

BRENT HAYES EDWARDS

## The Literary Ellington

One of the main assumptions in thinking about African American creative expression is that music—more than literature, dance, theater, or the visual arts—has been the paradigmatic mode of black artistic production and the standard and pinnacle not just of black culture but of American culture as a whole. The most eloquent version of this common claim may be the opening of James Baldwin’s 1951 essay “Many Thousands Gone”: “It is only in his music, which Americans are able to admire because a protective sentimentality limits their understanding of it, that the Negro in America has been able to tell his story. It is a story which otherwise has yet to be told and which no American is prepared to hear.”<sup>1</sup> Eleven years later Amiri Baraka put it even more forcefully, excoriating the “embarrassing and inverted paternalism” of African American writers such as Phyllis Wheatley and Charles Chesnutt, and claiming flatly that “there has never been an equivalent to Duke Ellington or Louis Armstrong in Negro writing.”<sup>2</sup> Such presuppositions and hierarchical valuations have been part of the source of a compulsion among generations of African American writers to conceptualize “vernacular” poetics and to strive toward a tradition of blues or jazz literature, toward a notion of black writing that implicitly or explicitly aspires to the condition of music.

I want to start by juxtaposing these stark claims with an early essay by one of the musicians they so often cite as emblematic. Duke Ellington’s first article, “The Duke Steps Out,” was published in the spring of 1931 in a British music journal called *Rhythm*. “The music of my race is something more than the ‘American idiom,’” Ellington contends. “It is the result of our transplantation to American soil, and was our reaction in the plantation days to the tyranny we endured. What we

could not say openly we expressed in music, and what we know as ‘jazz’ is something more than just dance music.”<sup>3</sup> This would seem to be in keeping with an assumption that black music articulates a sense of the world that could not be expressed otherwise—that it “speaks” what cannot be said openly. Yet Ellington, in moving on to describe the African American population of New York City, offers a somewhat different reading of the music that was being produced in that context, specifically in relation to the literature of the Harlem Renaissance that had exploded into prominence in the previous decade. He writes:

In Harlem we have what is practically our own city; we have our own newspapers and social services, and although not segregated, we have almost achieved our own civilisation. The history of my people is one of great achievements over fearful odds; it is a history of a people hindered, handicapped and often sorely oppressed, and what is being done by Countee Cullen and others in literature is overdue in our music.

Here what we so often suppose to be the dynamics of influence between black music and literature is inverted—in Duke’s view the achievements of the literary Renaissance are a model for his own aspirations in music. He continues: “I am therefore now engaged on a rhapsody unhampered by any musical form in which I intend to portray the experiences of the coloured races in America in the syncopated idiom.” In a remarkably early reference to his lifelong ambition to compose a “tone parallel” to African American history—an ambition that would find partial realization in later works like *Black, Brown, and Beige* and *My People*—Ellington makes no apologies for his desire to “attribut[e] aims other than terpsichore to our music.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, he adds, “I am putting all I have learned into it in the hope that I shall have achieved something really worth while in the literature of music, and that an authentic record of my race *written by a member of it* shall be placed on record.” My aim here is not of course to undermine the importance of black music, or to crudely promote the literary at its expense, but to begin to challenge some of our assumptions about the relations between aesthetic media in black culture. Looking at the literary Duke, at Ellington as writer and reader, I want to reconsider just what that provocative phrase—“the literature of music”—might mean.

It is well known that Duke Ellington based a number of his compositions on literary sources. One thinks of the 1943 *New World A-Comin’*, based on the Roi Ottley study of the same name; Ellington’s aborted plans to adapt South African novelist Peter Abrahams’ *Mine Boy* (1958); *Suite Thursday* (1960), the Ellington–Billy Strayhorn suite based on John Steinbeck’s novel *Sweet Thursday*; and the so-called Shakespearean Suite, also known as *Such Sweet Thunder* (1957).<sup>5</sup> There are many more compositions that involve narrative written by Ellington and/or Strayhorn (either programmatic, recitative, or lyric) in one way or another, including *A Drum Is a Woman* (1956); *The Golden Broom and the Green Apple* (1963); *The River* (1970); and of course the *Sacred Concerts* in the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> Barry Ulanov has commented that “Duke has always been a teller of tales, three-minute or thir-

ty. . . . He has never failed to take compass points, wherever he has been, in a new city, a new country, a redecorated nightclub; to make his own observations and to translate these, like his reflections about the place of the Negro in a white society, into fanciful narratives.”<sup>7</sup>

What is remarkable, in this wealth of work, is the degree to which Ellington was consistently concerned with “telling tales” in *language*, not only in sounds—or, more precisely, in both: spinning stories in ways that combined words and music. Almost all of the extended works were conceived with this kind of literary component, even though Ellington’s attempts at mixing narrative with music were for the most part dismissed by critics. The bizarre and misogynist vocal narration performed by Ellington himself on *A Drum Is a Woman* was mocked as “monotonous” and “pretentious” and as “purple prose,” with even favorably disposed reviewers like Barry Ulanov complaining that “there is no point in analyzing the script. Such banality, such inanity, such a hodgepodge does not stand up either to close reading or close listening.”<sup>8</sup> And yet Duke’s desire to write remained constant. Asked to speak to a black church in Los Angeles in 1941 on the subject of Langston Hughes’s poem “I, Too,” Ellington commented that “music is my business, my profession, my life . . . but, even though it means so much to me, I often feel that I’d like to say something, have my say, on some of the burning issues confronting us, in another language . . . in words of mouth.”<sup>9</sup>

Ellington also wrote poetry. He showed some of his writing to Richard Boyer, who in 1943 was preparing a now legendary portrait of Ellington for the *New Yorker*: “New acquaintances are always surprised when they learn that Duke has written poetry in which he advances the thesis that the rhythm of jazz has been beaten into the Negro race by three centuries of oppression. The four beats to a bar in jazz are also found, he maintains in verse, in the Negro pulse. Duke doesn’t like to show people his poetry. ‘You can say anything you want on the trombone, but you gotta be careful with words,’ he explains.”<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, some of Ellington’s poems are collected in *Music Is My Mistress* (MM 39–40, 212–13), and there are even a few recordings of Ellington reciting poetry in concert. Some of these performances are whimsical, couched as a humorous interlude to the music, as when Duke recites a short, colloquial quatrain at a Columbia University date in 1964 and prefaces it with the nervous disclaimer that “I wanted to tell it to Billy Strayhorn the other day in Bermuda, and he went to sleep. . . . So I still haven’t done it”:

Into each life some jazz must fall,  
With after-beat gone kickin’,  
With jive alive, a ball for all,  
Let not the beat be chicken!<sup>11</sup>

Another example is a poem entitled “Moon Maiden,” which Ellington recorded in a session for Fantasy Records on July 14, 1969. He plays celeste on the thirty-six bar tune and recites (in an overdub, since he is snapping his fingers as well) two brief stanzas before taking a solo:

Moon Maiden, way out there in the blue  
 Moon Maiden, got to get with you  
 I've made my approach and then revolved  
 But my big problem is still unsolved  
 Moon Maiden, listen here, my dear  
 Your vibrations are coming in loud and clear  
 Cause I'm just a fly-by-night guy,  
 But for you I might be quite the right "do right" guy  
 Moon Maiden, Moon Maiden, Lady de Luna<sup>12</sup>

In the liner notes Stanley Dance comments that this "unique" selection originated when Ellington's imagination "had been stimulated by the thought of men walking around on the moon, and he had not uncharacteristically visualized their encountering some chicks up there." These lyrics comprise only one among a number of works that reflect Ellington's fascination with the space race, like "The Ballet of the Flying Saucers" in *A Drum Is a Woman* (1956), "Blues in Orbit" (1958), "Launching Pad" (1959), and unperformed lyrics like the undated "Spaceman," with its more lascivious reveries: "I want a spaceman from twilight 'til dawn / When the chicks say there he is he's really gone / . . . Give me a spaceman on a moonlit nit [sic] / Who can fly further than he'll admit / One whose cockpit is out of this world / Been around so much he's even had his stick twirled."<sup>13</sup>

Stanley Dance writes that the "felicitous internal rhymes" of "Moon Maiden" come off Duke's tongue "as though phrased by plunger-muted brass," but surely it is important that Ellington conceives the piece as a vocal recitation, not an instrumental number or a sung lyric. Indeed, he had "recorded the number twice as an instrumental, and with at least a couple of singers, but each time he remained dissatisfied." At one concert around this time, Ellington introduced the piece by saying that "*Moon Maiden* represents my public debut as a vocalist, but I don't really sing. I'm a pencil cat. My other number will be, *I Want to See the Dark Side of Your Moon, Baby*. . . . Extravagance going to the moon? Extravagances have always been accepted as poetic license."<sup>14</sup> In other words, Ellington was deliberately seeking a kind of rhetorical—and apparently libidinal—excess that he considered to necessitate a poetic form, one in which "extravagances" would be accepted.

I want to focus briefly on what we might term this literary imperative in the Ellington oeuvre, which is not by any means limited to Duke's efforts at programmatic narrative or poetry. In his brilliant autobiographical suite, *Music Is My Mistress*, Ellington writes of a more general narrative or "story-telling" impulse behind the very process of creating music, arguing for the necessity in music of "painting a picture, or having a story to go with what you were going to play." He goes on to claim (like a number of other jazz musicians) that soloists could "send messages in what they play," articulating comprehensible statements to one another on their instruments while on the bandstand. "The audience didn't know anything about it, but the cats in the band did," he adds.<sup>15</sup> But he also noted that "stories" were

sometimes necessary to the composition and arrangement process, and often verbalized in language—with Duke talking the band through a new or unfamiliar tune with the guidance of a tall tale or two. The band seldom turned to collaborative arrangements (with all the musicians contributing to the construction of a song), but the anecdotes of that process are legendary, and fascinating for just this reason. Ellington describes it this way:

Still other times I might just sit down at the piano and start composing a little melody, telling a story about it at the same time to give the mood of the piece. I'll play eight bars, talk a bit, then play another eight and soon the melody is finished. Then the boys go to work on it, improvising, adding a phrase here and there. We don't write like this very often and when we do it's usually three o'clock in the morning after we've finished a date.

