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Alternative Music: Jazz and the Performance Resignification of Identity in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees* and Anthony Minghella's *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

**A thesis submitted to
the Department of English
Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario**

**in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English**

**by Kristen Poluyko ©
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Abstract

In this thesis, I argue that Jazz, a music which finds its basis in improvisation, not only functions as music, but as an extremely potent means of political resistance to a number of systems by and through which identity is constructed, distributed, regulated, and enforced. I also argue that, as a form of music and of resistance, jazz is, quite paradoxically, a part of the very system(s) that work(s) to construct, distribute, regulate, and enforce normative and/or compulsory categories of identity—but that resistance always takes place within the systems that give normative and/or compulsory categories of identity their intelligibility. And, finally, I argue that there exists a relationship between jazz and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which functions as a means by which to unsettle and subvert foundational categories of gender, sexuality, and race. In the following pages, I examine the ways in which two texts, Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall On Your Knees* (1996) and Anthony Minghella's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999) highlight and dramatize each of these precepts. While *Fall On Your Knees* illustrates the various ways jazz and gender performativity work to subvert and unsettle foundational categories of identity, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, quite alternatively, illustrates the various ways in which jazz and gender performativity sustain these same foundational categories of identity by allowing Tom Ripley an entrance into normativity. Although each text—in which jazz and gender performativity play an intricate role in the subversive practices of signification but are unable to provide a number of characters a means of sustained and successful subversion—ends on an ultimately dour note, the fact that subversion occurs at all is what remains important.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Introduction: Finding a Rhythm.....	1
Chapter One: <i>Fall On Your Knees: The Spaces In Between</i>	32
Chapter Two: <i>The Talented Mr. Ripley: From the Outside In</i>	74
Conclusion: Out of Tune? The Legacy of Jazz and Gender Performance.....	114
Works Cited.....	124
Works Consulted.....	128

Dedication

For my mom, Carla, my brother, Kyle, and Sandi, all of whom lived through me and me writing this thesis.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Introduction: Finding a Rhythm.....	1
Chapter One: <i>Fall On Your Knees: The Spaces In Between</i>.....	32
Chapter Two: <i>The Talented Mr. Ripley: From the Outside In</i>.....	74
Conclusion: Out of Tune? The Legacy of Jazz and Gender Performance.....	114
Works Cited.....	124
Works Consulted.....	128

Introduction:

Alternative Music

In a recent letter to the author, Dr. Henry van Dyke says of jazz:
"As I understand it, it is not music at all. It is merely an irritation of the nerves of hearing, a sensual teasing of the strings of physical passion. Its fault lies not in syncopation, for that is a legitimate device when sparingly used. But 'jazz' is an unmitigated cacophony, a combination of disagreeable sounds in complicated discords, a willful ugliness and a deliberate vulgarity.

— Anne Shaw Faulkner,
"Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?"

This quotation, found in Anne Shaw Faulkner's 's article "Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation," which appeared in *Ladies' Home Journal* magazine in the 1920's, puts into words—the sort of words that hide behind a wall of authority erected by both Henry Van Dyke's doctorate and the technical language wielded by one who immediately wants the reader to think, 'Yeah, he knows what he's talking about—he even uses the appropriate lingo'—the way I felt towards jazz as recently as a few years ago. Born and raised in the era of the 2/4 and the 4/4 beat that most often drives the tunes popularized by MTV, MuchMusic, and the many "All Rock, All the Time" radio stations that clutter the air-waves in Ontario, I would listen to jazz every so often knowing that there was a music I didn't quite get—that didn't, in other words, rely on

standardized rhythms or sounds with which I had grown not only familiar but accustomed over the years. In the era of the sound byte—quick, easy, and thoughtless—where everything supposedly important comes in pre-packaged sounds and images that get their information out in the span of a rock music video, I didn't particularly want to exert any more effort than I had to as a listener. If music—any kind of music—was going to be so bold as to demand that I actually *pay attention*, that I *think through* and *into* the notes being struck, the shifting, changing, and ever-evolving melodies that were at once vaguely recognizable and like nothing I'd ever heard, that I actually exert intellectual energy just listening—which should, for god's sake, be a thoughtless process in which the ratio of energy expended is nothing compared to that which is preserved, much like it is during sleep—then I was going to be so bold as to turn that music off, take the CD off the turntable, and use it as a coaster.

In other words, up until a few years ago, what I heard when I listened to jazz was something that I simply didn't understand. And, like most individuals who don't wish to bother facing up to their assumptions, unlearning what has become, through constant and continual repetition, a sort of common-sense so common as to go unnoticed, and eventually learn anew the thing that had once seemed so perplexing, I sided with Dr. van Dyke and decided that jazz was, for all intents and purposes, nothing but noise. This is, of course, what van Dyke is saying in the above quotation—that jazz, with which he had probably spent little time and thus had no opportunity to develop any sort of familiarity or appreciation, is not music at all, just a bunch of noise which, to him, made no sense whatsoever. Quite like myself, van Dyke simply didn't understand what he was listening to, and thus provided it with a label that let him off the hook quite easily. All of that cacophony, all of those vulgar discords that require so much work on the part of the listener, not to mention the musicians, amounts to nothing more than noise, the

sort that arouses passions rather than pleases the ears and relaxes the soul. It is, if I may imply a subtext running beneath van Dyke's self-righteous indignation, *the devil's music*.

This phrase, probably more than anything, is what got me thinking about my own assumptions regarding jazz. As I previously made clear, I listen to the sort of music that ends up, whether I like it or not, making appearances on Casey Casem's Top 40 Countdown. I tend to think that my choices in music are quite eclectic—rap CDs exist alongside the more folksy stuff on my CD shelf, and I'm quite happy to tuck Mozart between R.E.M. and The Smiths. And while my tastes may (or may not) be somewhat diverse, I became quite aware that a lot of what I find myself listening to has, at one point or another, been labeled either *noise* or *the devil's music* by those who are, for one reason or another, either frightened or threatened by its existence. R.E.M., whose lead singer classifies himself as "queer", has been banned, burned, and slandered by many who disagree with both the music and the politics within the music. Eminem, the white rapper whose lyrics tend to be dangerously subversive— dangerous because many are unable to recognize the irony and parody running beneath the surface of his rants and overzealously misread his expressions as serious rather than as ironic or parodic—has been singled out by the media, the Republicans, the Democrats, and other musicians as racist, sexist, homophobic, violent or obscene (and sometimes all five at once) despite a lot of evidence that none of these groups has listened to a single Eminem song all the way through. Even the Beatles were once accused of planting 'satanic' messages in their songs (although if you play "Revolution" backwards all you hear is "Revolution" backwards).

