

Ann Petry, Ralph Ellison, and Two Representations of Live Jazz Performance

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This article is a comparative study of Ann Petry's 1947 short story "Solo on the Drums" and segments of Ralph Ellison's *Three Days Before the Shooting* . . . that were almost certainly drafted several years later.¹ I believe Petry's masterful "Solo on the Drums" could have been Ellison's inspiration for the jazz club scene in Book One, chapter ten, which is a culmination of the action that begins in chapter nine (a long, coherent flashback sequence). This claim can probably never be proved one way or the other. But if Ellison arrived at the scenario—in which jazz induces a reverie in a recently love-jilted man—completely on his own, then his mind was working much like that of Petry, and their representations of jazz-induced reverie could be taken together as significant statements about one way jazz may have been apprehended and experienced at this time.

Both narratives portray the effects of a jazz performance on an emotionally troubled character. Attempts to relate the effects of live jazz on the psyche go back to at least the 1920s. Rudolph Fisher's short story "Common Meter" and Zora Neale Hurston's essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" furnish good examples. But Petry adds another dimension to the representation of the experience of the music and explicitly explores the effect of a jazz performance on a character who has suffered a personal romantic loss earlier in the day on which the performance takes place. The character experiences a reverie that drifts from personal heartbreak into commentary on a wider sense of political

and cultural loss. Ellison portrays a similar scenario across chapters nine and ten. What could this mean for the study of Ellison's influences, especially those that have gone unacknowledged or have not been explored adequately? And what might it suggest about Petry as a sort of "alternative" jazz critic?

First, I consider the question of whether Ellison could have read Petry's story when it appeared. Next, I note how jazz writing opportunities were generally closed to women, especially African American women (and were not especially open to African American men). Furthermore, I raise the question of how Petry's *oeuvre* might have looked had she had the opportunity to use her knowledge of jazz in nonfiction feature pieces, as Ellison did (following the success of *Invisible Man*). I then discuss what Petry's parallel exploration and representation of jazz performance might mean for the phenomenology of listening—the sense of being “in music”—that Ellison began to develop in *Invisible Man*, where he focused on recorded music.² He appears to expand upon this idea of being “in” music in *Three Days Before the Shooting* . . . in one of the most significant representations of live music in his *oeuvre*. I then discuss Petry as a possible literary precursor of Ellison (with regard to the representation of jazz performance) and ask what this could mean for understanding the influence of women writers, particularly African American women writers, on Ellison's work.

In his second novel, Ellison takes up the theme and imagery of music performed live in a way that he does not in *Invisible Man*. Music in general plays a more significant role in his second novel. Reverend Alonzo Hickman, a central character, is a former jazz musician and is nicknamed “God's Trombone.” There is a section about Hickman's early days as a trombonist.³ Chapter four of Book One is about a jazz bassist.⁴

In his 1955 essay “Living With Music,” Ellison writes of purposefully distancing himself from music (in which he'd majored at Tuskegee) during his early years in New York so that he could focus on becoming a writer.⁵ During this period, the late 1930s and 1940s, he “tried to break clean” with music, and, in general, this effort is reflected in his writing.⁶ In “Living With Music,” he writes of reengaging with music seriously in 1949.⁷ *Invisible Man* initially did not have much, if anything, to do with jazz.⁸ The famous passages in the novel's prologue about Louis Armstrong were late additions. Barbara Foley, one of the scholars who has studied the early drafts, claims that “the entirety of the prologue . . . came to Ellison only late in his compositional process.”⁹ This section, with its memorable scene of the narrator listening to Louis Armstrong's “What Did I Do To Be So Black and Blue,” seems to have come to Ellison around or after the time he had recommitted to listening seriously to music. Perhaps he returned at that point to a story he may have seen some time before.