But this is a little off the point. What I am trying to get across is that music for me is a language. It expresses more than just sound.<sup>16</sup>

A more vivid description of the same process is provided in Richard Boyer's "The Hot Bach," which is worth quoting at some length:

The band rarely works out an entire arrangement collectively, but when it does, the phenomenon is something that makes other musicians marvel. This collective arranging may take place anywhere—in a dance hall in Gary, Indiana, in an empty theatre in Mobile, or in a Broadway night club. It will usually be after a performance, at about three in the morning. Duke, sitting at his piano and facing his band, will play a new melody, perhaps, or possibly just an idea consisting of only eight bars. After playing the eight bars, he may say, "Now this is sad. It's about one guy sitting alone in his room in Harlem. He's waiting for his chick, but she doesn't show. He's got everything fixed for her." Duke sounds intent and absorbed. His tired band begins to sympathize with the waiting man in Harlem. "Two glasses of whiskey are on his little dresser before his bed," Duke says, and again plays the two bars, which will be full of weird and mournful chords. Then he goes on to eight new bars. "He has one of those blue lights turned on in the gloom of his room," Duke says softly, "and he has a little pot of incense so it will smell nice for the chick." Again he plays the mournful chords, developing his melody. "But she doesn't show," he says, "she doesn't show. The guy just sits there, maybe an hour, hunched over on his bed, all alone." The melody is finished and it is time to work out an arrangement for it. Lawrence Brown rises with his trombone and gives out a compact, warm phrase. Duke shakes his head. "Lawrence, I want something like the treatment you gave in 'Awful Sad,'" he says. Brown amends his suggestion and in turn is amended by Tricky Sam Nanton, also a trombone who puts a smear and a wa-wa lament on the phrase suggested by Brown. . . . Now Juan Tizol grabs a piece of paper and a pencil and begins to write down the

orchestration, while the band is still playing it. Whenever the band stops for a breather, Duke experiments with rich new chords, perhaps adopts them, perhaps rejects, perhaps works out a piano solo that fits, clear and rippling, into little slots of silence, while the brass and reeds talk back and forth. By the time Tizol has finished getting the orchestration down on paper, it is already out of date. The men begin to play again, and then someone may shout “How about that train?” and there is a rush for a train that will carry the band to another engagement.<sup>17</sup>

It is not at all unusual for collaborative musicians and dancers to give each other epigrammatic or narrative clues during the compositional or choreographic process. Here, though, the arrangement seems to *start off* from the narrative, with Duke’s self-accompanied performance—the tired band members are drawn into the creative process by the scene Duke sketches as he speaks. Here, in the middle of the night, at the core of what drives the band’s extraordinarily creative cohesiveness, is an intimate call and response between words and music, narrative instigation and the subsequent musical contextualization of a melody. It is almost a commonplace by now to describe Ellington’s music with superlative literary analogies, as a “drama of orchestration” or a “theatre of perfect timing.”<sup>18</sup> Some critics have gone so far as to write about the “Shakespearean universality” of Ellington’s music, contending that it is akin to the Bard’s plays “in its reach, wisdom, and generosity, and we return to it because its mysteries are inexhaustible.”<sup>19</sup> But part of what I am suggesting is that the literary is less an *analogy* for Ellington’s music than an inherent element in his conception of music itself and a key formal bridge or instigating spur in his compositional process.

It seems that Ellington was particularly attracted to the Stratford Shakespeare Festivals in Ontario partly because of the complex creative connections between literature and music fostered there in the late 1950s. The festival was unique in that it featured not only Shakespeare performances but also extensive musical line-ups, in effect proposing a dialogue or consonance between aesthetic media. In 1956 the festival presented Benjamin Britten’s opera *The Rape of Lucretia* as well as the Ellington band, Dave Brubeck, the Modern Jazz Quartet, Willie “the Lion” Smith, and the Art Tatum Trio; in 1957 it premiered Britten’s *The Turn of the Screw* and programmed Ellington’s *Such Sweet Thunder* as well as Count Basie, Billie Holiday, Gerry Mulligan, and the Teddy Wilson Trio; in 1958 John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* was presented next to the Maynard Ferguson Orchestra, Carmen McRae, the Billy Taylor Trio, the Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra, and Henry “Red” Allen and his All Stars, who performed with the poet Langston Hughes. In the program notes to *Such Sweet Thunder* Ellington commends the 1957 festival’s “awareness” of the “parallel” between Shakespeare and “top-grade jazz” and comments:

There is an increasing interrelationship between the adherents to art forms in various fields. . . . It is becoming increasingly difficult to decide where jazz starts or where it ends, where Tin Pan Alley begins and jazz ends, or even where the borderline lies between classical music and jazz. I

feel there is no boundary line, and I see no place for one if my own feelings tell me a performance is good.

In the final analysis, whether it be Shakespeare or jazz, the only thing that counts is the emotional effect on the listener. Somehow, I suspect that if Shakespeare were alive today, he might be a jazz fan himself—he'd appreciate the combination of team spirit and informality, of academic knowledge and humor, of all the elements that go into a great jazz performance. And I am sure he would agree with the simple and axiomatic statement that is so important to all of us—when it sounds good, it is good. (MM 193)

Here, Ellington slyly pulls the rug out from under the critics who applaud the “Shakespearean” qualities in his music. If anything, in this description of boundary-crossing, Shakespeare is revealed to be an Ellingtonian before his time. What unites jazz and Elizabethan drama, for Ellington, is above all a common concern with capturing the vibrant complexity of a particular social milieu. As Billy Strayhorn added in an interview, “Duke also said that the only way Shakespeare could have known as much about people as he did was by hanging out on the corner or in the pool room. He says that if William Shakespeare were alive today, you would surely find him down at Birdland listening to jazz.”<sup>20</sup>

In 1956, the first time that the orchestra was invited to the festival, Ellington and Strayhorn had been less inspired, offering a set of mainly old hits like “I Got It Bad (and That Ain’t Good)” and “Take the ‘A’ Train.” They did offer one selection, though, that seemed geared for the theatrical environs and toward an interest in the “interrelationships” between art forms: “Monologue,” also known as “Pretty and the Wolf” (which had first been recorded in 1951). The piece features Ellington with Jimmy Hamilton, Russell Procope, and Harry Carney. The record not only captures Duke’s “vagabond syntax” (in Barry Ulanov’s description) but also might be heard as an attempt to capture the feeling of one of those late-night arranging session narratives, with Duke narrating a piece to the band. One might hear “Pretty and the Wolf” as a kind of orchestration of that ephemeral process, a version of one of those casual tales spun to incite elaboration and embellishment.

Like the tale Ellington tells the band in the rehearsal recounted in the Boyer article, like “Moon Maiden,” and indeed like much of Ellington’s writing, “Pretty and the Wolf” is a parable of seduction as well as an insouciant reflection on African American urban migration (figure 16.1). “Once upon a time,” Duke opens as the three reeds unfurl behind him, “there came to the city a pretty little girl—a little country, but pretty; a little ragged, but a pretty little girl. There she met a man, a city man—smooth—handsome—successful—cool. A well-mannered type man. And since she was pretty, he saw fit to give her an audience, so he talked to her for quite a while.” The Wolf, standing on the corner casually twirling his “diamond-studded gold chain,” agrees to assist the pretty girl in her ambition to “get somewhere.” (The piece’s simple conceit turns on the two meanings of the phrase: in other words, the narrative sets up an analogy between sexual conquest and material success.) She obsequiously purrs “Yes, Daddy” at his every suggestion. “And so

agreed, they danced,” Ellington intones, as Jimmy Woode and Sam Woodyard enter on bass and drums, falling into an infectious swing. But the dynamics of the seduction switch during the dance, a “mad whirl” that leaves the seemingly unflappable city dweller in an amorous “spin.” By the end of the two-and-a-half-minute piece, it is no longer the Wolf, but the “pretty girl” who twirls the gold chain. As she “enumerates the various conditions and ways for him to get somewhere, you can hear him say, ‘Yes, Baby. Yes, Baby. Yes, Baby.’”<sup>21</sup> It is as though Ellington is attempting to perform that singular arranging technique—the music shifting with the bandleader’s narrative, taking on shape as his “Monologue” develops. The reeds “spin” in chromatic triplets as the Wolf twirls his chain, rock into rhythm when the characters start dancing, and later wheeze at the close of the piece, punctuating the Wolf’s “Yes, Baby” with resignation.

Deeply impressed by the 1956 festival, Ellington and Strayhorn promised to return the next year with a new composition specifically for that context. The result was *Such Sweet Thunder*, which premiered in New York in the spring of 1957 at the Music for Moderns series at Town Hall, and then was performed in Stratford that summer. Ellington explained that “the idea of writing a Shakespearean suite occurred to me during a visit to Anne Hathaway’s cottage when we first toured England in 1933. I have often wondered, had I been asked to play for the Bard, what devices I would have used to impress him. Consequently, I was very pleased when it was suggested that I compose a work for the Shakespearean Festival in Stratford, Ontario, since I found Shakespeare as performed there to be a thrilling experience.”<sup>22</sup> The suite is constructed around “parallels” to the stories of a number of Shakespearean characters, including Othello, Julius Caesar, Henry V, Lady Macbeth, Puck, Hamlet, and Romeo and Juliet.