While I'm not trying to compare jazz in any way with these other forms of music— although each, in its own way, is, indeed, *music*—I would like to point out a connection between the accusations leveled against the likes of R.E.M. and Eminem, and those leveled against jazz.

More to the point, I wish to make clear the fact that the music to which I've been referring, whether it is classified as jazz, rap, or rock, tends to scare a good many people when the musicians behind the music dare to use their music to make political points. Mixing something like music, which should, in the eyes of many, remain innocuous and playful, something by which to pass the time, with politics is to flirt with danger, especially when the politics of musicians do not coincide with the politics of the moral majority, or any sort of majority, for one simple reason: music is a tool which allows its creators to chip away at the prevailing views, social, political, or otherwise, of society. It allows musicians like R.E.M. to address social injustice and, perhaps, provide their listeners with another way of looking at things that their parents, teachers, and/or local politicians never told them about, and it provides an angst-ridden twenty-something like Eminem the opportunity to speak to, with, and for an entire generation in their own language—one that parodies the racist, sexist, homophobic violence that everyone preaches against but no one seems to want to confront or change.

This is what got me thinking that jazz, which, up to this point, I'd viewed as so much noise, might have something going on beneath the surface that I'd yet to tap into. If this music was—and is—powerful enough to get Dr. Henry van Dyke all ruffled up, then perhaps I should be listening more carefully, exerting the energy necessary to hear what was being said, musically and otherwise. Maybe what van Dyke was hearing, I thought, wasn't just noise, after all, but was something that frightened him into becoming defensive about his own territory, upon which jazz was infringing. For if jazz was nothing but a bunch of noise, then it could have been easily and simply dismissed by merely ignoring its presence—to silence something is to take away its power, after all. However, if jazz actually had something to say that didn't exactly jibe with van Dyke's conception of the world, something that might be worth listening to, then van

Dyke's frightened but coolly authoritative response was not only predictable, but typical, and no different from the accusations thrown at other forms of music and musicians over the past ten decades.

But if jazz was saying something that I wasn't hearing, something subversive, something *political*, then what was it, and why was I missing it? And if, as I hypothesized, Dr. van Dyke found whatever he was hearing frightening enough to become articulately defensive in the form of a quotable letter, then what, exactly, was he really defending? It wasn't music per se, because van Dyke didn't appear to have a problem with the musical quality of jazz, otherwise he would have simply turned a deaf ear to its 'disagreeable sounds' and put on something much more to his taste. No, it wasn't jazz music itself that van Dyke was railing against, but something about jazz that sent him running to the nearest typewriter, where he would write an attack against this willfully 'ugly' and 'vulgar' music that immediately stuck one of his more sensitive nerves. It was something within the music that rattled van Dyke's cage—something that I simply wasn't hearing but desperately wanted to, if I could only figure out how.

I found my entrance into jazz in the most unlikely of places, if you consider literary theory an unlikely source of illumination about anything other than...well, literary theory. It so happened (if anything so illuminating can be thought to 'just so happen') that my troubles with jazz, a most inaccessible form of music, coincided with my discovery (a forced discovery, but still a discovery) of Judith Butler's theory of gender as a performative practice, under the guise of an assignment handed to me in a fourth year theory class I was taking. The assignment, which kept me up until two in the morning trying to decipher a theoretical language that seemed quite foreign, required that I reconcile humanist conceptions of 'identity' as essential with Butler's conception of 'identity' as nothing more than an performative social act. Although I found

Butler's theories somewhat confusing and inaccessible at this point in time, I plodded through the assignment and garnered at least a partial apprehension of what Butler was talking about—which I will spend much more time examining in the pages to come—and actually began the slow process of *understanding* what I was reading and writing about the further and deeper I went into Butler's texts. This process, that of coming to terms with something until that hyper-real state of knowledge is reached, was, as I've already said, quite difficult. But it was also enjoyable, to the extent that I felt myself becoming much more wary of a number of naturalized conceptions of gender that, honestly, hadn't really crossed my mind until I was assigned this particular project.

While I won't go into great detail about that project—I think the small description I provided speaks for itself, if you view it through the eyes of a fourth year English student—I certainly found a great deal of what Butler had to say was, and still is, quite interesting, and actually offered me a new way of looking at jazz, the complex and contradictory music that I continued to find so intellectually troubling, by offering me a new way to look at feminism, gender, and sexuality. In her groundbreaking and now seminal text, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler sets up her theory of gender performance, that is, gender as "an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (Butler 177), by first explaining what she saw as a paradox within feminist theory, which often claims to subvert the binary thinking that places men in positions of power over women by repositioning women in direct opposition to men. Such tactics, Butler thinks, do not liberate women from gender hierarchies which tend to situate the masculine over the feminine, but reify the very hierarchies they claim to subvert by further legitimizing and thus maintaining categories of masculine and feminine, male and

feminine, male and female, as natural. For to situate women in opposition to men is to do exactly what patriarchy has been doing all along. This is, of course, troubling, because, as Butler points out, "any feminist theory that restricts the meaning of gender in the presuppositions of its own practice sets up exclusionary gender norms within feminism" (vii). What this does, according to Butler, is allow for the production of "new forms of hierarchy and exclusion" (vii) within the very binary frames that feminism, in all its wisdom, claims to subvert.

Butler's solution to the problems she located in feminist conceptions of identity was to confront these problems within feminism head-on and look for another way of conceiving of gender that was not so contradictory, so ultimately self-destructive. In short, Butler wanted to "open up the field of possibility for gender without dictating what kinds of possibilities ought to be realized" (vii), and indeed did so by postulating gender not as something fixed or natural, but as a *performative* act or an expression which, once detached from foundational and/or biologically determined categories of 'male' and 'female' or 'masculine' and 'feminine', becomes "a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (Butler 10).