Petry's “Solo on the Drums” first appeared in the October 1947 issue of *The Magazine of the Year*, which brought the first excerpt of *Invisible Man* to U.S. readers three issues later. In “Solo on the Drums,” the drummer Kid Jones (almost certainly based on the enormously influential swing-era innova-

tor Papa Jo Jones) performs at a midtown Manhattan movie palace (a typical daytime venue) in the orchestra of the Marquis of Brund, a pianist-leader similar to Count Basie. Papa Jo Jones (1911–85) was Count Basie’s drummer from 1936 to 1944—from the Count Basie Orchestra’s beginnings through its years of peak fame and influence—and again from 1946 to 1948. Petry’s story appeared in 1947, making such *à clef* portrayals plausible and likely. Perhaps Petry picked up on some tensions in the band after Jones’s return from the U.S. Army. In 1948, Jones was to leave the Count Basie Orchestra abruptly and without notice, though not, as far as is known, for any reason dealing with a conflict over a woman.¹⁰ Jones was seven years younger than Basie and was among the youngest members of the band—thus, perhaps, a “kid.”

In Ellison’s hometown, Oklahoma City, he knew members of what was to become Basie’s band—for example, bassist Walter Page and singer Jimmy Rushing.¹¹ From 1938 to 1942, when Ellison was writing for *New Masses*, the popular Basie band played fundraisers and parties associated with the publication.¹² In short, then, Ellison crossed paths with several of the group’s musicians at least twice in his life. It seems, with all this in mind, that Ellison could not have failed to hear Jo Jones and Count Basie, the musicians who seemingly inspired Petry’s story. Ellison published the Battle Royal episode of *Invisible Man* in the January 1948 issue of *The Magazine of the Year*. Presumably he was aware of its previous issues and easily could have encountered Petry’s story in the short-lived magazine’s inaugural year. “Solo on the Drums” was published when Ellison would have been editing the Battle Royal episode for *The Magazine of the Year*.¹³

Another reason that Ellison probably could not have failed to miss the October 1947 issue of *The Magazine of the Year* was because of the portfolio of jazz photographs by filmmaker and photographer Gjon Mili. Mili’s portfolio immediately precedes Petry’s story in the issue. Petry’s story begins on a right-hand page, and on the opposite page is what was to become one of Mili’s best-known photographs—a shot of Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, and others at a jam session. The inside of the back cover features a stunning photo of the trumpeter Oran “Hot Lips” Page, who was based in Oklahoma City during Ellison’s youth and was a figure Ellison looked up to and tried to imitate.¹⁴ In 1944, Mili had directed the influential short film *Jammin’ the Blues*, which was nominated for an Academy Award. (Jo Jones was one of two drummers featured in the film.) Mili was the preeminent visual chronicler of jazz at the time. Even if Ellison was still trying to distance himself from music at this time, he likely remained interested in his friends and acquaintances in the world of music. Mili was on the editorial board of the magazine (he was one of seven “executive editors”) and thereby lent it a patina of jazz-world credibility, which perhaps was envisioned as carrying over to Petry’s story on the page after his photograph of the Ellington-Gillespie jam session. *The Magazine of the Year* published a number of photograph portfolios by Mili, but the one in question, in the October 1947 issue preceding Petry’s story, was his only jazz-themed portfolio. The

photograph would have brought together two of Ellison's interests, as Ellison worked as a professional photographer during this period.¹⁵

It is unclear what Ellison thought of Petry's work,¹⁶ but perhaps it is safe to say that he did not have anything against it in the late 1940s. There is no reference to Petry in the finding aid for Ellison's papers in the Library of Congress. According to Arnold Rampersad, Ellison declined an offer to review Petry's 1953 novel *The Narrows* for *The New York Times Book Review*, but the reason for his refusal is unknown.¹⁷ Petry, in any case, was closely associated with *The Magazine of the Year*. She published two stories in the magazine before Ellison's story appeared there. The first issue, in March 1947, declared on the front cover that "This magazine is owned by leading artists, writers, and photographers." Subsequent issues listed the owners—several dozen prominent writers, artists, and photographers. Petry, whose highly successful novel *The Street* was published in 1946, is listed among them starting in August 1947. Her first short story to appear in the magazine was "A Necessary Knocking at the Door" in the August 1947 issue. In her author biography, she is referred to as a "contributor-owner."¹⁸ Other owners included famous writers such as Martha Gellhorn, S.J. Perelman, Walter Lippman, Pearl Buck, Ogden Nash, and Upton Sinclair. As far as one can tell, Petry seems to have been the only African American on the list of owners.¹⁹