“It was the preparation that was tremendous,” Billy Strayhorn told Stanley Dance later. “We read all of Shakespeare!”<sup>23</sup> He told another interviewer that

you have to adjust your perspective, you know, as to just what you’re going to do, and what you’re going to say, and what you’re going to say it about, and how much of it is supposed to be coming . . .—and this included also consultations with two or three Shakespearean actors and authorities, you know. We’d sit down and discuss for hours. . . . And it was a matter of just deciding finally [that] on one album we’re not gonna parallel any, you know, anything of Shakespeare. . . . You need a thousand writers and a thousand years to do it . . . to cover Shakespeare. So, we’ll say well we’ll just devote one number to one Shakespearean word, or one Shakespearean phrase, you know, something like that. Just like “Lady Mac,” you know.<sup>24</sup>

Ellington described the process more figuratively—and with characteristic irreverence: “I kept thinking what a dandy song Lady Macbeth would make. The girl has everything. Noble birth, a hot love story, murder—even a ghost. Then there’s Othello and Desdemona. There’s a swinging story for you. What a melodrama! What a subject for the blues. Blues in the night!”<sup>25</sup>



FIGURE 16.1 Two pages from one of Ellington's draft scores for "Pretty and the Wolf." Duke Ellington Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Pretty and the Wolf - Duke Ellington

once upon a time, there came  
to the city a pretty little girl - a little country but pretty;

a little ragged but a pretty little girl there she met a MAN

FIGURE 16.1 Continued

A City MAN - smooth - handsome - successful - cool well MANNERED type of MAN

And since she was pretty,  
 he saw fit to give her an  
 audience; Oh he talked to her  
 for quite a while, naturally  
 she wanted to get somewhere, where  
 he was at ready some

he was standing on a corner  
 twirling his diamond studded gold chain

Around his finger, and as he enumerates the various  
 conditions and ways for her to get some where, you can hear her say: -  
~~here here stay~~

tr ~~~~~ tr ~~~~~

Yes Baby      yes baby      yes baby      And so my real

tr ~~~~~ tr ~~~~~

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I would argue that this transformation of Shakespeare is doing work very different from other black expressive appropriations one might assume are similar, like Langston Hughes's poem "Shakespeare in Harlem":

Hey ninny neigh!  
And a hey nonny noe!  
Where, oh, where  
Did my sweet mamma go?  
Ney ninny neigh  
With a tra-la-la!  
They say your sweet mama  
Went home to her ma.<sup>26</sup>

Ellington and Strayhorn do not place Shakespeare *in* Harlem, challenging our preconceptions about "high" and "low" art in the process.<sup>27</sup> Instead, *Such Sweet Thunder* is above all a *reading* of Shakespeare—perhaps *from* Harlem—and an elaborate reading at that. In the liner notes to the album, Duke describes the title cut (featuring Ray Nance on trumpet) as "the sweet and singing, very convincing story Othello told Desdemonda. It must have been the most, because when her father complained and tried to have her marriage annulled, the Duke of Venice said that if Othello had said this to his daughter, she would have gone for it too."<sup>28</sup> The point is that the speech of seduction is not given in the play itself: here the music fills the silences or interstices of Shakespeare's work. It imagines what cannot be or is not given in the written language—aiming to capture in sound the enthralling effect of Othello's violent and bloody tales of his life as a soldier. And, to do so, the music "rhymes" *Othello* with an entirely different moment from another play, as Barry Ulanov has noted:

On stage Ellington introduces each "major work" with a vagabond syntax that makes one wonder why he bothers. But if one listens carefully, both to the words and the music, one discovers why. One finds, for example, that in titling a piece about *Othello* with a quotation from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ("I never heard so musical a discord, such sweet thunder"), he has gone right to the root of Othello's problem. His blunt and jazzy explanation is probably closer to the substance of the play than the long and involuted commentaries of most Shakespearean scholars.<sup>29</sup>

David Hajdu has commented that the Ellington-Strayhorn suites, even when inspired by literary characters, are in no way "traditional descriptive music."<sup>30</sup> Ellington writes in a press release for the Stratford Festival that "in the suite I am attempting to parallel the vignettes of some of the Shakespearean characters in miniature . . . sometimes to the point of caricature."<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, Ellington seems to choose the word *parallel* carefully to describe the way *Such Sweet Thunder* interprets the Shakespearean texts. It is a term that Ellington used more than any other to describe his longer works, such as the 1951 "(A

Tone Parallel to) Harlem,” the 1943 *New World A-Comin’*, which he called “a parallel to Roi Ottley’s book,”<sup>32</sup> and *Black, Brown, and Beige* (1943), which was originally titled “A Tone Parallel,” and which Ellington described as “a tone parallel to the history of the American Negro” (MM 181). Whereas before *Black, Brown, and Beige* Ellington and Strayhorn sometimes speak more loosely about music “portraying” the world, or about the necessity to “translate” experience into the arena of sound, by the mid-1940s they begin use the term *parallel*, seemingly in order to specify the effects and requisites of *musical* transcription, without relying on reference to another art form (as in *tone poem*, *portrait*, or *translation*). The term is sometimes used in a sense that connotes a kind of mimesis, aesthetic reflection, as in *Music Is My Mistress*, where Ellington says that “composers try to parallel observations made through all the senses” (MM 457). Elsewhere, in sketching a history of black music, he describes the “Negro musician” as “strongly influenced by the type of music of his time, and the black beat was his foundation. . . . The music of his time—and sound devices—were always parallel to the progress of science, medicine, and labor. When you pick the jazz musician of any period, if he happens to be one of the many unique performers, you may be sure he always reflects what’s happening in his time” (MM 413). But Ellington’s use of the term usually avoids formalizing whatever that artistic reflection might involve. *Parallel* has interesting implications for an Ellingtonian understanding of the relation between music and literature in particular, since it offers a metaphor not of crossing, transferral, or import—much less grafting or mixing—but instead of simultaneous and equivalent movement through space and time. Ellington and Strayhorn seem to favor this sense of an exact match in development, a structure of reflection without primacy, in a term that implicitly respects the distances between expressive media.

Ellington also seems to understand the term *parallel* in a structural sense, indicating the “musical” use of a literary form. The four pieces called sonnets, for instance (“Sonnet for Caesar,” “Sonnet for Hank Cinq,” “Sonnet in Search of a Moor,” and “Sonnet for Sister Kate”) are “different in mood, orchestration, and rhythm, but have in common, as Ellington scholar Bill Dobbins points out, fourteen phrases of ten notes each, musically mirroring the fourteen lines of iambic pentameter (ten syllables) that make up the literary sonnet Shakespeare favored.”<sup>33</sup> This effect is particularly marked in Jimmy Hamilton’s stately clarinet melody in “Sonnet for Caesar” and Jimmy Woode’s plucked bass statement in “Sonnet in Search of a Moor”—both of which are woven out of a series of ten-note two-measure phrases. But it is also apparent in the theme in A-flat (framed by two blustery blues choruses) played by trombonist Britt Woodman in “Sonnet to Hank Cinq.” Ellington’s pencil manuscript for “Sonnet for Sister Kate” (which characteristically identifies the trombone solo simply with Quentin Jackson’s nickname, “Butter”) actually numbers the two-bar phrases of the melody from one to fourteen.<sup>34</sup> Of course, this is an odd and somewhat convoluted way to “parallel” the Shakespearean texts, since the dialogue in the plays is not in sonnet form. It is a bit like writing a book of short stories inspired by Beethoven’s symphonies and calling some of the stories “etudes” or “sonatas.” Still, the choice evidences the attempt by Ellington and Strayhorn to structure their portraits or caricatures by deliberately

adopting the phrasing structure required by a literary stanza form. The parallel is staged, in other words, both on a level one might term representational, or even interpretive (the bass suggests the gravity of Othello, perhaps; or a medium-tempo blues indicates the swagger of “Hank Cinq”), and simultaneously on a structural level.

The other way that *Such Sweet Thunder* “reads” Shakespeare is a strategy that Ellington and Strayhorn take with most of their tone parallels. Particularly in the titles of the pieces, they play with puns and homonyms, not just for humorous effect but also in order to highlight the phonemic registers of the Shakespearean text. Strayhorn told one interviewer that “Sonnet in Search of a Moor” was “triple entendre, because it was, you know, you had to decide whether we were talking about Othello, or whether we were talking about love [that is, *amour*], or whether we were talking about the moors [the Scottish lowlands] where the three witches were, you know.”<sup>35</sup> This is a familiar practice, when one examines the discography: John Steinbeck’s novel *Sweet Thursday* becomes *Suite Thursday*, embedded in *Toot Suite* is the French for “right away” (*tout de suite*), and likewise I would suggest that we are asked to hear “suite” in “Such Sweet Thunder.” This operation privileges the sound of words over the particular ways they are written on the page. Again, it underlines the specific parameters of a musical parallel, an interpretive mode that reads by “hearing” phonemically at a certain distance from the literary source text (divining thereby, for instance, that the proper musical form to represent Steinbeck’s novel is a suite). It brings sound to the fore, as it were, places sound before sense, in a spirit of semantic disturbance or “fugitivity” that Nathaniel Mackey, among others, has argued is endemic to black traditions of literate and musical expression alike.<sup>36</sup>

This effect is related to what is sometimes considered to be a “trick” that Ellington trumpet players resorted to in performance: playing “words” on their horns in a manner to imitate the relative pitch of English pronunciation.<sup>37</sup> The most famous example is Cootie Williams’s exclamation of “Harlem!” on his trumpet in the 1951 composition “(A Tone Parallel to) Harlem” (MM 189). But in *Such Sweet Thunder* there’s another, in the section called “Up and Down, Up and Down (I Will Lead Them Up and Down),” based on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Puck, played by Clark Terry in this rendition, comments on the foolish love tangles of the couples (Jimmy Hamilton and Ray Nance on clarinet and violin and Russell Procope and Paul Gonsalves on alto and tenor saxophones) by “pronouncing” on his trumpet what is perhaps the most famous quotation in the play: “Lord, what fools these mortals be” (3.2.115). To take up an Ellingtonian vocabulary, one might say that, in this sense, the suites strive to “insinuate the sonic dimension” in the literary.

To come to terms with Ellington’s sense of the “literature of music,” it is necessary to consider in more detail that work he announced so grandly in 1931, the “rhapsody unhampered by any musical form” designed to parallel the “experiences of the coloured races in America in the syncopated idiom.” As I argued at the outset of this essay, for Ellington the literary is not only a medium to parallel in sound, or a poetic mode that allows the expression of libidinal excess; in addition, espe-

cially in the compositions he came to call his “social-significance thrusts” (MM 183), the literary is closely bound up with Ellington’s sense of the historical.