None of this, on the outside, has anything to do with jazz per se, but it has quite a bit to do with my own conceptions of jazz, that cacophonous 'noise' which, according to van Dyke, aims to rattle the nerves and arouse physical passions. While trying again and again to listen past the apparent noise of the music and hear what was going on beneath each note, I began to notice a trend in what I was hearing—or, more to the point, I began to notice a trend in my thinking about what I was hearing. The thoughts—or assumptions—I was carrying about jazz as inaccessible noise were, indeed, quite similar to my original thoughts of Butler's theories of

gender as a performative practice as inaccessible and difficult. However, with Butler, I was able to overcome these difficulties by simply opening myself up to the new, heavily theory-laden language that Butler was speaking, a language which provided a new way of conceiving of old suppositions of gender as something natural and essential, a *given* that need not be questioned. What Butler did, more than anything else, was question the assumptions upon which both patriarchy and feminism are founded—that gender, the state of being either ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’, follows from one’s biological sex as either ‘male’ or ‘female’—and arrive at a theory of gender that did not constrict or confine one’s identity to any single category. Indeed, Butler’s theories do not confine one’s identity to any category whatsoever. And, if Butler was able to open up such ground-breaking and illuminating possibilities, as simple as they are complex, by questioning the presuppositions on which our gender-bound society runs, then wasn’t it possible to do the same with jazz? Didn’t jazz, categorized as an improvisational music, as structured as it is unstructured, operate in much the same way as Butler’s theory of the performative? In other words, wasn’t the improvisational nature of jazz quite like Butler’s ideas of gender as performative, as an *improvisation*, if you will, in the sense that both question, trouble, and unsettle a number of assumptions by demonstrating how flimsy and unsubstantial those assumptions really are? Once again, I decided to return to jazz, this time armed with an open mind and a willingness to listen into the complexities of the music which had, for so long, sounded like noise. And this time, I came away with a new-found appreciation for jazz not only as a music, but as a political form of resistance to naturalized categories of race, gender, and sexuality, a resistance that is embodied (and I don’t use this term lightly, as I will soon explain) by, in and through techniques of improvisation and dissonance that open up a space in which new categories of gender and sexuality can be put into play, both musically and otherwise.

And now I arrive the heart of this thesis, which consists of three basic premises derived and developed from my earlier and seemingly endless grapplings with jazz and Butler's theories of gender performativity. In the following pages, I hope to demonstrate that, (1) jazz—the complex and sometimes contradictory music on which this thesis is based—does not only function as music, but as an extremely potent means of political resistance to a number of systems by and through which identity is constructed, distributed, regulated, and enforced; (2) as a form of music and of resistance, jazz is, quite paradoxically, a part of the very system(s) that work(s) to construct, distribute, regulate, and enforce normative and/or compulsory categories of identity—but that resistance must, by necessity, always take place within the very systems that give normative and/or compulsory categories of identity their intelligibility; and (3) there exists a relationship between jazz and performative acts of gender, the latter of which is conceived by theorist Judith Butler a way to unsettle and subvert foundational categories of gender, sexuality, and, by extension, race. In order to do so, however, I think it best to backtrack a little so that I may outline and explain exactly how and why jazz functions as both a music and a form of political resistance, which will in turn explain Dr. van Dyke's subtly fearful reaction to the music, what jazz provides its participants/musicians an opportunity to resist, how Judith Butler's theory of the performativity of gender operates in the context of this thesis, and how it connects to jazz, and why.

To begin to provide the necessary answers to these questions means first coming to terms with jazz as a music, finding out what it is, who is involved in its creation and proliferation, and how it works both musically and politically. In short, to provide a coherent answer to any of the questions listed above requires a definitive definition of jazz that explains, at least in musical

terms, how, what, and why jazz is. This is not, however, as easy as it sounds, because jazz, as I hope I've already made clear, isn't an easy music and thus cannot be reduced to a single definition, let alone one that claims to be *definitive*—especially because the term itself has a particularly troubled and hotly contested history¹. Even so, certain jazz theorist/historians—many of whom also work within the realm of literary theory and criticism—have attempted to provide working definitions to aid the uninitiated in developing a basic understanding of this most complex music. Gurleen Grewal, for example, content to acknowledge but not explore some of the contradictory aspects of the music, defines jazz as “vocal and instrumental, monodic and polyphonic, individual and collective, improvised and worked out” (124), while Philip Page explains it as “an art of the individual, celebrating originality and imagination and simultaneously a group art, an art of the collective consciousness” (14). Others define jazz not merely as a music, but as a distinctly African American music that “serve[s] a dual function as both a unifying factor within subculture and as a vehicle and a symbol of the separateness of that subculture from the dominant culture” (Ellison quoted in Page 15). As though directly challenging the jazz-as-an-expression-of-individuality theme that many—if not most—theorists believe to be central to the music, Wendy Harding and Jackie Martin choose to define it as a “music [which] bypasses rational categories in order to produce a global and pervasive feeling of satisfaction” (153).

As interesting and, at times, provocative, as many of these brief definitions are, I find each to be lacking in one area or another, specifically in terms of explaining, even in basic

¹ Any attempt to provide a definition of the term ‘jazz’ is, I have noticed, riddled with ‘may haves’ and ‘possibilities,’ as is Frank Tirro’s suggestion that jazz “may have been used originally as a minstrel or vaudeville term, but it may have had African or Arabic origins” and “was possibly associated with the sex act, for which the word is used in slang as a synonym” (53). Many, including Tirro, have postulated that the term derives from the French *jaïser* — a term which translates into ‘an animated conversation among diverse people’ (Tirro 53). The only thing I’ve been able to determine is that no one really knows for sure what the term ‘jazz’ originally meant or where it comes from. Everything else—all those ‘may haves’ and ‘possibilities’—are nothing more than pure conjecture.

terms, what jazz really *is* and *how* it works on both musical and theoretical levels. Although each theorist I've quoted is quite capable of explaining what jazz is to him or her, they don't quite seem to place it in terms that surpass their personal conception of the music—which is difficult to do for two very distinct but equally important reasons. First, jazz is, for many, a very personal music and means something different to each individual listener (or performer). Second, 'jazz' is really a very generalized term that describes a wide body of music made up of different styles and sounds, each of which is historically situated and thus exemplifies the very historically specific struggles of each successive artist who, individually, helps to define what is collectively referred to as 'jazz'.