"Solo on the Drums" is remarkable in its own right, aside from any possible influence on Ellison. It may be worthwhile to consider the piece as not only a short story but also a work of jazz criticism. Petry claimed, "I've been a jazz buff, or a fan, ever since I was a teenager."²⁰ Yet she did not publish any nonfiction about the music. There was little writing about jazz published by women from the 1920s through the 1960s. In John Gennari's history of jazz criticism, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics*, he claims, "By far the loudest silences in this book are female and feminine voices. While female jazz critics have been even fewer in number than female jazz musicians, the issue is not simply a matter of sexual identity, but also of gender dynamics."²¹ Jazz journalism proved difficult to enter for most women.²² Thus, if Ellison, an eminent, masculine jazz sage who thrived in that world, picked up a technique for representing jazz in fiction from Petry, this influence could say something about what might have been, both for Petry's interest in jazz and for midcentury representations of the music.

Petry reports that she was a jazz buff, and Keith Clark claims that her "interlarding of storytelling and jazz is a precursor to Ellison's pioneering treatise on music and literature, *Shadow and Act*."²³ But perhaps this technique is a precursor to more than Ellison's essays on jazz. Perhaps it is a precursor to his later fiction as well, or at least it mirrors aspects of Ellison's technique, raising questions of why both settled on a similar method of representing the effect of hearing jazz performed live following intense trauma.

The limited opportunities available to women in the field of jazz journalism may have limited the full scope of Petry's jazz writing. Ellison, however, is

rightfully admired for his jazz writing and his fiction. Yet, if a fictive instance of Ellison's representation of jazz and its impact on an individual is reminiscent of an instance by Petry, what could it suggest about Petry as a would-be jazz critic? For instance, Ellison memorialized and historicized Minton's Playhouse (the Harlem jazz venue and early laboratory for bebop) in his 1959 essay for *Esquire*, "The Golden Age, Time Past," and (as I argue later) sets most of Book One, chapter ten, of *Three Days Before the Shooting* . . . in an unnamed stand-in for Minton's. Ellison thus memorializes the venue and its music in two registers: a journalistic register for the historical record, and a fictional register, which allowed for a wider swath of feeling and a different cluster of observations. Petry created a fictional portrait of a big band in a midtown Manhattan movie palace in "Solo on the Drums." I would like to place "Solo on the Drums" alongside Ellison's portrayal of Minton's for purposes of critical comparison—perhaps akin to comparison in art history.

In Petry's story, Kid Jones's wife has just told him, before his performance that day, that she is leaving him for his boss, the Marquis. When the earlier trauma of the news of the separation and betrayal interacts with the music, it opens a sort of portal into Jones's mind, to which the narrator has access. Performing on the drums later that day, driving the band led by his erstwhile friend who has formed a relationship with his wife behind his back, Jones channels his emotions into his performance and plays the drums with an intensity rarely seen by his bandmates. First he fantasizes about killing the Marquis, and then he enters a fragmented reverie peppered with historical references and images. The narrator says that Jones "built up an illusion."²⁴ It is an illusion that may draw on deep cultural or familial memory or, rather, is a pastiche of memories and images heard tell of or read about—a collage of text in the mind accessed through the combination of trauma and music:

The drums leaped with the fury that was in him. The men in the band turned their heads toward him—a faint astonishment showed in their faces.

He ignored them. The drums took him away from them, took him back, and back, and back in time and space. He built up an illusion. He was sending out the news. Grandma died. The foreigner in the litter has an old disease and will not recover. The man from across the big water is sleeping with the chief's daughter. Kill. Kill. Kill. The war goes badly with the men with the bad smell and the loud laugh. It goes badly with the chiefs with the round heads and the peacock's walk.