Ellington had spoken in the 1930s of a “tone parallel to the history of the American Negro” (MM 181) with five sections, tracing a trajectory of diaspora starting with the African past and moving through the experience of slavery, the role of blacks in the development of the United States (particularly in the Revolutionary War and the Civil War), the great migration to the urban centers of the north in the early twentieth century, and the future. The piece that came closest to embodying this project, though, the 1943 *Black, Brown, and Beige*, which premiered on January 23, 1943, at Carnegie Hall in a benefit concert for Russian war relief, comprised only three movements.<sup>38</sup> “Black” focused on slavery, drawing on early work songs and spirituals, “Brown” “recognized the contribution made by the Negro to this country in blood” (MM 181), and “Beige” followed the rise of a black community in Harlem. Ellington gave spoken introductions to each section, which form the basis of his description of the suite in *Music Is My Mistress* (181–82).<sup>39</sup> One programmatic narrative, the introduction to “Emancipation Celebration,” one of the short dances in *Brown*, was preserved on the recording of the second Carnegie Hall concert in December 1943 when the orchestra played selections from the composition:

And now another short portion of “Brown” which represents the period after the Civil War, where we find many young free Negroes who are happy with so much opportunity in front of them, and just behind them a couple of very old people who are free but have nothing and no place to go, and of course it’s very dark for them. And we find a duet representing the old people and the solos representing the younger people. This is “The Lighter Attitude.”<sup>40</sup>

As Brian Priestly and Alan Cohen point out in the first detailed musicological analysis of *Black, Brown, and Beige*, the relationship between such a programmatic introduction and the music that follows is not necessarily transparent: thus it is not easy to track, in listening to “Emancipation Celebration,” a particular moment in the music when one hears the entrance of “a couple of very old people who are free but have nothing and no place to go.”<sup>41</sup> The point is that the narrative is not simply intended to elucidate the development of the music, nor simply to “sell” the grand sweep of the piece to a potentially resistant audience. Ellington’s statement here, in fact, may not deserve the designation *programmatic* at all, at least in any straightforward sense of the term (that is, a narrative that drives the musical composition, providing an audible motivation for its structure). Although the language here gestures toward the historical (“the period after the Civil War”), it also engages in a register of sometimes playful metaphor and double entendre (“This is ‘The Lighter Attitude’”) and rhetorical obliquity (“of course it’s very dark for them”) that cannot be easily categorized as a historicist, fact-driven representation of the past. In other words, Ellington’s narrative introductions are not at all glosses, or the uneasy discursive cement between weakly linked segments—they are in-



tegral to the structure of *Black, Brown, and Beige*, providing a literary component to the performance that is constitutive because outside or beyond (but “parallel” to) the music itself.

Critic Graham Lock, in his excellent recent book *Blutopia*, has considered in more detail the ambitions of Ellington’s music as history. Lock contends that, for Ellington, music serves as “an alternative form of history” in a mode of creative expression that might be termed “Blutopia”: “a utopia tinged with the blues,” a mode “where visions of the future and revisions of the past become part of the same process, a ‘politics of transfiguration,’ in which accepted notions of language, history, the real, and the possible are thrown open to question and found wanting.”<sup>42</sup> Placing Ellington’s work in what some music historians would consider unfamiliar territory (in juxtaposition to the music of Sun Ra and Anthony Braxton), Lock reveals the innovative futurism that is a sometimes overlooked element in Ellington’s aesthetic, while at the same time demonstrating the engagement of Ra and Braxton with supposedly “traditional” issues of historical representation and racial politics. In the process, Lock offers a number of fresh readings of the Ellington-Strayhorn oeuvre, from the “jungle music” of Ellington’s early period in Harlem in the late 1920s (78–91), to a number of the later extended works, including *Jump for Joy* (93–97), *The Deep South Suite* (97–101), *Black, Brown, and Beige* (102–18), and *A Drum Is a Woman* (137–41).

Here I will question only one component of Lock’s theoretical framing, a pre-supposed antidiscursivism that reduces Ellington to a position that “music can be used to say that which cannot be stated openly” (78). Lock takes this antidiscursive stance in the very subtitle of his opening chapter on Ellington’s music, called “In the Jungles of America: History Without Saying It” (77). Lock makes this argument most forcefully in his reading of the purely instrumental *Deep South Suite*, which premiered in 1946 at Carnegie Hall, and which for Lock was driven by a “more pointed subtext” of racial protest than was apparent in Ellington’s discussions of the suite, or even in his description of it nearly thirty years later in *Music Is My Mistress* (MM 184). In the autobiography Ellington recounts an anecdote about a party after the concert, where William Morris Jr. approached him to complain that the piece was too timid in its protest. Ellington writes: “‘You should’ve said it plainer,’ he kept insisting. ‘You should have said it plainer!’ He was for out-and-out protest, but as with *Jump for Joy*, I felt it was good theatre to say it without saying it. That is the art” (MM 185).

Lock assumes that the notion of a history “without saying it” was one of Ellington’s “guiding aesthetic principles” (95). But even given the *Deep South Suite* anecdote, this would seem a difficult argument to make about a great deal of Ellington’s oeuvre. Indeed, a number of the scholars who have traced Ellington’s musical development, including Mark Tucker, have noted the prevalence of programmatic, narrative, and multimedia work among his key influences.<sup>43</sup> Tucker stresses not just Ellington’s exposure to innovative and hybrid forms such as the Cotton Club revues and Lew Leslie’s *Blackbirds* shows that dominated the New York musical theater scene in the late 1920s but also Ellington’s upbringing in Washington, D.C. Tucker notes Ellington’s exposure to “Negro history” and heritage programs early

in his childhood and speculates in particular that the elaborate pageants that were produced in black communities throughout the country in the teens and twenties greatly affected Ellington's sense of the way that history should be depicted in artistic expression. These included sweeping allegorical works like *The Evolution of the Negro in Picture, Song, and Story* (which played at the Howard Theater in 1911), *The Open Door* (which played at Carnegie Hall in 1921, with music featuring the Clef Club Orchestra), and especially W. E. B. Du Bois's magisterial pageant *The Star of Ethiopia*, a performance that premiered in 1913 and was reprised in 1915 in Washington. *The Star of Ethiopia* attempted nothing less than to encapsulate "10,000 years of the history of the Negro race."<sup>44</sup> Du Bois drafted the spectacle as an outdoor, participatory lesson in the African diaspora, what biographer David Levering Lewis has described as an almost unimaginably grandiose "three-hour extravaganza in six episodes, featuring a thousand creamy-complexioned young women and tawny, well-built men, and flocks of schoolchildren marching through history." The music featured not only two selections from Verdi's *Aida* but also new pieces from a number of black composers, including Bob Cole, Rosamond Johnson, and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. The range of historical information condensed into the pageant was itself mind-boggling: three young women dressed to represent the regal African past (Sheba, Ethiopia, and Meroe) were "serially replaced center stage by a pharaoh, Mali's fourteenth-century Islamic ruler Mansa Musa, Columbus's pilot Alonzo; moaning slaves in chains; Spanish lancers; Toussaint L'Ouverture; Sojourner Truth; Frederick Douglass; and, to the accompaniment of rolling drums, the Massachusetts regiment of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw; followed by children, the professions, and the working class." A narrator extolled Africa's gifts to the world, including iron and fire, the great civilization of Egypt, and then a parade of spiritual values, with performers meant to portray "Faith in Righteousness, then Humility, and the gift of 'Struggle Toward Freedom' and finally 'the Gift of Freedom for the workers'—all this in 'a great cloud of music that hovered over them and enveloped them.'"<sup>45</sup>

Certainly Ellington's work that led most directly to *Black, Brown, and Beige* (discussions of writing his tone parallel with journalists in the 1930s, the film *Symphony in Black* in 1935, the musical revue *Jump for Joy* in 1941) evidences an interest in explicit and discursive history, pointing toward the literary and narrative experiments that would become such an integral part of his music. For instance, the film *Symphony in Black: A Rhapsody of Negro Life* was produced in December 1934 and early 1935 at Paramount's Eastern Service Studios in Astoria. Especially compared to the early film appearances of other African American musicians such as Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong,<sup>46</sup> *Symphony in Black* is remarkable if for no other reason than the unprecedented and dignified depiction of Ellington as a black composer commissioned to perform a "symphony" in a concert hall. But one should not overlook its clear narrative and allegorical aspirations. The film opens with a carefully planned shot of Ellington at his piano, composing music for the premiere of the "symphony" in pencil on a manuscript score. After this thirty-second introduction, the film segues through four sections indicated by handwritten titles that the film implies are written on Ellington's manuscript: "The Laborers,"



with a theme based on work songs played in accompaniment to sharply angled and heavily shadowed “images of black men shoveling coal into blast furnaces and carrying bales on a river wharf,”<sup>47</sup> a second set-piece called “A Triangle,” portraying a lover’s betrayal in three movements (“Dance,” “Jealousy,” and “Blues”—featuring a version of “Saddest Tale” sung memorably by Billie Holiday in her first film appearance), a “Hymn of Sorrow,” portraying a black minister leading his congregation in a stylized mourning ceremony, and “Harlem Rhythm,” shot with the Ellington orchestra in a nightclub apparently based on the Cotton Club, with the dancer Earl “Snakehips” Tucker. What is notable even in this early composition, again, is Ellington’s insistence on a narrative framing—here one that interestingly combined the sentimental romance of much of Ellington’s poetry and short prose (in the section called “A Triangle”) with the emblematic historicism of “The Laborers” and the near ethnographic expressionism of the scenes of contemporary Harlem nightlife.