Admittedly, I have a difficult time trying to understand the shifting history of jazz proper (if such a term can even be said to exist) and the many different kinds of jazz which have informed that history, and vice versa. Unable to read music and lacking the talent to discern the difference between a flattened 7th and augmented 9th, but fully capable of hearing the often subtle, sometimes pronounced changes in rhythm, tone and structure that help differentiate one form of jazz from another, I don't believe that a firm knowledge of the more technical aspects of music theory is a necessary facet of jazz appreciation. I do, however, believe that a basic knowledge of the historical and musical development of jazz is necessary, especially within the realm of this thesis, where jazz should function not only as an abstract theoretical tool, but as an actual musical movement that is in constant and continual conversation with its own history.

However, the history of jazz, at least in terms of origins, is a little on the sketchy side. Although it is known that jazz had its beginnings in New Orleans in and around the turn of the century—a period which frames not only the development of jazz but racial tensions arising from a conflict between New Orleans' Creole population and its African American population,

consisting of slaves just recently freed from bondage—no audio recordings exist from which to draw any concrete conclusions about the sorts of sounds or musical techniques used to create the music we now classify as jazz. There is, however, a general consensus that jazz is the result of a “gradual blending of several musical cultures” (Gridley 56) and musics, including but not limited to sounds which included British folk songs, French dance and ballet music, brass bands of a Prussian or French model, hymns and chorales of Puritans, Catholics, Baptists and Methodists, the ‘shouts’ of black street vendors, and black dances and rhythms (Berendt 8). As to how this music, played by such figures as Buddy Bolden and Bunk Johnson, might have sounded, Gridley believes that much of the jazz emanating from this period “emphasized colorfully varying pitches...which in formal European music would constitute ‘playing out of tune’ or being ‘off-key” (38-9), “rough and varied timbers” (39), “ragging” (39), a practice that “involve[s] anticipating and delaying timing for selected notes to add or enhance accents” (39), and, of course, improvisation. And most everyone agrees that jazz, specifically in this period, was a distinctly black music, one which provided a community that suffered both internal and external oppression an opportunity to devise and develop its own identity, the expression of which can be found within the music itself.

Yet as much as jazz can be—and still is, in many cases—classified as a distinctly black art form, the advent of Dixieland in and around the first and second decades of the 20th century, found the white mainstream appropriating and, to a great degree, commercializing jazz. What resulted was a period in which a contest was sprung between the white style of jazz, which Joachim Berendt describes in *The Jazz Book* as “less expressive, but sometimes better technically versed” (11) than other earlier forms of jazz, and ‘hot’ style practiced by mainly black musicians. The 1920’s didn’t resolve this contest between black and white musicians, but it did

find jazz turning away from its birthplace in New Orleans towards Chicago, specifically when the war closed down New Orleans's fabled Storyville district, thus forcing musicians to relocate both themselves and their music. (Berendt 12-14)

Once firmly established in Chicago, a number of new sounds began to take off, including 'cool' jazz and the blues, both of which began as an emulation of the New Orleans style but soon became known (for obvious reasons) as Chicago style jazz, which is in some ways markedly different from its predecessor. In the Chicago style, for example, "the profusion of melodic lines, so typical of New Orleans style, is more or less absent. The voicings, if there is more than one line, are neatly parallel. The individual [rather than the collective group] has become the ruler, [and] [f]rom this point on, the solo becomes increasingly important" (Berendt 14), specifically the sax solo, which dominates Chicago style jazz until the trumpet makes it way to the forefront some ten years later, when jazz makes yet another leap in style and geography, this time to New York. (Berendt 14-16)

A period commonly referred to as the 'reconstruction,' as it marked the phase in which much of the United State's African American population 'reconstructed' their lives and culture after years of legalized slavery and racism, the 1930's saw a massive movement of black peoples from the South to New York's Harlem district, which was as much a hotbed of black creative and cultural energy as New Orleans was a hotbed of racial conflict thirty years' previous. A place in which the black arts—dance, music, literature, and fine art—were valued, encouraged, and appreciated, if only by the black inhabitants of Harlem itself, Harlem during this period in history witnessed a sort of cultural and artistic Renaissance, in which jazz played a prominent role. Here, in Harlem, Big Bands and the Swing style—otherwise known as "four-beat jazz because it puts the stress on all four beats of the bar" (Berendt 15)—moved to the

forefront, so much so that Swing becomes a key term and a key musical practice in jazz, one which "connotes a rhythmic element from which jazz derives the tension classical music gets from its formal structure. This swing is present in all styles, phases, and periods of jazz. It is so essential that it has been said that if music does not swing, it is not jazz" (15). (Berendt 15-16)

However, even if it swings, and even if it's jazz, it isn't necessarily revolutionary or even politically viable. Quite the contrary, the big bands of the 1930's brought jazz into the cultural and musical mainstream by commercializing a sound which was, up to this point, a sort of underground sensation. Jazz, it appears, was suddenly and successfully reappropriated by white musician/band leaders such as Benny Goodman, whose mass-market appeal brought jazz out of the night clubs of Harlem and put it on the radio while simultaneously pushing the black musicians responsible for many of these ground-breaking sounds into the shadows. Although some of these musicians, such as Louis Armstrong, didn't rest idly by as jazz became, for all intents and purposes, a bit of a cultural phenomenon among the record-buying white public, they were not able to achieve the same sort of popularity their white counterparts achieved, nor were they able to stop the mainstreaming of a music that had, up to this point, been regarded as cutting-edge and very much a part of the black lived experience. That is, not until the advent of Bebop in the 1940's. (Berendt 15-16)

Bebop's arrival on the jazz scene not only signaled the arrival of yet another new sound, one in which the obvious was discarded in favor of the obscure and dissonant, but also marked a challenge to mass-market commercialization of jazz. Swing, so unique and vital in its day, suddenly became passe and was replaced by what has been described as bebop's "racing," "nervous", "fragmented," "jagged" and "hasty" rhythms. A number of black musicians, those who had become alienated by the swing movement and wanted to use their music to evoke

certain levels of difference rather than the now-formulaic Big Band variety of swing, veered away from the more traditional musical forms and began experimenting with atonality and dissonance, complexities of harmony and melody, and a marked departure from standardized chord progressions which brought an abstraction to the sound that was, for many used to following vocalists and four-four rhythms, difficult to follow (Gridley 143-146; 170). This sudden explosion of experimentation with sound made jazz unappealing to the same consumers who flocked to the showy and very formulaic (musically and otherwise) performances of the Big Band era, and something akin to a revolt occurred. Jazz was no longer—or wasn't as much—a commercial commodity, particularly to white listeners who had grown accustomed to a certain sound played in a certain way, and once again jazz faded into the background, where it continued its evolution quietly.

