublime. Therefore commodification and the ideal sound or music-making experience are inextricably linked. In a way this is another form of torture for Bolden, as he cannot have one without the other: the audience defines and controls him, just as he would like to define and control it with his music. While he ‘hit each boundary of the crowd’ (129) with his music, he also wants to break down the definition between himself and the audience: ‘this is what I wanted, always, loss of privacy in playing’ (130).

The dancer is moving alone, as is Bolden in this scene. Bolden cannot hear the other musicians around him, just as the dancer seems to be dancing without any awareness of the other people around her. This is also part of what makes the dancer a mirror to Bolden; they are each alone in the crowd, expressing themselves in their own unique manner. This suggests purity in the action:
although they share the moment, and Bolden loses his ‘privacy’ to her, they are also outside of the crowd, unaffected by the judgment of the rest of the audience. It is a moment that embodies Bolden’s ideal of performance: personal connection without the concerns of commercialisation.

As Bolden pushes his music to control the physical world, his breath and music literally turn into blood surging through his cornet as he loses his hearing and his sight before finally collapsing. As Bolden falls, his final words appear exposed on the bottom of the page on their own: ‘What I wanted’ (131). The simplicity of these three words suggests an appetite sated, but it is also an admission of defeat, knowing that this demise was his own doing: he wanted to destroy something with his sound. Music and violence have combined in one fateful performance that Ondaatje suggests is the ultimate combination of making and destroying – when the performance destroys its creator.

As an early hint at Bolden’s demise, Bellocq – who functions as a distorted mirror of Bolden in the novel – commits suicide in a carefully executed fire. He arranges chairs around the room in a circle and then sets them on fire. It is as though he has surrounded himself with a blazing audience, and horrified with what he has created, he throws himself through a wall, plummeting to his death on the street below. We are told that as he falls ‘Nothing is there to clasp him into a certainty’ (67) and he is no longer bound by the confines of his secluded life. This vivid event foreshadows Bolden’s own final performance, echoing the pull away from reality, leaving his home, his audience, and finally his music.

Sam Solecki argues that it is in fact the audience that drives Bolden to this point of self-destruction (2). He claims that they demand that Bolden push himself, that they long for his outrageous sound, for his experimentation and his madness, and indeed this is what is implied through many parts of the novel. Throughout Coming Through Slaughter, Bolden’s music is described as a commodity produced to please his audience (Ondaatje 136). Indeed, Scobie argues that through the recurring and violent image of the ceiling ‘fan’ that threatens to chop off Bolden’s fingers, Ondaatje’s play on words becomes a reminder of the volatility of the fan-base to which Bolden plays (12). However, I argue that it is not only the extremes to which they push him, but also the constraints they place on him that pull him apart. The audience demands that he play within certain boundaries, so that he sees them as making the room ‘narrower
and narrower’ (86). While there are expectations that he be loud and exuberant, the audience is also depicted as hemming him in. They want him to create new sounds, and Ondaatje implies that they don’t want him to ‘destroy’ too much: they don’t want him to break through what they see as ‘normal’. Yet Bolden feels he must, and in working outside of what is normal, he not only destroys himself, but also along the way attacks his audience, the pimp, his wife and his lover.

**A Fusion**

Throughout this chapter, I have shown that through performance, jazz musicians such as Ondaatje’s Bolden are repeatedly represented as being torn between two states, be it stability and instability, experimentation and constraint, certainty and anarchy, or, as Ondaatje suggests, creativity and destruction. This pull between creativity and destruction is only lightly touched upon in critical literature about jazz fiction, and is rarely identified as the primary cause of the character’s self-destruction.⁵⁰

I argue that the attempt to find a balance between creativity and destruction is what drives these characters not only to self-destruction, but into various violent states, be they physical, psychological, or musical. The reason Bolden’s experimental form of early jazz is so perfect a genre of music through which to explore this craving for balance is that the tension and excitement of this type of jazz relies upon balancing preconceived structure and the intuitive qualities of improvisation.