Nearly ten years later, *Black, Brown, and Beige* marked a narrowing of this programmatic frame into a register of historical representation. Indeed, the so-called *Black, Brown, and Beige* controversy emerged only partly around Ellington’s foray into the concert hall and the debate over whether jazz could provide the foundation of long-form musical composition.<sup>48</sup> It was most explicitly articulated in terms of the way *Black, Brown, and Beige* “says it”: the suite’s programmatic form, its attempt to “parallel the history of the American Negro” by combining spoken narrative, song lyrics (in the “Blues” in *Brown*), and the instrumental music itself. Almost all the major critics castigated not just the piece’s length (many snidely suggested he restrain himself to the length of a record side: “Mr. Ellington can make some two dozen brief air-tight compositions out of *Black, Brown, and Beige*. He should.”) but more specifically its literary components and historicist baggage. Mike Levin opined sourly that “I don’t think the music needs any such ‘programmatic’ prop,” and Paul Bowles, reviewing for the *New York Herald-Tribune*, reserved his most dismissive words for the work’s “ideological” frame, claiming that “presented as one number it was formless and meaningless. In spite of Mr. Ellington’s ideological comments before each ‘movement,’ nothing emerged but a gaudy potpourri of tutti dance passages and solo virtuoso work.”<sup>49</sup> In fact, Barry Ulanov was one of the few critics who later countered that a listener’s “understanding and appreciation of the work will, however, be considerably heightened if you bear Duke’s program in mind while listening to the music.”<sup>50</sup> Ulanov’s spirited defense of the programmatic ambition of Ellington’s composition is worth quoting here:

The fact that [*Black, Brown, and Beige*] is not written in the sonata form and therefore is not a symphony, the fact that it is programmatic, these are not limitations from Duke’s point of view or from that of sympathetic auditors whose listening experience in some way duplicates Ellington’s. Duke, contrary to the arrogant dismissal of his musical equipment and knowledge, could have written. . . . a symphony or string quartet or oratorio or opera; he chose, instead, to write a “tone parallel,” in which jazz virtuosi, in solo and in section and in band ensemble, gave vigorous inter-

pretation to his phrases, some rough, some tender, all colorful and all directed to a narrative point.<sup>51</sup>

Lock adopts the phrase “without saying it” directly from Ellington, in a passage from *Music Is My Mistress* devoted to the revue *Jump for Joy*, where he writes: “I think a statement of social protest in the theatre should be made without saying it, and this calls for the real craftsman” (MM 180). But *Jump for Joy*, a vibrant West Coast production that involved collaborators such as Langston Hughes, Mickey Rooney, Dorothy Dandridge, Big Joe Turner, and lyricist Paul Webster, was a compilation of sketches, dances, and songs expressly designed “to correct the race situation in the U.S.A. through a form of theatrical propaganda” (MM 175). Lock himself admits that it “was possibly the most outspoken project [Ellington] was involved in” (95). Ellington pens the sentence about social protest not in reference to the discursive content of the show (its song lyrics and spoken sketches—many of which were openly ideological) but in reference to a debate about whether the comedians in the show should put on blackface:

I had stopped all the comedians from using cork on their faces when they worked with us. Some objected before the show opened, but removed it, and were shocked by their success. As the audience screamed and applauded, comedians came off stage smiling, and with tears running down their cheeks. They couldn't believe it. I think a statement of social protest in the theatre should be made without saying it, and this calls for the real craftsman.  
(MM 180)

This is a much more subtle point about the strategy of critiquing racist stereotypes in theatrical representation: it asks, if anything, for a certain subtlety in the manipulation of specifically *visual* signifiers, without coming anywhere near demanding a simple reticence or shying away from linguistic expression. As I have already pointed out, this passage in no way dampens Ellington's continuing conviction that an effective mode of “propaganda” had to combine art forms—and specifically, that it had to include a literary element.

Ellington seems to have decided, in the wake of the journalistic criticism of *Black, Brown, and Beige*, that the programmatic mix of narrative and instrumental music was not successful, and, as Lock points out, he never performed the entire suite again in public. Yet this traumatic rejection became the impetus for Ellington to write *more*, not less. Ellington penned a never published manuscript (thirty-eight typed pages) that seems designed to parallel the music of *Black, Brown, and Beige*, following the progress of an African slave named Boola from bondage to freedom, and (in the *Beige* section) into Harlem, the modern black metropolis. In Ellington's verse narrative the music—work songs, spirituals, blues, and finally jazz—charts the drive to emancipation and modernity among New World black populations: “Out of this deep dream of freedom / Evolved the blessed release / Of freedom of expression in song.”<sup>52</sup> But, in the end, the narrative also argues that the music is *not* enough, that the “song” of the American Negro does not tell the

whole story—that the music has been “categorized,” perverted, and commercialized to the degree that it doesn’t speak for the full wealth of black modernity:

HARLEM! Black metropolis!  
Land of mirth!  
Your music has flung  
The story of “Hot Harlem”  
To the four corners  
Of the earth!  
. . .  
The picture drawn by many hands  
For many eyes of many races.  
But did it ever speak to them  
Of what you *really* are?  
Did it say to them  
That all your striving  
To take your rightful place with men  
Was more than jazz and jiving?  
. . .  
It can’t be true  
That all you do . . .  
Is dance and sing  
And moan!  
Harlem . . . for all her moral lurches  
Has always had  
LESS cabarets than churches!<sup>53</sup>

Interestingly, the proposition here would seem to be that the music is inadequate, alone—that by itself it is open to misinterpretation (“But did it ever speak to them / Of what you *really* are?”). Even though the music has “flung / The story of “Hot Harlem” / To the four corners / Of the earth,” it cannot transport the truth of black strivings for political justice and historical retribution. If anything, it remains mired in easy racist stereotype and cliché (“jazz and jiving”). In a startling apostrophe, departing from the allegorical narrative of *Boola* to address its own historical referent and end point (“HARLEM”), here Ellington’s verse narrative announces its own indispensable “parallel” role in the project of *Black, Brown, and Beige*.

Ellington’s difficulty, in other words, was ultimately methodological: how does one stage such a parallel? How does one bring such a verse narrative into conjuncture with a musical composition, without falling into a mode of expression that would be heavy-handed or unwieldy or scattered? This is a problem that Ellington does not solve. It haunts all his larger works after *Black, Brown, and Beige*—all of which are at least in part motivated by an attempt to unearth the elusive definition of that suggestive phrase “the literature of music.” Duke continued to yearn for the proper structure, even as he declined to perform *Black, Brown, and Beige* in full again. In June 1943 *Variety* reported that Ellington was even going to attempt to

literalize his aesthetic of parallel, placing narrative and music (score) into one publication:


Duke Ellington is preparing a book explaining the story behind his much-discussed composition, “Black, Brown and Beige,” which he debuted during his orchestra’s recent Carnegie Hall, N.Y. concert. Leader [sic] feels that detailing the thoughts which motivated the work will help toward a better understanding of it: to this end the story will be printed on the upper half of each page in the book, with the music related to each portion below on the same page so that readers with a knowledge of music can follow both at the same time.<sup>54</sup>

In 1956 Ellington told another interviewer that he had “almost completed” *Black, Brown, and Beige* “as a stage presentation: songs and narration and all that. . . . Now I want to do *Black, Brown, and Beige* with a narration and tell all the things about the Negro in America—the Negro’s contributions and so on.” When the interviewer asks him to explain the scope of the piece, Ellington hesitates, and then says: “Maybe you should *read* it.” “You got a script?” the interviewer responds, and Ellington says, “I have a thing I wrote a long time ago—some of it might be changed now.” Even here he seems uncertain of the status of his writing in the larger composition, calling it variously a “screenplay,” a “script,” and “annotations” to the music. Ellington adds that he’s trying to add song lyrics for the spiritual theme (most likely “Come Sunday,” which was recorded in 1958 with Mahalia Jackson singing the lyrics), the work song, and the “Emancipation Celebration” section; but he doesn’t know yet if the words he’s written are “adequate.”<sup>55</sup>

It is only appropriate that by the end of his life Ellington consistently projected this effort to practice a “literature of music” into the realm of eschatology.<sup>56</sup> Both the tortured quest for compositional form and a spiritual register are evident, for instance, in Ellington’s only book, the autobiographical suite *Music Is My Mistress*, published in 1973. Mercer Ellington has commented wryly on the “undoubtedly unique” composition of his father’s “autobiography,” which Duke wrote slowly and haphazardly while on tour, scribbling fragments “on hotel stationery, table napkins, and menus from all over the world.”<sup>57</sup> (The book was subsequently “deciphered,” thoroughly edited, and assembled by jazz critic and biographer Stanley Dance, who nonetheless would only let Ellington give him a minor credit in the book’s acknowledgments.) In this sense the composition of the vignettes and portraits that make up the book can also be read as a diffuse travel itinerary, recording the places the Ellington orchestra passed through in the late 1960s and early 1970s (figures 16.2 and 16.3). Reading the fragments and notes gives a sense not just of the intermittent travails of Duke’s memory but also of the incredibly diverse variety of the scenes where he wrote, especially the hotels that allowed brief moments of literary work in his hectic concert travels. For example, Ellington’s description, near the beginning of *Music Is My Mistress*, of Frank Holliday’s poolroom on T Street near the Howard Theatre in Washington, D.C. (23), is written on stationery from the D.C. Hilton Hotel. A section of the faux “interview” that closes

FIGURE 16.2 Page from Ellington's notes for *Music Is My Mistress*. Duke Ellington Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

HOTELS


Ambassador  
 CHICAGO

MUSIC

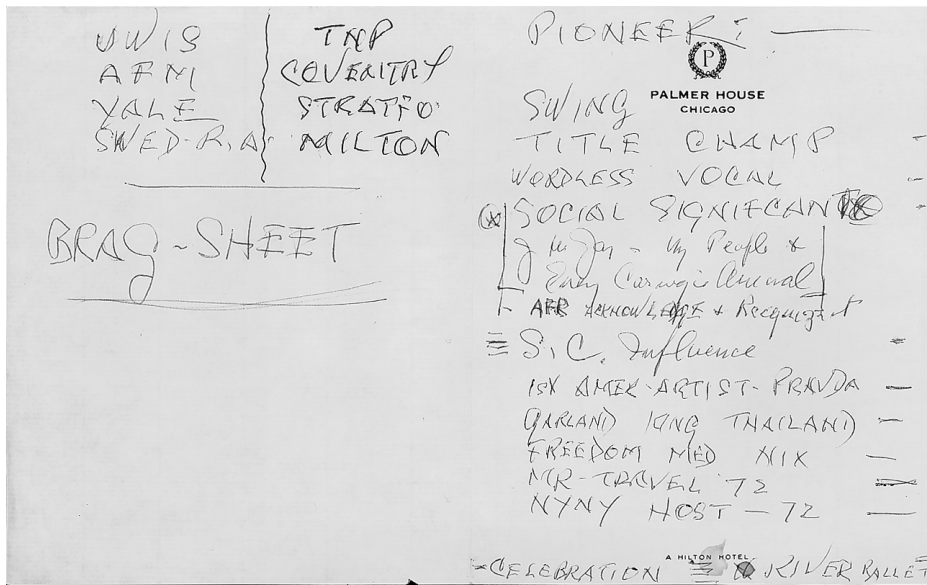
The Question of New & Old - Young & old Musicians - always seem to be designed to Defeat me - But then I must take into Consideration the Source of the Question if just has to come from someone who is that aware of what is really going on today - they I imagine are speaking up the kids in the Top 40 who get the most publicity - like the Kids who are rebellious, or Furber Pat or Gurd who are themselves in varied & sundry forms of unlawful Release -