It is cool in the deep track in the forest. Cool and quiet. The trees talk softly. They speak of the dance tonight. The young girl from across the lake will be there. Her waist is slender and her thighs are rounded. Then the words he want-

ed to forget were all around Kid Jones again. "I'm leaving I'm leaving I'm leaving."

He couldn't help himself. He stopped hitting the drums and stared at the Marquis of Brund—a long, malevolent look, filled with hate.²⁵

Through his refracted rage at his wife and at his boss and musical collaborator, Jones accesses a hazy past (gleaned from sources to which the reader is not privy) through his furious drumming and hints, mysteriously, at encounters leading to cultural and political loss. The cause of his immediate suffering and inspired playing—personal loss and betrayal—is juxtaposed with narrative wisps hinting at historical loss. A chief and chiefs are mentioned. This appears to suggest a Native American or African context for Jones's collage of images. (Scottish Highlanders had chiefs as well, but that seems a stretch.) What the narrator could be suggesting with this fragmented narrative is far from clear, but perhaps it could be thought of as framing questions about what sorts of losses occurred in the past that set the stage for that day's loss to occur and how potentially insignificant personal loss seems from that perspective. The broader claim is about the power of an improvised jazz performance to reveal both personal and historical trauma (and perhaps the potential inability to adequately articulate what the performer is experiencing and thinking about).

Later in his solo, Jones experiences the sensation or illusion of becoming part of the drums, of being "sucked inside them."²⁶ Perhaps "Solo on the Drums" is most valuable for its narration of what can happen to one while listening to music—for the suggestion that when "inside" music, so to speak, one is in another reality or another perception of reality, outside the constructed social world and in a musical world particular to one's own mind. Gunther Anders (1902–92) theorized that, when listening to music, one forms an "enclave" with it.²⁷ Ellison's chapter in *Three Days Before the Shooting . . .* and Petry's story seem to move along the same lines that Anders does, for Ellison and Petry seem to reject the view that music passively impacts the listener and molds the listener's subjectivity (a view widely held since Descartes). In Anders's view, the listener inhabits the sound and creates a new world with and within that sound, albeit temporarily.²⁸ Whether the similarity between the scenes in Petry's and those in Ellison's narratives is the result of influence or an instance of coincidence, it still represents a moment in which characters temporarily discover through jazz another perception of reality. In each case, Petry's Jones and Ellison's Welborn McIntyre may be said to be "in" music.

The section of Ellison's chapter that I place next to Petry's story follows the same general outline as her story does: a man is distraught after the woman he was romantically involved with breaks up with him. Later that same day, he proceeds to go into a deep reverie while listening to a jazz performance. His mind at this point, inside the music so to speak, proceeds to form a pastiche or collage of images from fragments of remembered history or film. These frag-

ments, called forth by the music, seem to create a kind of historical foil against which the break up can (implicitly) be compared. There are several key differences, such as that Ellison's Laura Jean, an African American woman who breaks up with the white narrator of Book One, McIntyre, does so because her mother forces her to. Laura Jean does not have a say in the matter.²⁹ Her mother declares her relationship with McIntyre to be over, and she accepts the decision.³⁰ In addition, McIntyre is not personally creating the music that affects him later that night. The question of labor is important as well. Jones must go to work after his traumatic break up, while McIntyre goes out to a jazz spot to have a drink and relax after his (and hopes Laura Jean might look for him there). But overall, this segment of Ellison's narrative is quite similar to Petry's.

McIntyre is the narrator of Book One of *Three Days Before the Shooting* . . . and is a white journalist who is attempting to understand the relationship between Reverend Hickman and Senator Sunraider. Though most of the action takes place in the mid- to late 1950s, in chapters nine and ten, McIntyre flashes back to the late 1930s or early 1940s, when he was in an interracial romantic relationship with Laura Jean in Harlem. Laura Jean's mother disapproves of the relationship and demands an end to it. McIntyre then wanders the cold Harlem streets in a dejected despair and eventually ends up at the unnamed jazz club.