Through the exploration of violence, the distortion of time and space, the depiction of making and destroying, and through the complete disintegration of the main character, Ondaatje shows us the power of performative violence. If jazz and violence must, as these novels seem to suggest, be inextricably linked, then perhaps examining the relationship as performance – as performative violence – is the key to understanding how the act of creation can also be an act of destruction. Jazz performance provides an exposed representation of this process, and an arena in which authors can display the challenges of finding balance between the preconceived structures of tradition and the desire to make something completely new.

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⁵⁰ Some examples where some discussion of this issue does occur include: (Bok; Solecki)
Chapter 5 – Conclusion

In his article on Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter*, Sam Solecki suggests that authors use jazz musicians to explore creativity because it is one of the few artistic forms in which the creation occurs in public and in a physical way:

The act of creation when expressed through or embodied in a cornetist is a physical act that presents the reader's imagination with a concrete image that can be easily, because sensuously, grasped (25).

As Solecki points out, if a writer were exploring the creative work of an author or composer for instance, there would be little action and only thought processes involved. Although there have been many attempts in literature and film to represent these processes, they do not lend themselves to engaging or dramatic narrative action (25). This is where the examination of jazz and violence becomes more interesting too: due to the way layers of violence intersect and are then translated into music, there is both a physical representation of the music-making process, and a reflection of the character’s psychological concerns. Clearly, not every novel I have examined has achieved this layering of psychological and philosophical emphasis, though those that have achieved this have succeeded in a successful representation of the jazz life, jazz music and the creative process.

Throughout this study, I have shown that the three layers of violence – systemic, intimate and performative – work together to highlight elements of risk and danger in the creative act. Although not all three forms are present in every novel, each text contains at least one type of violence and uses it to highlight something about the music that the character performs. The novels that do successfully combine all three forms of violence have an added psychological depth that enhances the representation of the music making as more than simply a process. If the creative process of improvisation in jazz is, as Berliner argues, a ‘demanding musical journey’ (348) that involves ‘a lifetime of preparation and knowledge’ (17), then to adequately represent it is a difficult challenge. A

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51 However, this is not a concern for all writers attempting to represent the lives of people in the creative arts as there are many texts and films about writers who apparently have extraordinarily dramatic lives. These are most often completely unrealistic.
consideration of all three layers of violence I have identified will enhance that representation.

The framework I have developed has therefore established a means through which the complex relationship between jazz and violence may be examined in literature. In addition, the application of the framework reveals the importance of history (both personal and social) to the representation of performance in the novels. As systemic and intimate violence both lead to performative violence, the history of the characters and the music has an impact on how the music is both performed and received by the audience. The music embodies and sometimes absorbs the violations, breakages and damage of the characters’ lives. When the music takes on this weight, it becomes a driving force in the narrative and can even, as it does in *Coming Through Slaughter*, influence the form of the text itself.

Another insight that has been produced through the application of the framework is that the novels I examine use recurring themes of addiction to reflect the nature of the creative mind at work. Many of these novels examine addiction through representations of both creative and destructive urges, and addiction is a defining trait of the musicians they describe. The jazz musician characters are victims of their addictions because they want to access the sublime in order to create new sounds, but they also want to escape reality and find new ways of responding to the violence in their lives. Therefore the performers who use drugs or alcohol, and become addicted to them, are simultaneously agents of both creation and destruction.

Through the examination of *Coming Through Slaughter*, it was also revealed that scenes of performative violence can be a representation of the author’s own preoccupation with creative process. This is essentially at the heart of the question of why authors choose to write about jazz musicians and their music making. These characters become emblematic of the creative process for all artists. As such, it would be interesting to attempt to apply the systemic-intimate-performative framework to the characterisation of artists working in other mediums. It would also be possible, with some small adjustments perhaps, to apply the same framework to musician characters in film that exhibit many of the same traits addressed in this study.
The framework may be particularly applicable to characters who play other genres of improvised music. For instance, if literary representations of music were to extend to improvised popular music in the future, the framework could potentially be applied to representations of ‘jam bands’ such as the Grateful Dead, or the psychedelic rock of Pink Floyd. In the broader context, the examination of violence and improvisation could also be applicable to representations of traditional Indian improvised music including Raga Sangeet or even to the musical cadenzas of Romantic and Classical music. However, due to the evidence that performative violence develops primarily from other forms of violence, some forms of improvised music may be less amenable to the framework than others. Differences in the historical backgrounds of each style of music may mean that systemic violence and intimate violence are not always present.