'Quiet' might be a fitting way to describe the change in sound and style which followed the bebop revolution, after which jazz musicians began working with sounds—'cool' sounds—that were much more "subdued" and "understated" (Gridley 177) than those heard in bebop. Characterized by "long, linear, melodic lines" (Berendt 20) that offer a softness rarely (if ever) heard in bebop, cool jazz is much more introspective than previous forms of jazz. Interestingly, around the same time cool jazz was coming to the fore, hard bop, a much more modernized version of bop that "employed hard-driving, fiery, melodically complex improvisation" (Gridley 191), was finding an audience, albeit a relatively small audience, but one which responded to the fact that it was, in style, structure, and rhythm, much more straight-forward and less complicated than was cool jazz. However, this apparent straightforwardness is somewhat deceptive. As Berendt points out, "The musical and technical material [of hard bop] is so simple and slight that it is hard to uncover musical reason" (23) although it most certainly exists and led

to the formation of free jazz.

To a great degree, free jazz is exactly what it sounds like: a music free from the constraints of conventional musical forms—and from earlier varieties of jazz, which embody certain conventions and traditions even as they alter and expand upon them. Free jazz is a revolutionary style—“chaotic and nerve wracking” (Gridley 241), difficult to follow, and innovative. Unlike other forms of jazz to which it responds, works off of, and moves dramatically away from, free jazz “has a reputation for wider variation in pitch and tone quality than bop and cool styles” (Gridley 242), does not “adhere to preset chord progressions and such divisions as bridges, turn-arounds, and fixed chorus lengths” (242), and, in some cases, entirely “dispenses with preset melody and steady timekeeping” (241). An all-around textured music made up of layers of sounds and great degrees of fragmentation (227), free jazz is possibly one of the most difficult forms of jazz as it continually challenges preset conceptions of what music is and what it should sound like.

What is interesting about free jazz, both historically and musically, is that the music expresses and emphasizes the collective *and* the individual, specifically in terms of improvisation, and thus becomes representative of a specifically black “group acceptance” (Berendt 23) in which free jazz musicians are able to locate a certain musical freedom amidst dramatic and sometimes violently stifling social constraint. That the music itself—atonal, intense, and non-conformist—mirrors a number of social and political events which characterized the 1960’s, including but not limited to the civil rights marches, the rise of the Nation of Islam, and many protests and black pride movements, is not surprising, nor is the anger heard in “loud,” “frenzied” and “turbulent” (Gridley 241) improvisations which characterize free jazz. Jazz was, in this period, as much about protest as it was about music, and

became—as it was in the past and still is—socially, politically, and culturally relevant.

Although the development and evolution of jazz does not stop with free jazz, the point I wanted to make in the preceding paragraphs—which is that jazz is a music that is continually evolving and very much historically situated—has, by now, become clear. Each style of jazz, however ground-breaking or revolutionary it seems in its particular historical context, becomes, at some point, somewhat dated as each successive style takes flight. And each of these successive styles owes something to and takes something away from that which came before it. In this sense, then, jazz is always in motion, always evolving, never stagnant, and very much opposes any sort of all-encompassing definition.

Even so, each of the styles mentioned above contains certain general characteristics that allows us to classify and define each of them, collectively and individually, as jazz. Finding the words for such a definition—one that encompasses all styles, forms, and movements—is not impossible, but finding a good one that suits the purposes of this thesis is a different story. For this reason, I chose to turn to jazz historian Joachim Berendt, who defines jazz against more traditional and familiar musical styles/movements so as to offer the unfamiliar a point of comparison and contrast on which to lay the beginning foundations of knowledge and appreciation. According to Berendt's admittedly limited 'working definition',

jazz is a form of art music which originated in the U.S. through the confrontation of the Negro with European music. The instrumentation, melody, and harmony of jazz are in the main derived from Western musical tradition. Rhythm, phrasing, and production of sound, and the elements of blues harmony are derived from African music and from the musical conception of the American Negro [sic]. Jazz differs from European

music in three basic elements:

- 1) A special relationship to time, defined as swing. [Which, it must be noted, applies to some but not all forms of jazz.]
- 2) A spontaneity and vitality of musical production in which improvisation plays a role.
- 3) A sonority and manner of phrasing which mirror the individuality of the performing jazz musician.

These three basic characteristics create a novel climate of tension, in which the emphasis no longer is on great arcs of tension, as in European music, but on a wealth of tension-creating elements, which continually rise and fall. The various styles and stages of development which jazz has passed since its origin around the turn of the century are largely characterized by the fact that the three basic elements of jazz temporarily achieve varying degrees of importance, and that the relation between them is constantly changing. (174)

While there exist numerous other 'working definitions' of jazz, a few of which I've already cited, and while some of these may be easily categorized as better or worse than that cited in the above passage, I chose to use Berendt's 'definition' because, more than any other I've come across, it brings forth and makes clear what I regard as three of the most important elements of jazz as it applies to this thesis. Firstly, Berendt makes clear that jazz is polyphonic, meaning that jazz is not just a single, unified musical form, nor do the instruments produce single or unified tones. Rather, jazz is made up of numerous musical sounds and tones, traditions and/or voices, each of which contributes important elements, including the rhythm, phrasing, and

production of sound, to the music we have come to classify as 'jazz'. By looking at jazz as polyphonic, it becomes possible to make sense of the many different and often oppositional and/or contradictory facets of this extremely, and sometimes maddeningly, complex musical art form.

Furthermore, that jazz is polyphonic connects to the second characteristic I find both interesting and largely applicable to this thesis. Jazz, writes Berendt, is, to a great degree, about tension, the sort of tension that occurs when many different, varied, and contradictory traditions are brought together in one musical form. This tension is not, of course, stable or static, but in constant and continual flux, rising at certain points, falling at other points, and always working to create a sense of unease and anticipation in the listening audience.