In other words, the Weight Kids, always get they pictures on TV in newspapers etc. the Contrasting youngsters who are doing some <sup>THING</sup> Normal & Behaving like Clean Progressive Individuals - Preparing themselves for a Responsible Position in the Society of Today & Tomorrow is never mentioned for instance on the Music Picture - there are many wonderful Bands, & Incredible Performing Musicians for a possible Career even more

A LOEW'S HOTEL



**FIGURE 16.3** Page from Ellington's notes for *Music Is My Mistress*. Duke Ellington Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



the book (455), where he considers the value of “new music” in the sixties, appears on pages from the Fairmont Hotel in Dallas. In another stolen moment, Duke jots down a few paragraphs on the great stride pianist Luckeyeth Roberts (104) on a pad from the Waldorf-Astoria in New York. His proud description of the band’s concert at the 1966 World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar is composed on paper from the Desoto Hilton in Savannah, Georgia, in a thick black felt-tip scribble. The opening fable used as the book’s prologue (“Once upon a time a beautiful young lady and a very handsome young man feel in love and got married. They were a wonderful, compatible couple, and God blessed their marriage with a fine baby boy” [x]) appears on stationery from the Baltimore Hilton. On paper from the Steigenberger Park Hotel in Düsseldorf, Germany, Duke scrawls portraits of Al Hibbler (223–24) and Johnny Hodges (116–19), while he pens the section about his early days in New York with lyricist Joe Trent (70–71) and the anecdote about his 1962 recording session with Max Roach and Charles Mingus (242–44) under the letterhead of the Ambassador Hotel in Chicago.

During this period Ellington was increasingly concerned with spiritual matters. He channeled much of his religious sensibility into the three *Sacred Concerts*, but it also became more and more part of his daily life, as he collected religious readings and meditations during the band’s tours. His papers contain an assortment of Bibles that fans and correspondents had given him, as well as religious broadsides and pamphlets from various sources—Jewish prayer books, programs from Catholic masses, Unitarian tracts, and an assortment of more obscure literature.<sup>58</sup> He seems not to have paid close attention to the majority of this material, taking

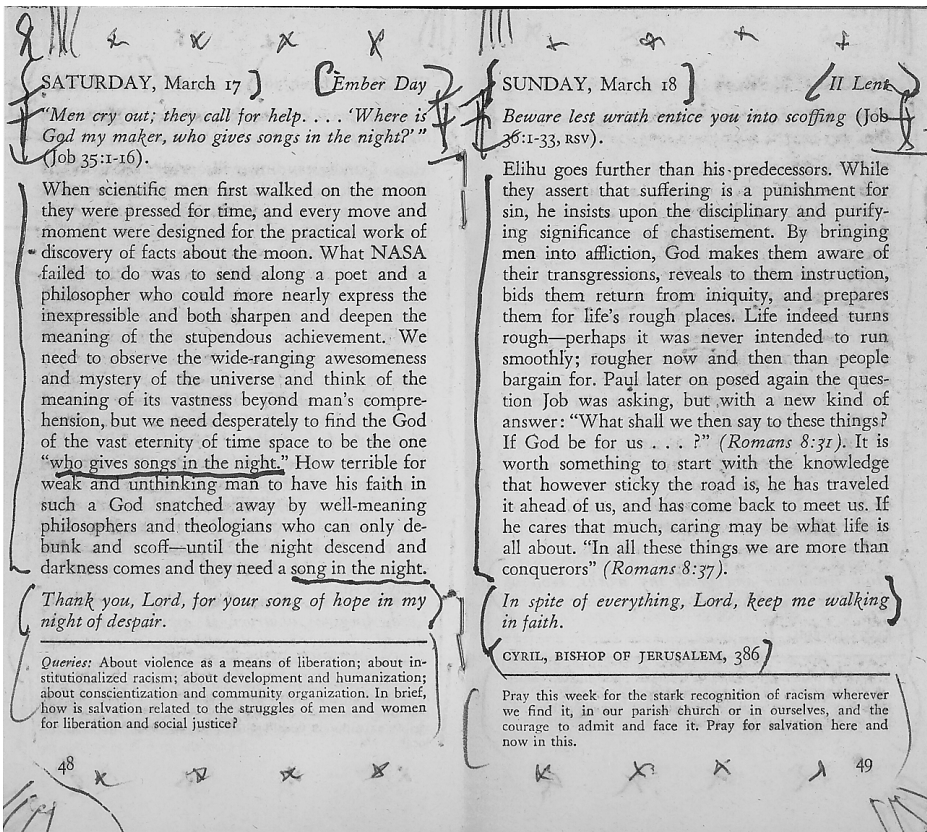
what was presented to him, and studying his personal copy of the Bible with the deepest care. One of the few other items that Ellington read assiduously in these years was a pocket-sized pamphlet called *Forward Day by Day*, a “manual of daily Bible readings” published by the Forward Movement in Cincinnati, Ohio, which he received in periodic installments from the summer of 1968 until the spring of 1973.

Ellington seldom underlines the texts of these readings, and, when he does, he usually highlights quotes from the scriptures that have to do with music. In the *Forward Day by Day* selection for March 17, 1973 (figure 16.4), for example, when the band was playing an extended gig at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto, Ellington only underlines one phrase, “who gives songs in the night,” from an epigraph from the Book of Job: “Men cry out; they call for help. . . . ‘Where is God my maker, who gives songs in the night?’”<sup>59</sup> This is not to say that Duke leaves the books pristine, though: in fact, he pen-marks these daily prayer books heavily, with busy crosshatches, long vertical lines, corner flourishes, and brackets that swirl around the margins of the texts. This odd, even compulsive graphicity must be read as concurrent with or concomitant to his reading but not directly reflective of

**FIGURE 16.4** A page from Ellington’s personal copy of *Forward Day by Day*, February 1–April 30, 1973 (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1973). Duke Ellington Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

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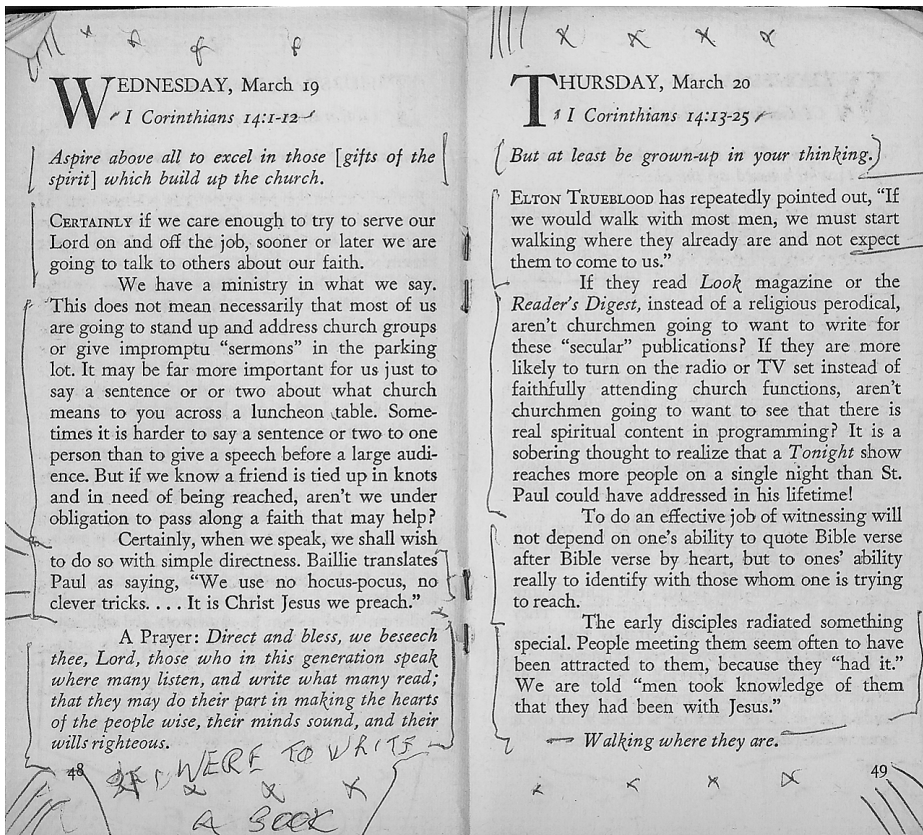
brent hayes edwards



it—the markings have a consistency day to day and through the months that seems to have little to do with the texts he's reading. One might understand this graphicity as parallel to his reading, then, in the Ellingtonian sense of the term. The marks don't represent or translate the words he reads as much as they move alongside the text, filling the margins, with what might be closer to a "musical" form of inscription than a linguistic one. Duke's recourse to the pen could even be called a *scoring* of the books, in at least two senses: both as a marking or incision that interrupts or cuts the words on the page and as the record of a kind of rhythm, a graphic suggestion of "beat" (through the spacing and iteration of the marks) that registers, subdivides, or accompanies the time of reading.