Although the number of novels about jazz musicians is not large, jazz and literature have been intertwined since the early days of jazz – through novels, short stories and narrative poetry. Within this relatively small field, violence is a feature that recurs in various forms, as shown throughout this thesis. However, the relationship between jazz and violence in literature is rarely recognised. I argue that this relationship is important, as it is emblematic of the artistic concern with the process of creation and the destruction or reconfiguration of conventional ideas. The process of jazz improvisation live on stage is, at its best, illustrative of the process of creating something new through the reshaping of traditional ideas. In addition, the context of violence that surrounds these representations of performance highlights the contrast between music and violence while simultaneously suggesting the two elements are necessarily intertwined. As such, the framework I have developed provides a grid through which these characters and their violent histories can be examined, potentially providing some answers to the question of how and why artists pursue the creation of new ideas and forms of expression.

By viewing the relationship between violence and jazz through the systemic-intimate-performative framework, it can be seen that that the act of creation is all-consuming. Every part of the musician characters’ lives is affected by their creative impulse – their past, their relationships, their social status, their economic situation, their gender, their identity and their desires. The creative
impulse that filters through what the characters do is a violent impulse and they break things apart in order to create something new. This core idea is what these writers harness in their exploration of the ways in which the destruction of convention and expectations can lead to creation. For authors exploring the lives of jazz musicians, violence is a metaphorical tool that enhances the representation of the creative act by showing its necessarily destructive component.

As mentioned in the introduction, the three forms violence have been inspired by other theorists’ conceptions\(^\text{52}\). However, I have expanded on these conceptions of violence to accommodate the complexities of the representation of violence in literature about jazz musicians. Primarily, Žižek’s conception of symbolic violence, ‘violence embodied in language and its forms’ (1), although applicable to both literature and music, does not account for the physical impact of the violence represented in the novels. By examining violence beyond the confines of symbolic violence, I have applied the idea that violence can be transferred almost as a form of energy, from one victim to another to the analysis of the novels\(^\text{53}\). Thus psychological violence can become physical or musical and vice versa. Violence is not viewed as simply remaining in one form or another – instead, it can be applied to almost any expression, be it physical, vocal or indeed musical.

Violence, and the process of music making, can be linked through this transformative quality. Where violence can shift from one victim to another through several forms, music too can have an impact in many forms. Perhaps it is the very notion of transference that also entices authors towards using music as a vehicle to talk about violence – ultimately, perhaps artists desire some demonstrable level of transference from their creations to those who experience the work – be it aural, visual, or multi-sensory.

Through the examination of these novels, this thesis explores the intersection of many complex areas including race, gender, Romantic myths, jazz culture, collaboration, and of course several modes of violence. The juxtaposition of these elements also suggests that the examination of violence in jazz fiction can lead to a broader understanding of cultural perceptions of artists more generally. Through the wide range of inquiry here (albeit with a limited scope in some

\(^{52}\) Such as Žižek, Girard and Gussow.

\(^{53}\) As discussed in the introduction, in relation to René Girard (p.5).
areas), I have argued that links can be made between the representation of a character’s personal history and the representation of their music making (or artistic practice). In addition, the novels imply that economic and social concerns have an impact on artistic production. Thus the examination of these novels highlights how the writers represent creative practice as a process of transferring energy from their lives into their art (in these cases, jazz), and then sometimes even transferring that energy back to the audience.

Violence in literature can be viewed as an expressive or responsive force that is at once destructive and creative. In addition, representations of creative practice in literature sometimes use violence to highlight the desire to transfer emotional impact from the artist to the audience.

Towards ‘Swing’

The following volume is a novel, ‘Swing’, which has both influenced and been inspired by the research. Written partly as an antidote to the recurring stereotypes in novels about jazz musicians, ‘Swing’ is also an investigation of how performative violence might be used to represent fully the psychological development – and downfall – of a character.