This, of course, brings me to the third element of jazz that Berendt points out as not only important, but, I believe, essential to our understanding of jazz not only as a form of music, but as a politically wired, socially charged part of the discourse of resistance. According to Berendt, jazz, like any and all forms of social and political discourse, is "constantly changing" (174), meaning that it is neither foundational nor fixed. Although it is possible, as Berendt has demonstrated, to pin down some of the most basic elements that go into and come out of its creation, jazz defies definition and therefore claims much of its potency as a musical form from its non-conformist, non-traditional, and anti-establishment inclinations, all of which, in one way or another, challenge and/or subvert the status-quo. Jazz is also, I contend, inextricably entwined in the process of identity formation, which, when viewed through the lens of Judith Butler's theory of gender as "sustained social performances" (180), shakes free of any and all foundationalist and/or normative notions of identity as stable and/or fixed and becomes something that, like the music with which I have aligned it, is in a perpetual state of flux, never

static, always moving, changing, shifting, and resisting all attempts to stabilize and control its creation and proliferation. For this reason, it is not only possible but necessary to view jazz not merely as music, but as

a music of protest...[that] cries out against social and racial and spiritual discrimination, against the clichés of picayune bourgeois morality, against the functional organization of mass society, and against the categorization of standards that lead to the automatic passing of judgements in areas where they do not apply. (Berendt 180)

The standards to which Berendt alludes, are, I think, of the utmost importance to anyone interested in developing and exploring a connection between music and the construction and proliferation of normative categories of gender and sexuality, as we live in a society in which standardized notions of what is acceptable and unacceptable, right and wrong, normal and abnormal proliferate and, in fact, control and regulate the various modes of gender and sexual identity(-ies) individuals are permitted to express. Nobody wants to be at the bottom of any one of the many hierarchies into which the social order has been split, but many—including women, gays, lesbians, and anyone whose skin tone is darker than white—are, whether they like it or not, forced to play subordinate to a great many dominant discourses, including those which insist that gender is equal to the sum of one's private parts and that the term sexuality must in act and in expression always be preceded by a *hetero-*. Although resistance to such discourses is often difficult, considering the sort of risks involved—risks that include but are not limited to a virtual loss of intelligibility—it is not impossible, especially when conducted by and through the very systems, specifically music and language, that give dominant discourses their power. In order to hold this view, however, one must see a link between music, language and

identity, and while such a link may seem nearly impossible to establish, it becomes quite fathomable when the music which is being examined is jazz.

Perhaps my separating jazz from other forms of music is, at this point, misleading, as I don't mean to imply that jazz and only jazz is connected to language and/or identity formation. Indeed, music—all music—is easily connected to language for one simple reason: music, in many ways, functions like a language, actually is a sort of language in and of itself. Considering that what we know as language is really nothing more than an arbitrary system of signs that, when strung together in various ways and contexts, allow us to communicate, establish/create meaning, and, perhaps most importantly, become socialized, encultured beings, it is not surprising that music, also a system of signs (in this case, the arbitrary signs are notes rather than letters and words), works in much the same way as language. Both, when reduced to their bare bones, are codes, systems of signification that give order and meaning to oral, written, and musical emissions and/or utterances. And both are tantamount to systems by and through which we are granted access to various modes of (acceptable and normalized) identity, including gender and sexual identity.

Although such claims as those made above seem somewhat shaky, considering the disparate notions we tend to hold about music and identity, there do exist a number of critics who have already noted and examined these sorts of relationships—those that exist between music and gender, music and language, and music and social and political resistance—in full. Perhaps the most illuminating commentary thus far has been provided by feminist musicologist Susan McClary, who, in her book *Feminine Endings*, claims that gender and music are inextricably entwined, for not only are “[t]he codes marking gender difference in music... informed by the prevalent attitudes of their time” (7)—meaning that both are culturally and

linguistically constructed—but the codes

themselves participate in social formation, inasmuch as individuals learn how to be gendered beings through interactions with cultural discourses such as music. Moreover, music does not just passively reflect society; it serves as a public forum within which models of gender organization (along with many other aspects of social life) are asserted, adopted, contested and negotiated. (7-8)

As this thesis claims to be about the role of jazz in the construction of genders and sexualities alternative to those presented as normative and/or compulsory, the aspects of contestation and negotiation are what I am particularly interested in and are what jazz, both musically and otherwise, works to promote through improvisation, itself a salient means of musical and political resistance.

While improvisation certainly does invite—indeed, demand—a certain level of creativity, invention, and spontaneity, it is not wholly unstructured, in the sense that improvisation, depending on the sort of jazz being practiced, allows musicians to change, vary and/or completely veer away from pre-existing melodies that act as a sort of ground from which each improvisational flight takes off. Thus, improvisation always takes place within what critic Missy Dehn Kubitchek calls “a recognized structure” (141), without which there would, by necessity, be no opportunity for improvisation to take place. This, I think, is of paramount importance and interest because it further connects music to language, which is also a recognized structure in which change can occur, but more importantly, it aligns Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, in which she theorizes the body as a performative site of multiple gender configurations and alternative practices of sexuality, with jazz.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler points out that the “rules that govern intelligible identity, i.e., that enable and restrict the intelligible assertion of an “I,” rules that are partially structured along matrices of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, operate through *repetition*” (185). In Butler’s view, agency—the ability of a subject to act on his or her own behalf and in his or her own interest—can be enacted by and through the process of signification, which she defines as “*not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects*” (185). In other words, it is through and in repetition, a necessary facet of signification which involves “the consistent and repeated invocation of rules that condition and restrict culturally intelligible practices of identity” (184) that agency is located. The use of such “tools” of signification as repetition, parody, and pastiche allows for a “reconceptualization of identity [including categories therein such as gender and sexuality] as an *effect*, that is, as *produced* or *generated*, [which then] opens up possibilities of ‘agency’ that are insidiously foreclosed by positions that take identity categories as foundational and fixed” (187). Thus, for Butler, “The critical task is...to locate strategies of subversive repetition...to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them” (188).