The scene of McIntyre's dark night appears to riff on significant elements of "Solo on the Drums." Petry's story features an explosive, out-of-the-ordinary performance in a setting known for predictable performances, while Ellison's features an innovative performance in a space known for experimentation. "Solo on the Drums" takes place during the day, whereas Ellison's scene is set at night. Petry's Jones performs in a big band at the fictional Randlert Theater at Broadway and 42nd Street in New York (the actual theater at that address during the 1940s was the New Rialto). At that time, swing orchestras, or big bands, played matinees in enormous midtown movie palaces for largely white audiences. Petry's narrator does not specify whether the Randlert is segregated or partially segregated (that is, if it had a balcony area reserved for African Americans or if African Americans were not allowed to sit center aisle), but it probably was meant to be, because the midtown movie palaces were segregated to one degree or another.³¹ Quite the opposite from a big band playing rehearsed numbers in a midtown movie palace during the day was a freewheeling late-night jam session at a Minton's-like venue, with its evocations of bebop. Beginning around 1938, musicians who worked in big bands elsewhere, such as in the midtown movie palaces, would often come to Minton's to jam, relax, and experiment after hours. McIntyre notes that "a jam session, for which the place was famous was taking place" and that the bandstand was "set against the rear wall."³² Minton's Playhouse was the bar of the Hotel Cecil and featured a long bar perpendicular to the street, with a tight space for tables and chairs in front of a small bandstand against the rear wall. This is suggested by the closely placed tables and bandstand described by Ellison's narrator McIntyre.³³

For McIntyre and Jones, each bedeviled by traumatic romantic separation earlier in the day, an Andersian being-in-music may provide a temporary escape from the frustrations and shock of the separation and, if only momentarily, from the frustrations of segregation that inform each story. There is a subtle representation of Jim Crow and exploitation in Petry's story, as Jones is "selling himself a little piece at a time" for largely white audiences. Minton's, however, was a nonsegregated space, as Ellison notes in his essay "The Golden Age, Time Past."³⁴ Ellison reverses the situation of the midtown movie palace by placing McIntyre in a fictional Minton's "crowded with dark people."³⁵ The primary purpose of chapters nine and ten—which narrate McIntyre's youthful immersion in Harlem and interracial romance with (and impregnation of) Laura Jean—seems to be to provide psychological depth to McIntyre and to provide him with a motive for being so interested in the racial dynamics of the Hickman-Sunraider relationship.

McIntyre decides to go to the Minton's-like venue because he and Laura Jean had been there once. He thinks she may escape her mother for the evening and think to look for him there. McIntyre settles in at a table and has a drink. As he begins to take in the music, he begins to inhabit the music in much the same way that Jones dwells in it and, like Jones, to speculate on colonial conflict and cultural loss:

The big saxophone was improvising now, seeming to talk, to speak in a hoarse, reedy stylization of human speech; pleading, crooning, coaxing, then rising to great heights of abstract eloquence which evoked for me, in my disturbed state, those movies in which great Indian chieftains bespeak in the native tongue their tribe's vision of the world to representatives of the white man's church, his army, and the executive branch of his government. I could see mountains, canyons, forests and plains, a row of horsemen bearing feathered lances, their war-bonneted heads outlined against the sky along the curve of a noble hill. . . . Tears flooded my eyes as I watched his big hulk swaying gently back and forth, thinking as the applause roared up, *You nasty bastard, you're playing with me. You're playing with me, and all the rest, but you're laughing at me, and I have to stay here for Laura.* . . .³⁶

The music momentarily jars McIntyre out of his immersion in self-pity before triggering a fresh paranoia. Why should the music evoke for McIntyre (in his "disturbed state") images gleaned from Hollywood portrayals of Native Americans? Jones's reverie is more abstract.³⁷ But this could be yet another instance of Ellison riffing on Petry's story. In the moment when McIntyre is jarred out of self-pity, his habitation within music constructs a new space for his thoughts, mediated by images (as in the case of Jones) at his mind's dis-

posal—in this case, Hollywood’s images of Native Americans, which effectively throw his personal problems into quasihistorical relief. This is hardly a narrative strategy that readily presents itself for representing the effects of an unexpected and bad break up, but Ellison and Petry both invoke jazz as a kind of meditative substrate that allows personal losses to be subsumed in thoughts of wider, historical losses.