As mentioned in the introduction, the simultaneous composition of the research and creative writing components of this thesis has resulted in a web of interaction between the two parts. The novels were previously foregrounded as the primary inspiration for the systemic-intimate-performative framework. Yet the development of the main character of the novel, Chester Nelson, was also crucial to the identification of violence as a theme in the novels about jazz musicians.

I wrote, in an improvisatory manner, about my protagonist, Chester, performing jazz and developing relationships with other musicians. Through the process of writing, Chester developed into a violent character. He broke a chair, he crashed his car. And, dissatisfied with his inability to perform to the level to which he aspired, he tried to pick fights with other characters. This development in my own writing led to an examination of other novels about jazz musicians and hence the discovery that the vast majority include violence in some way.
Although performative violence was important to the way in which Chester played some of the time, initially it did not appear to have much meaning beyond an attack on the audience. However, on researching techniques of improvisation, and listening to contemporary jazz, the complexities of the improvisatory process became very important to the portrayal of Chester’s music making, particularly with one band in the novel, Jacknife. Jacknife attempts to incorporate into its performances a high level of skill, the knowledge of many styles of music, the emotional interaction between performers, and the process of intuitive playing. Throughout the novel, these qualities became more and more challenging to Chester and he struggles to keep up.

This is one of the ways I hoped to write against stereotypes of musician characters, as Chester is not a genius. He is competent, but struggles to perform at the standard to which he aspires. As a result the performative violence is as much about his self-destruction as it is about attacking others. The process of improvisation provokes an unraveling in Chester: even when he thinks he is strong enough, the music undoes him again and again, because he does not have the musical ability to express the music he would like to be able to play.

In addition, Chester’s personal life affects the way he plays. A combination of events – including his partner leaving him and his discovery of a family secret – render him unable to perform. He is unable to put aside his problems and focus on the music alone, or to use the music to process his emotions. Instead, through trying to access an intuitive, spontaneous mindset for improvisation, he is pushed towards drug use to deal with the tension arising from his inadequacies as a performer.

However, Chester is able to play early jazz. When he performs with Madeleine, a singer in a big band, he is comfortable with the skill level required and enjoys the dance music. This is another theme that has arisen from the research: how do musicians manage the distinction between swing and contemporary jazz? Although in reality many jazz musicians easily transition between the two forms (and others), I felt that the difference in the music was an appropriate representation of the internal conflict within Chester. On the one hand, Chester craves stability, family and simplicity, and on the other, he wants to live a more ‘wild’ life, with outrageous journeys, bar fights, lies, drugs and alcohol. Swing music represents the former and contemporary jazz, the latter.
While these parallels may appear to reflect stereotypes associated with jazz musician characters, I believe that the music as a representation of the internal conflict within one person makes this less about the stereotypes and more about the manner in which the music is actually performed.

Many jazz musician characters in fiction verge on stereotypes, and this was a major concern to me in the initial stages of writing the novel. My need to react against stereotypes began with my own choices in the development of the main characters – Chester, Beau and Simone – who I hoped would be a departure from these recurring stereotypes. Firstly, Chester is a bass player, and therefore not a front-line player like most of the characters in the novels. In addition, there are both male and female musician characters throughout ‘Swing’, and the female musicians are actually more musically skilled than the male characters. The female characters provide the benchmark of performance to which Chester aspires.

In retrospect, the reading and analysis of other novels about jazz musicians also helped me identify other familiar models that I have attempted to write against in ‘Swing’. The realisation that the vast majority of these fictional characters were genius musicians led to a decision that Chester would not be an exceptional player. In addition, through research into empirical studies, it also became clear that very few jazz musicians make a living through their music. As a result, I felt it necessary to give all my characters ‘day jobs’. These extraneous positions helped expand the backgrounds of the characters, as well as bring out qualities of their personalities that would otherwise have remained underdeveloped.

‘Swing’ is a novel that was written in response to the jazz fiction of the twentieth century. Not only is the novel set in 2010, it is situated in Sydney, Australia, and this location alone is a differential which sets it apart from previous novels about jazz musicians. By incorporating modes of violence and attempting to write against stereotypes, I hope that I have presented a more realistic perspective on the life of a jazz musician, while retaining an element of drama and representing the complexities of psychological deterioration.
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