Butler spends the entirety of *Gender Trouble* locating, identifying, and examining one such ‘strategy of subversive repetition’, which many have defined as ‘gender performance.’ There is, however, a difference between a ‘performance’ and the ‘performative,’ a difference which Butler partially explains in *Gender Trouble*:

The view that gender is performative [seeks] to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained

set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body. In this way, it show[s] that what we take to be an 'internal' feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures. (xv)

In this view, the performative is an expression of gender, an "*aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names*" (Butler in Osborn and Segal), while a performance indicates a creation contained within a specific moment. Thus, as a 'strategy of subversive repetition', gender is not a performance, but a performative, and the performative as Butler conceives of it acts as a means of unsettling the various foundations upon which normative and/or compulsory categories of gender and sexuality rest. In other words, gender as performative involves *acting* a gender rather than *being* a gender, because one simply cannot *be* something that is really nothing more than an illusion. Gender is not, according to Butler, real, but is something that is established through a number of acts, gestures and desires. Accordingly, these acts, gestures and desires

produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior

essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the 'integrity' of the subject. In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of re-productive heterosexuality. (173)

When actively performed, however, the categories of gender and sexuality are themselves put on display. It then becomes possible not only to question their reality, but to consciously and effectively dislodge them from their lofty and seemingly safe positions of primacy over the formation, distribution, and regulation of identity.

What I hope has, by now, become apparent is that jazz, in many ways, exemplifies Butler's theory of gender as performative, for jazz, with its heavy emphasis on improvisation, is always "working within yet subverting mainstream culture through irony and parody" (Page quoting Monson 16). Furthermore, notes theorist Ajay Heble in his book *Landing On the Wrong Note: Jazz, Dissonance, and Critical Practice*, improvisation, like gender performativity, highlights the difficulty of self-expression while at the same time opening up a space in which individuals may rearticulate old melodies in new ways while simultaneously resignifying themselves (93-96). Indeed, writes Heble, jazz improvisation mirrors the efforts of its practitioners/ musicians to "improvise their own identities in order to transgress the socially and institutionally constituted frameworks that have defined their status" (96). And, finally, like gender performativity, jazz acts as "an art of individual assertion within and against the group"

according to Ralph Ellison,

springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest; each solo flight, or improvisation, represents...a definition of his [sic] identity as individual, as member of the collectivity and as a link in the chain of tradition. Thus, because jazz finds its very life in an endless improvisation upon traditional materials, the jazzman [sic] must lose his identity even as he finds it. (267)

Having found my way into and through jazz, and now having explained how and why, I'm forced to once again return to Dr. Henry van Dyke and the excerpt of his letter which opened this introduction. I asked many questions earlier, most of which I've answered to the best of my ability. However, there do remain a number of loose-ends which are directly attached to jazz—which I no longer view as noise but which still troubles me, for a number of reasons. As much as I detest both the tone and content of van Dyke's letter—I view it as an elitist attempt by one secure in his place within culture to quash any resistance to the codes and credos of a very inflexible society—I am very much aware that, at one point, I did, in fact, agree with the basic premise of what he wrote; that is, I agreed that jazz was noise, and did so because I found myself facing something that I couldn't quite decipher. What this means, at least from my perspective, is that there does exist something within jazz that makes listening and understanding quite difficult for someone like me. I'd like to clarify that, unlike van Dyke, I never found jazz threatening, just a lot of work that never really seemed to pay off. I felt—and often still feel—excluded, somehow, from the whole jazz idiom. In jazz, there is a language being spoken that I simply will never be able to fully or completely access because I believe that those

who are mainly responsible for the creation and proliferation of jazz (including but not limited to the musicians, producers, and technicians of the music, not to mention the entire music industry itself) do not want me to access it, or at least run on the assumption that I simply *can't* access it.

This may seem to be somewhat of a cop-out on my part, and it may be on some levels. However, as I understand it, jazz is a distinctly *male* musical domain, even more than it is a distinctly African American musical domain. But such a suggestion—be it true or false—cannot be left to stand on its own, as I'm implying, as do many theorists working in the realm of musicology and literary studies, that music—particularly jazz—is, in fact, gendered. This is not, however, a recent phenomenon. "Beginning with the rise of opera in the seventeenth century," states McClary in her study of gender and sexual politics as represented in and by various modes of music, "composers worked painstakingly to develop a musical semiotics of gender: a set of conventions for constructing 'masculinity' and 'femininity' in music" (7). These conventions, both consciously and unconsciously, have been worked into just about every aspect of music—into its cadence, tonality, narrative structure, into all namable and nameless facets of music production—and have, in many ways outlined by McClary, helped to solidify and reify music as a gendered discourse:

Throughout its history in the West, music has been actively fought over bitterly in terms of gender identity. The charge that musicians or devotees to music are 'effeminate' goes back as far as recorded documentation about music, and music's association with the body (in dance or for sensuous pleasure) and with subjectivity has led to its being relegated in many historical periods to what was understood as a 'feminine' realm. Male musicians have retaliated in a number of ways:

by defining music as the most ideal (that is, the least physical) of the arts; by insisting emphatically on its 'rational' dimension; by laying claim to such presumably masculine virtues as objectivity, universality, and transcendence; by prohibiting actual female participation altogether. (17)

Although McClary is not specifically referring to jazz in her argument, it is quite clear that jazz conforms to a number of her claims, many of which are taken from the realm of music in general and placed into the context of jazz in particular by Heble and Siddall, who comment upon the specific issues of gender within jazz as both a music and an institution. For, as Heble and Siddall point out, while

McClary's work has been exemplary in exposing some of the ways in which rational aspects of musical practice frequently taken for granted as natural and autonomous, are, in fact, powerfully, if not necessarily consciously, caught up in reproducing, transmitting, and inculcating prescribed cultural attitudes towards gender and sexuality... jazz [makes clear that] such attitudes are not only consolidated through musical structure; they are also publicly reinforced in various extra musical ways. (142-43)

Some of these 'extra musical' reinforcements of gendered attitudes about jazz can be located in the comments made by reputable male jazz musicians about the 'essence' of their art, comments that tend to reveal a certain level of overt sexism at work in the seemingly liberal-minded realm of music. For example, Cootie Williams is quoted as having said, "All great jazz musicians, every one of them, have had many loves and girls in their lives...as a girl is jazz music. They throw something into the mind to make you produce jazz" (in Stein 285). This

comment at once makes clear that (1) 'all great jazz musicians' are thought to have been heterosexual men, (2) the role of women in jazz, according to this particular trumpet player, is restricted to that of 'muse' who inspires but does not create, and that (3) women who play jazz will most likely come up against this sort of view point, which implicitly asserts that women, by virtue of their gender, can't possibly have the same sort of access to the male dominated world of jazz that men do. Indeed, according to many female jazz musicians, women are simply not taken seriously in the realm of jazz—no matter how good they may happen to be. What this indicates to me is that while jazz may indeed function as a means of resistance to certain normative and/or compulsory categories of gender, race, and/or sexuality, it remains a distinct part of the systems by and through which many of these categories are upheld. To put it more simply, jazz, in many cases, maintains the very normative categories of identity that it claims to subvert, a contradiction that is difficult to reconcile.