In March 1969 the Ellington orchestra played a three-week engagement at the Casbar Lounge in the Sahara Hotel in Las Vegas.<sup>60</sup> In the *Forward Day by Day* for Wednesday the 19th, the reading is taken from I Corinthians 14: "Aspire above all to excel in those [gifts of the spirit] which build up the church," which the book explicates in terms of the "ministry" of "what we say" in daily conversation and informal speech (figure 16.5). The page ends with a prayer: "Direct and bless, we beseech thee, Lord, those who in this generation speak where many listen, and write

**FIGURE 16.5** A page from Ellington's personal copy of *Forward Day by Day*, February 1–April 30, 1969 (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1969). Duke Ellington Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.





what many read.”<sup>61</sup> Ellington brackets the prayer, as usual, but, for once, he adds his own marginal note at the bottom of the page, amidst his usual “X” scorings, in a somewhat feeble-looking uppercase script:

IF I WERE TO WRITE  
A BOOK

A strange and poignant subordinate clause to hang at the foot of a plea. It is important that this phrase isn’t simply past tense (“If I wrote a book”) or declarative (“I want to write a book”)—much less some kind of glancing reinterpretation of the call to bless those who “speak where many listen, and write what many read” (if Ellington had written instead, for instance: “I write music” or “I *play* where many listen”). Neither is it an allusion to the well-known Rogers and Hart popular standard, “I could write a book,” with its playfully amorous proclamations of literary agency. The phrase “If I were to write a book” expresses a kind of desire, but it is desire couched in the subjunctive, in the realm of a shakily contingent possibility rather than a prediction or a promise or a counterclaim.

If the subjunctive mood denotes an action or state as conceived and not as a fact, then the phrase articulates in this personal and meditative space Ellington’s sense of the literary. That Ellington would describe his “book” in this mood, as contingent and hypothetical, as an open-ended, unlikely, but imagined prospect, is not surprising given that he was struggling to write *Music Is My Mistress* during this period. “He dragged his feet,” Mercer Ellington commented later,

and grumbled about the progress. He would have Stanley [Dance] go to places like Toronto and Houston when he had long engagements, but often they would sit up all night watching dog-assed movies and not work at all. It was the same when he was at home. Stanley would come to work, but after hours of Perry Mason and shoot-’em-ups, Ellington would be too tired for anything but criticisms and promises. It was a miracle the book was ever finished.<sup>62</sup>

“If I were to write a book”: it is appropriate, then, that Ellington comes to express that struggle as a fragile possibility, in a religious pamphlet titled to evoke daily progress “forward.”

But, in a broader sense, one might also read this subjunctive as the mood of all Ellington’s grand racial programmatic ambitions, the desire to write a “tone parallel to the history of the American Negro” that in different ways animated his “social significance” works: *Jump for Joy* and *Black, Brown, and Beige* in the 1940s, *A Drum Is a Woman* in the 1950s, and *My People* in the 1960s. To write an extended composition about the Negro, the work that “tells his story,” in Baldwin’s phrase. “If I were to write”: the desire, and the vulnerability, in the phrase might also in part be Ellington’s conviction that his great work had to combine music and language, somehow, as I have already suggested—melody and text “parallel” to each other in voice-over narration, programmatic verse, and song lyrics—in order to

capture the full richness of that history. Only such a work, an achievement in what he had called many years before “the literature of music,” might offer an “authentic record” of African Americans. “If I were to”: the contingency, the open-endedness, would seem unavoidable. In *Music Is My Mistress* Ellington writes that he felt the rather “unfinished ending” of the first section of *Black, Brown, and Beige* “was in accordance with reality, that it could not be boxed, and stored away when so much else remained to be done” (MM 181). Part of the project’s “authentic record,” then, is precisely its open-endedness, parallel to the unfulfilled hopes of the African American. And it is likewise as though Duke could only conceive and desire his combination of words and music as a prospect, in the uncertainty of the subjunctive, only in an intimate space of reflection. For Ellington, the literature of music trembles at the margin of a prayer.

## NOTES

1. An early version of this essay was first presented at a symposium on Duke Ellington at the North Carolina Jazz Festival in February 1999. The late Mark Tucker invited me to that event, and I only hope that the expanded piece honors to some degree the model of his own pathbreaking scholarship on Ellington. I am also grateful for the extraordinarily generous assistance of Krin Gabbard, David Hajdu, and David Lionel Smith and for the comments and suggestions of Katherine Bergeron and the anonymous readers for *Representations*. At the Archives Center in the National Museum of American History, Annie Kuebler helped with my research on a number of occasions, and Reuben Jackson and Jeff Tate were invaluable when it came time to obtain reproductions. In particular, I thank Robert O’Meally, who asked me to present a revised version of the piece as the inaugural lecture in the Lecture Series on Jazz and American Culture at the Center for Jazz Studies, Columbia University, in November 1999, and who shared both his personal Ellington archive and his extensive knowledge of the music with me throughout the writing process.

James Baldwin, “Many Thousands Gone,” *Partisan Review* (November/December 1951), collected in James Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York, 1998), 19.

2. Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), “The Myth of a ‘Negro Literature’” (1962), in *Home: Social Essays* (New York, 1966), 106–7.
3. Duke Ellington, “The Duke Steps Out,” *Rhythm* (March 1931): 20–22, collected in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, ed. Mark Tucker (New York, 1993), 49.
4. This is not the only such reference. In 1930 a Manhattan reporter wrote: “At present [Ellington] is at work on a tremendous task, the writing, in music, of ‘The History of the Negro,’ taking the Negro from Egypt, going with him to savage Africa, and from there to the sorrow and slavery of Dixie, and finally ‘home to Harlem.’” Florence Zuner, “‘Opera Must Die,’ Says Galli-Curci! Long Live the Blues!” *New York Evening Graphic Magazine* (December 27, 1930), collected in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, 45.
5. See Ellington’s own description of the impetus for *New World A-Comin’* in Ellington, *Music Is My Mistress* (Garden City, N.Y., 1973), 183. Subsequent page citations from this work will be cited parenthetically in the text with the initials MM.
6. A number of these texts are available: *The Golden Broom and the Green Apple* (MM 200); *The River* (MM 201–2); “Program Outline for the Sacred Concert” (MM

- 270–79); *My People* (1963), eight-page typescript, Duke Ellington Collection, Subseries 4B: Scripts, Box 8, Folder 7, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.
7. Barry Ulanov, “The Ellington Programme,” in *This Is Jazz*, ed. Ken Williamson (London, 1960), 168.
  8. Barry Ulanov, “Thumps Down,” in “Two Thumps on ‘A Drum,’” *Downbeat* (June 27, 1957): 18.
  9. Ellington, “We, Too, Sing ‘America,’” a talk delivered on Annual Lincoln Day Services, February 9, 1941, Scott Methodist Church, Los Angeles, *California Eagle*, (February 13, 1941), collected in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, 146.
  10. Richard O. Boyer, “The Hot Bach,” *New Yorker*, (June 24–July 8, 1944), collected in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, 239.
  11. Duke Ellington, “Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall (Duke’s Poetry),” concert at Columbia University, May 20, 1964, *The New York Concert* (MusicMasters CD 01612–65112–2, 1995). This poem plays with the title of a song made famous by Ella Fitzgerald, “Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall.”
  12. Duke Ellington, “Moon Maiden,” recorded July 14, 1969, *The Intimate Ellington* (Pablo/Fantasy OJCCD-730–2, 1977). I am grateful to David Lionel Smith for alerting me to this rendition and for helping me to track it down at short notice. Ellington’s manuscript for “Moon Maiden” is located in the Duke Ellington Collection, Subseries 1A: Manuscripts, Box 229, Folder 8, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. George Avakian, who was present at the recording session, confirms that Ellington recites in an overdub; personal communication, November 2000.
  13. Duke Ellington, “Spaceman,” Duke Ellington Collection, Series 5: Correspondence, Box 6, notes, undated, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. See also Ellington’s unpublished essay, “The Race for Space” (ca. 1957), in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, 293–96.
  14. Liner notes, *The Intimate Ellington*. Duke’s claim notwithstanding, “Moon Maiden” is in fact not the first Ellington recording to feature his abilities as a vocalist; that distinction belongs to the obscure and odd version of “The Saddest Tale” that the band recorded in 1934. Another song under this title would be recorded in 1935 (with Billie Holiday singing) for the film *Symphony in Black*; but the 1934 studio “The Saddest Tale” features Ellington himself, speaking a short lyric (“Saddest tale told on land and sea / Was the tale when they told the truth about me”) over an instrumental backdrop.
  15. Ellington uses this phrase in recounting a “cutting contest” between Sidney Bechet and Bubber Miley: “Call was very important in that music. Today, the music has grown up and become quite scholastic, but this was au naturel, close to the primitive, where people send messages in what they play, calling somebody, or making facts and emotions known. Painting a picture, or having a story to go with what you were going to play, was of vital importance in those days. The audience didn’t know anything about it, but the cats in the band did” (MM 47).
  16. Ellington, “Swing Is My Beat!” *New Advance* (October 1944): 1, 14, collected in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, 249.
  17. Boyer, “The Hot Bach,” in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, 226.
  18. Ulanov, “The Ellington Programme,” 169.
  19. Gary Giddins, “Duke Ellington (Part 3: At the Pulpit),” in *Visions of Jazz: The First Century* (New York, 1999), 501. The phrase “Shakespearean universality” was used by