McIntyre, a well-meaning liberal white journalist in love with an African American woman, thinks of himself at the outset of chapter nine as a pioneer of interracial relationships and thus as a pioneer of a more thoughtful and humane society. Now, in chapter ten, he sits in a largely black Harlem bar, in a musical reverie, pondering images (however misshapen by Hollywood) of the history of the Western Hemisphere over the last half millennium—including some of the historical processes that led to the creation of the music he is hearing and the situation in which he finds himself. It seems too similar to be coincidental, but the most important difference here is that Ellison’s character is a white consumer of the music while Petry’s is a black creator of the music. Ellison’s version of the scenario provides crucial context for McIntyre’s interest in Hickman, Sunraider, and Minifees (the jazz bassist in chapter four). The jam session that sends McIntyre into his reverie is broken up by the high jinks of a male nun impersonator who enters the club looking for money. After throwing out the disruptor, the proprietor promises McIntyre that the music will resume and that free breakfast will be served. This is reminiscent of the free breakfast, provided by manager Teddy Hill that Ellison describes in “The Golden Age, Time Past.” McIntyre declines to stay and resumes wandering the Harlem night. He hears “an uproarious [sic] version” of “Ain’t Gon’ Study War No More” that “exploded” out of a basement, sung with “wild accents of laughter.”³⁸ McIntyre later imagines this song as “rowdy farewell fanfare” for himself, for his exit from Harlem for having been “the victim of an impossible and impractical love.”³⁹ The end of his interracial romance is also the end of his “efforts at social action,” which implies a leftist politics that he does not particularly espouse in the present chapters (set in the 1950s). Fifteen years or so before the opening of *Three Days Before the Shooting. . .*, at the outset of which McIntyre is a middling political journalist, his trajectory was apparently different: he was actively involved in progressive social action, in love, and soon to be the father of a child. Laura Jean’s mother forecloses those possibilities, but his reverie during the saxophonist’s solo cements the loss by meditating on the catastrophe that befell Native Americans. The life of Jones will also change personally and professionally after the day on which his story takes place, and the slivers of narrative bring the reality of the situation into relief for him.

The similarities between the narratives, along with Ellison and Petry both publishing in *The Magazine of the Year*, suggest to me that Ellison may have seen Petry’s story and found in it a way to situate McIntyre’s experience of hearing Harlem musicians. “Solo on the Drums” may have helped Ellison to create a richer context and sympathy for McIntyre’s investigation into the

Hickman-Sunraider relationship. “Solo on the Drums” may also be tangentially related to a crucial segment of *Invisible Man*’s Prologue, where the experience of listening to Louis Armstrong’s rendition of “What Did I Do To Be So Black and Blue” plunges the narrator into a hallucinatory scene of the mother who was a slave.

If Ellison was thinking along the same lines as Anders, it could be that Petry was as well—first—and that she may have provided Ellison with a framework or model for rendering this aspect of his fiction. If Ellison’s literary influences were mostly males, and mostly white males (aside from Langston Hughes and Richard Wright), I do not think there would necessarily or automatically be anything wrong with that. But, as this essay suggests, it may be time to reconsider this account. If Ellison was not influenced by Petry, then the sort of comparative analysis offered here could still make for a more expansive understanding of the two writers as jazz aficionados whose representations of the perceptions and effects of live music in their fiction reflect their knowledge of and engagement with the music.