- a London critic reviewing Ellington's first appearance at the Palladium; it is quoted in Boyer, "The Hot Bach," in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, 216.
20. Strayhorn interview with Sinclair Trail and Gerald Lascelles, *Just Jazz* 3 (London, 1959), quoted in David Hajdu, *Lush Life: A Biography of Billy Strayhorn* (New York, 1996), 156.
  21. "Monologue (Pretty and the Wolf)" was originally recorded for Columbia Records on May 24, 1951. The live version appears on *Duke Ellington Live From the 1956 Stratford Festival* (Berkeley: Music and Arts CD-616, 1989). Ellington performed this recitation frequently in concert. There is even a version in the telecast *Music '55*, broadcast that summer by CBS, where Ellington recites "Pretty and the Wolf" seated at the piano against the backdrop of a series of drawings by Andy Warhol (specially commissioned for the program), which scroll across a screen from left to right. See Klaus Stratemann, *Duke Ellington Day by Day and Film by Film* (Copenhagen, 1992), 358.
  22. "Music Press Release no. 6 (for Saturday morning release, April 13, 1957)," Stratford Shakespearean Festival, Ontario, Canada (April 10, 1957). Ellington clippings file, Institute for Jazz Studies, Rutgers University.
  23. Stanley Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington* (New York, 1970), 32.
  24. Bob Smith interview with Strayhorn, Vancouver (November 1, 1962). I thank David Hajdu for making this interview available to me.
  25. Beatrice Washburn, "The Duke—"I Hear Music All the Time,"" *Miami Herald* (January 12, 1958).
  26. Langston Hughes, "Shakespeare in Harlem," in *Shakespeare in Harlem* (New York, 1942), collected in Hughes, *Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad (New York, 1994), 260.
  27. Rebecca Walkowitz has argued convincingly that Hughes's poem offers "a contrast not between two different *traditions* but between differences *within* traditions—Shakespeare or Harlem—that are thought to be undifferentiated. As 'Shakespeare in Harlem' points to Shakespeare's bawdy songs, it represents not 'low' Shakespeare so much as Shakespeare's own conjunction of high and low cultures." See Rebecca Walkowitz, "Shakespeare in Harlem: *The Norton Anthology*, 'Propaganda,' Langston Hughes," *Modern Language Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (December 1999): 515.
  28. Irving Townsend, liner notes to Duke Ellington and his Orchestra, *Such Sweet Thunder* (Columbia CL 1033, 1957).
  29. Ulanov, "The Ellington Programme," 171. The phrase is taken from Hippolyta's speech in act 4, scene 1 of the play: "I never heard / So musical a discord, such sweet thunder" (lines 120–21).
  30. Hajdu, *Lush Life*, 161.
  31. "Music Press Release no. 6."
  32. Stratemann, *Duke Ellington Day by Day and Film by Film*, 239.
  33. Stanley Crouch, Program Notes, Classical Jazz Series Concert, Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (August 10, 1988), collected in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, 441.
  34. "Sonnet for Sister Kate," Duke Ellington Collection, Series 1A: Music manuscripts, Box 363, Folder 6, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.
  35. Bob Smith interview with Strayhorn, Vancouver (11/1/62).
  36. Nathaniel Mackey, "Other: From Noun to Verb," in *Discrepant Engagement: Dissidence, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (New York, 1993), 269–70. It would

be a mistake to underestimate the role of humor in this fugitive mode—the way that *Such Sweet Thunder* is composed not just of “parallels in miniatures” but also *caricatures*. This is equally an element in Ellington’s own writings. For example, *The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse*, recorded in 1971 in the wake of Ellington’s travels on U.S. State Department tours in the 1960s, was apparently inspired by Marshall McLuhan’s claim in the late 1960s that the world was “going oriental, and that nobody will be able to retain his or her identity—not even the orientals” (MM 4). But Ellington’s spoken introduction to the suite’s opener, “Chinoiserie” (which he repeated word-for-word at each performance) only glancingly takes up McLuhan’s proposition, preferring to jaunt through a self-deprecating run of alliteration and association that matches its rhetoric of pseudo gallantry with its tongue-in-cheek allusion to “the piano player”: “In this particular segment, ladies and gentlemen, we have adjusted our perspective to that of the kangaroo and the dijiridoo, which automatically puts us Down Under or Out Back. From this viewpoint, it is most improbable that anyone can tell who is enjoying the shadow of whom. Harold Ashby has been inducted into the responsibility and obligation of scraping off a tiny chip of the charisma of his chinoiserie, almost immediately after the piano player completes his riki-tiki . . .” It is crucial to read this as serious play, though: to suggest, in other words, that the fugitive poetics of Ellington’s language (its slippage along what Roman Jakobson would call the axis of equivalence) actually *enacts* McLuhan’s proposition that the contemporary world is characterized by cultural mixing without progeniture—a state in which “it is most improbable that anyone can tell who is enjoying the shadow of whom.” *The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse: A Suite in Eight Parts* (Fantasy Records OJCCD-645-2, 1975).

37. Albert Murray has gone much further, arguing that this effect is not at all exceptional, but instead that the entire Ellington band must be heard as one orchestrated “extension of the human voice.” He writes:

Such was the vocal orientation of Duke Ellington’s genius that in addition to achieving the most highly distinctive overall instrumental orchestral sound (made up of instrumental voice extensions), he not only played his orchestra as if it were a single instrument (to an extent that cannot be claimed for any other composer or conductor) but expressed himself on it as if the three-man rhythm section, three trombones, four to six trumpets, five woodwinds (plus occasional strings) were actually the dimensions of one miraculously endowed human voice.

Albert Murray, *Stomping the Blues* (New York, 1976), 114.

38. Duke Ellington and His Orchestra, *Black, Brown, and Beige, The Duke Ellington Carnegie Hall Concerts, January 1943* (Prestige Records 2PCD-34004-2, 1977).
39. See also the summary of Ellington’s verbal introductions in Barry Ulanov, *Duke Ellington* (New York, 1975), 254–55.
40. Quoted in Brian Priestly and Alan Cohen, “Black, Brown, and Beige,” *Composer* 51 (Spring 1974): 33–37; 52 (Summer 1974): 29–52; 53 (Winter 1974–1975): 29–32; collected in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, 195–96.
41. Priestly and Cohen, while demurring about any easy links between music and narrative, do offer some examples of the ways the suite format of *Black, Brown, and Beige* may have arisen “from the demands of the programmatic motivation itself. In other words, . . . the fragmentation and development of short thematic motifs in ‘Black’

- is intended to represent musically the fragmentation of African tradition on American soil; similarly, the conflict during 'Work Song' between motifs referring to the blues scale . . . and those affirming the major mode . . . may just be a metaphor for the clash between two cultures." Priestly and Cohen, "Black, Brown, and Beige," in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, 188–89.
42. Graham Lock, *Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington, and Anthony Braxton* (Durham, 1999), 2–3. Further references will be indicated parenthetically in the text.
  43. Mark Tucker, "The Genesis of *Black, Brown, and Beige*," *Black Music Research Journal* 13.2 (Fall 1993): 67–86.
  44. Mark Tucker, *Ellington: The Early Years* (Urbana, 1991), 7–8.
  45. David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, Vol. 1: 1868–1919 (New York, 1993), 460. See also W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Star of Ethiopia," *Crisis* 11 (December 1915): 91–3; Du Bois, "The Drama Among Black Folk," *Crisis* 12 (August 1916): 169–73; Du Bois, *A Pageant* (a four-page leaflet issued in 1915), in *Annotated Bibliography of the Published Writings of W. E. B. Du Bois*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (Millwood, N.Y., 1973), 543.
  46. Krin Gabbard compares Ellington's dignified role as a bandleader in his debut film, *Black and Tan* (1929) with Bessie Smith's role as a victimized woman in the film *St. Louis Blues* (1929). See Gabbard, *Jammin' at the Margins: Jazz and the America Cinema* (Chicago, 1996), 161–62. Gabbard follows Gary Giddins in arguing that Armstrong was able to "transcend the racist trappings" of his early films, such as the infamous *Rhapsody in Black and Blue* (1932); *ibid.*, 210–11; Gary Giddins, *Satchmo* (New York, 1988), 36.
  47. Stratemann, *Duke Ellington Day by Day and Film by Film*, 121.
  48. Ulanov, *Duke Ellington*, 258.
  49. Robert Bagar, quoted in Ulanov, *Duke Ellington*, 257. Of course this complaint had been common in reviews of Ellington as soon as he began to experiment with longer forms: Ulanov quotes Constant Lambert, who in 1934 wrote: "Ellington's best works are written in what may be called ten-inch record form. . . . Into this three and a half minutes he compresses the utmost, but beyond its limits he is inclined to fumble" (259). Mike Levin, "Duke Fuses Classical and Jazz!" *Down Beat* (February 15, 1943): 12–13, collected in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, 169. Paul Bowles, "Duke Ellington in Recital for Russian War Relief," *New York Herald-Tribune* (January 25, 1943), collected in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, 166. On the critical reception of *Black, Brown, and Beige*, see more generally Scott DeVeaux, "*Black, Brown, and Beige* and the Critics," *Black Music Research Journal* 13.2 (Fall 1993): 125–146; Andrew Homzy, "*Black, Brown, and Beige* in Duke Ellington's Repertoire, 1943–1973," *Black Music Research Journal* 13.2 (Fall 1993): 87–110; Priestly and Cohen, "Black, Brown, and Beige," in *The Duke Ellington Reader*, 185–204.
  50. Ulanov, *Duke Ellington*, 260.
  51. *Ibid.*, 259.
  52. Duke Ellington, "Black," in *Black, Brown, and Beige*, undated typescript 8, Duke Ellington Collection, series 4: Scripts, Box 3, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. I should note that scholars are still uncertain about the dating of this document. The typescript (based on an earlier handwritten draft), with the character Boola, would seem related to Ellington's plans to write an



“opera” of the same name in the later 1930s. The question remains, of course, whether this script was written before or after the premiere of musical *Black, Brown, and Beige* in 1943.

53. Duke Ellington, “Beige,” in *Black, Brown, and Beige*, undated typescript 8, Duke Ellington Collection, series 4: Scripts, Box 3, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, 1, 3.
54. “Duke’s Book Will Explain His Carnegie Hall Symph,” *Variety* (June 9, 1943): 2, quoted in Lock, *Blutopia*, 110.
55. Carter Harman, audiotape interview of Ellington, Las Vegas (1956), Oral History Collection 422, tape 1, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.
56. Janna Tull Steed has also recently suggested that Ellington approaches the literary through a spiritual focus in this period. See her reading of another untitled Ellington manuscript, written on stationery from a Zurich hotel (the poem opens “His Every Day Cracked Up / in Empty Day / With Promises of only the Blackest / Stormy Night”) in Steed, *Duke Ellington: A Spiritual Biography* (New York, 1999), 152.
57. Mercer Ellington with Stanley Dance, *Duke Ellington in Person: An Intimate Memoir* (New York, 1978), 171.
58. On Ellington’s turn to religion, see Ellington, *Duke Ellington in Person*, 110–11.
59. *Forward Day by Day* (February 1–April 30, 1973) (Cincinnati, 1973), 48. Duke Ellington Collection, Series 14: Religious Materials, Box 2: Pamphlets, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. The Ellington itinerary is taken from Stratemann, *Duke Ellington Day by Day and Film by Film*, 653.
60. Stratemann, *Duke Ellington Day by Day*, 584.
61. *Forward Day by Day* (February 1–April 30, 1969) (Cincinnati, 1969), 48. Duke Ellington Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.
62. Ellington, *Duke Ellington in Person*, 172.

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