Notes

1. Ralph Ellison, *Three Days Before the Shooting . . .*, ed. John F. Callahan and Adam Bradley (New York: Modern Library, 2010), xviii, 3. According to John Callahan and Adam Bradley in their “General Introduction to *Three Days Before the Shooting . . .*,” the beginning of Ellison’s work on his second novel can be dated to 1951 when, in a letter to Albert Murray, Ellison reported that he was “trying to get started” on the novel. This is the point where Callahan and Bradley’s “Chronology of Composition” begins. They claim that Ellison’s “drafting in earnest” did not begin until 1954 (xviii). In their “Editors’ Note to Book One,” they claim that extant drafts of Book One date “in all probability” to the “mid-to-late 1950s” (3).
2. “I not only entered the music but descended, like Dante, into its depths,” the narrator of *Invisible Man* recalls. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 9.
3. Ellison, *Three Days*, 517–20.
4. This is a variant of Ellison’s 1973 short story “Cadillac Flambé.” Ralph Ellison, “Cadillac Flambé,” *American Review* 16 (1973): 249–69. (Reprinted in *Three Days*, 1085–97.)
5. Ralph Ellison, *Collected Essays*, ed. John Callahan (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 233.
6. Ralph Ellison, *Flying Home and Other Stories* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 137–47. An exception is his 1944 short story “In a Strange Country.” The story explores the tension between the form of music and the content of lyrics in the case of Welsh nationalist songs. A clarinet’s music is featured in the 1947 version of the Battle Royal scene, but it is more of an incidental detail relating to establishing the scene in the hotel than the subject of music-related speculation or commentary.
7. Ellison, *Collected Essays*, 233.
8. Ralph Ellison, “Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar,” in *Soon, One Morning: New Writing by American Negroes, 1940–1962*, ed. Herbert Hill (New York: Knopf, 1963), 242–90. In a section excised from the final manuscript and published in the anthology *Soon, One Morning* (1962) as “Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar,” the Invisible Man hears the distant sound of a musical performance while in an underground tunnel after escaping from the hospital (277).
9. Barbara Foley, *Wrestling with the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 157.
10. Jo Jones, *Riftide: The Life and Opinions of Papa Jo Jones as Told to Albert Murray*, ed. Paul Devlin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 58.
11. Ralph Ellison, “My Strength Comes from Louis Armstrong,” in *Living with Music: Ralph Ellison’s Jazz Writings*, ed. Robert O’Meally (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 268. Here, Ellison also mentions “always going around” with the Basie band in New York.
12. Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1997), 332–34.
13. Ralph Ellison, “The Invisible Man,” *Horizon* 93, no. 4 (1947): 104–118, and “Battle Royal,” *48: The Magazine of the Year* 2 no. 1 (January 1948): 14–32. Debut, that is, for a readership in the United States. The Battle Royal scene first appeared in the British journal *Horizon* in October

1947. The version published in the January issue of '48: *The Magazine of the Year* is significantly different from the version in *Horizon*. The 1948 version has been thoroughly bowdlerized, with risqué elements (mostly relating to the exotic dancer) omitted. There are also different paragraph breaks.

14. Ellison, *Collected Essays*, 231.

15. For a discussion of Ellison's interest in photography, see Sara Blair, "Ellison, Photography, and the Origins of Invisibility," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Ellison*, ed. Ross Posnock (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 56–81.

16. Ellison, *Three Days*. Ellison was not shy about discussing his influences: Thomas Hardy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Ernest Hemingway, T.S. Eliot, and William Faulkner were some of the writers he mentioned in interviews and essays. As a whole, Book One of *Three Days Before The Shooting . . .* probably owes more to Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* than to any other work of fiction: the bulk of the story in Book One concerns a curious journalist (Welborn McIntyre) on the trail of a mysterious and charismatic politician (Adam Sunraider). Certainly the narrative frames of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* could have been inspirations for both Warren and Ellison, as thoughtful narrators become enthralled by unconventional figures whose life stories they become determined to learn about and tell. Though Ellison and Warren were friends (one of his finest interviews appears in Warren's *Who Speaks for the Negro?*), he never really mentions Warren as a novelistic influence—at least not in the way he mentions Dostoevsky, Hardy, Hemingway, and Faulkner. Thus, Ellison could have had numerous unacknowledged or undiscussed influences. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Penguin, 2007). Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (New York: Penguin, 2007). Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946). Robert Penn Warren, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (New York: Random House, 1965).

17. Arnold Rampersad, *Ralph Ellison: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 281.

18. "'47 August Contributors,'" '47: *The Magazine of the Year* 1 no. 6 (1947): 136.

19. I do not make this claim with absolute certainty, because some names on the list are unknown to me and do not have any current Web presence, but I did not see the names of any writers or artists, other than Petry, known to me to be African American.

20. Keith Clark, *The Radical Fiction of Ann Petry* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 6.

21. John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 16.

22. One prominent woman who became a jazz writer (in addition to being a promoter and publicist) was Helen Oakley Dance, a white Canadian who was independently wealthy. She was married to Stanley Dance, who was one of the most prolific jazz writers of all time.

23. Clark, *Radical Fiction*, 6.

24. Ann Petry, "Solo on the Drums," in *Black American Short Stories: A Century of the Best*, ed. John Henrik Clarke (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 168. I thought it perhaps better to cite the page numbers for "Solo" from a well-known anthology, John Henrik Clarke's *American Negro Short Stories*, in which it reappeared in 1966, rather than the October 1947 issue of *The Magazine of the Year* ("Solo on the Drums." '47: *The Magazine of the Year* 1.8 (1947). (The anthology was retitled *Black American Short Stories: A Century of the Best* when it was reprinted in 1993.)

25. Petry, "Solo," 169.

26. Petry, "Solo," 169. Perhaps this is related to the image of the drums of Africa being surreptitiously smuggled to the Western Hemisphere in the body of the slave and everyman "Cuffy" in Hurston's "Jonah's Gourd Vine." It appears to be an inversion of Hurston's image, though in each case a man becomes one with drums. Zora Neale Hurston, "Jonah's Gourd Vine," in *Zora Neale Hurston: Novels and Stories*, ed. Cheryl A. Wall, New York: Library of America, 1995, 29

27. Veit Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality* (New York: Zone, 2010), 326.

28. Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance*, 326.

29. Ellison, *Flying Home*, 123–37; *Invisible Man*; *Three Days*, 105. Laura, incidentally, is also the name of the narrator's romantic interest in Ellison's 1944 story "King of the Bingo Game." A "Laura-jean" is mentioned briefly by Mary Rambo in *Invisible Man* (252). (The mother of the Laura-jean mentioned in *Invisible Man* is named Jenny Jackson, while the mother of Laura Jean in *Three Days Before The Shooting . . .* is named Ernestine Johnson.) Meanwhile, the bouncer and proprietor at the Minton's-like club that McIntyre visits is named Barrelhouse, as is a bartender in *Invisible Man*. All of this suggests that perhaps at one point Ellison intended or hoped to circulate his Harlem characters in a manner similar to how Faulkner circulated his characters in Yoknapatawpha County.

30. Ellison, *Three Days*, 110.

31. David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 236–38.

32. Ellison, *Three Days*, 118.

33. Minton's closed in the 1970s but sometimes reopened on special occasions. I visited it in 2012 before its recent renovation, when it still had its original configuration. The restaurant and jazz club there in 2015, also named Minton's, is in a reconfigured space.

34. Ellison, *Collected Essays*, 238–40, 248.

35. Ellison, *Three Days*, 118.

36. Ellison, *Three Days*, 121–22, italics in the original.

37. "The drums took him away from them, took him back, and back, and back in time and space. He built up an illusion. He was sending out the news. Grandma died. The foreigner in the litter has an old disease and will not recover. The man from across the big water is sleeping with the chief's daughter. Kill. Kill. Kill. The war goes badly with the men with the bad smell and the loud laugh. It goes badly with the chiefs with the round heads and the peacock's walk." Petry, "Solo," 168.

38. Ellison, *Three Days*, 125.

39. Ellison, *Three Days*, 126.