However, this same contradiction is partly responsible for my decision to write this thesis. As difficult as I find jazz, as utterly maddening and, sometimes, troubling as both the music and politics of the music are to me, I can not overlook the fact that, at least to my knowledge, no other music functions on as many levels—musically, intellectually, politically, and otherwise—as jazz. The texts upon which I have chosen to base the following chapters, Ann-Marie MacDonald's 1996 novel *Fall On Your Knees* and Anthony Minghella's 1999 film *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, were selected because both illuminate jazz as a music of resistance while at the same time refusing to shy away from the more vexing aspects of the music—those which I have outlined above. In the first chapter, which focuses on MacDonald's *Fall On Your Knees*, I explore the ways in which the improvisational nature of jazz opens up a space for two of the novel's main characters to subvert through performative acts the normative binaries of

male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual, and white/other-than-white. While the novel makes clear the performative nature of both jazz and gender, it makes equally clear the problems, often violent in nature, encountered by those who dare to resist established social and political norms, and the limitations of jazz as a means of resistance.

The second chapter, which focuses on Minghella's *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, takes a decidedly different view of jazz, one which exposes to a greater degree the limitations discussed in the previous chapter. Here, in this chapter, I argue that jazz is performativity within the film, as it is through jazz that Tom Ripley, lower-class con-man, is able to assume the identity of an upper-class, Princeton-educated, heterosexual and thus insinuate himself into the lives of his victims. Interestingly, Ripley is drawn to jazz not so much for its subversive potential, but because jazz, as a masculine domain, provides him with an entrance into the normative categories which elude him as a gay man. Thus *Ripley*, much more than *Fall On Your Knees*, allows me to explore and address some of the aspects of jazz that continue to trouble me because *Ripley* opens up questions about the gendered aspects of music.

While both of these texts were chosen mainly because they illustrate and explore the three premises on which I have based the entire thesis—that jazz functions as an extremely potent means of political resistance to a number of the systems by and through which identity is constructed, distributed, regulated, and enforced, that, as a form of music and of resistance, jazz is, quite paradoxically, a part of the very system(s) that work(s) to construct, distribute, regulate, and enforce normative and/or compulsory categories of identity, and that there exists a relationship between jazz and the resistance to and/or collusion with normative and/or compulsory categories of identity through gender performativity—they were also chosen because they allow me to examine three media—music, film, and literature—that aren't often

placed side-by-side in the context of Master's theses. I believe each of these media is of great interest to anyone studying English today, and I more or less designed this thesis so that I would be able to explore all three at once, thereby granting myself access to a range of theoretical material I might not otherwise have had the opportunity to explore. These are admittedly selfish motivations, but I offer no apologies, as my entire motivation for writing this thesis has been, from the beginning, selfish. Having already acknowledged my many troubles with jazz, I feel absolutely no shame in admitting that everything you will read in the following pages is, to some degree, the outline of a personal saga that continues, and will continue for quite awhile, I'm sure. My goal—a very self-serving goal—is to continue to delve into jazz, to find ways to utilize its subversive potential within the realm of gender and literary studies, and to continue to discover and uncover the many layers that lay beneath the dissonant sounds that continually undermine and strengthen my own position as listener, a student, and, perhaps most importantly, as a human being.

Chapter One

Fall On Your Knees: The Spaces In Between

"The human organism responds to musical vibrations. This fact is universally recognized. What instincts then are aroused by jazz? Certainly not deeds of valor or martial courage, for all marches and patriotic hymns are of regular rhythm and simple harmony; decidedly not contentment or serenity, for the songs of home and the love of native land are all of the simplest melody and harmony with noticeably regular rhythm. Jazz disorganizes all regular laws and order; it stimulates to extreme deeds, to a breaking away from all rules and conventions; it is harmful and dangerous, and its influence is wholly bad."

**— Anne Shaw Faulkner,
"Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?"**

When questioned by a journalist about the role of sexuality in her novel, *Fall On Your Knees*, Ann-Marie MacDonald supplied an interesting response, one which highlights some of the basic themes of this thesis. "It's pretty undeniable," said MacDonald,

that sex is a powerful force, and the desire to control sexuality is pretty big-time, too. It's all part and parcel of the oppression of women or any other group. You can control women's sexuality to keep them on side so that our society stays stable. We're looking at that right now, obviously, the control of female sexuality and also control of male sexuality. It's like a powder keg. (Tihanyi 22)

Indeed, sexuality is a powder keg, in that wrapped up in this issue are a number of volatile forces—social, political, and otherwise—that promote and regulate the proliferation of normative gender(ed) identities. The resistance to and explosion of normative and naturalized conceptions of identity, I contend, is exactly what *Fall On Your Knees* is about. Even MacDonald, who is careful to distance herself from both academic and political readings of her novel, admits that “There’s a whole powerful force in the book, of resistance” (23) that is played out on numerous fronts, including those involving gender, sexuality, race, and, perhaps most uniquely, jazz, the moody and unpredictable music that, according to one critic, “brings [MacDonald’s] narrative superbly...together” (Coughlin).

This chapter, though, is not about jazz or sexuality per se. Rather, it is about the role of jazz music in the construction of genders and sexualities alternative to those presented as normative and/or compulsory. However, before looking at any particular alternative and, more often than not, performative identity categories, those which are, as explained earlier, reactions made within discourse/the linguistic order against these norm(s), it is first necessary to come to a general understanding of the foundational categories that are, through the process of resignification, reconceptualized by the characters (interestingly, the *female* characters) of *Fall On Your Knees*. Lacan’s theory of identity formation—which stipulates that one’s position within society as an intelligible subject is contingent upon one’s entrance into and compliance with the rules of the patriarchal linguistic order, which Lacan terms ‘the Symbolic Realm’—becomes both relevant and important at this point, for it is Lacanian theory which claims that, (1) identity and, by extension, gender and sexuality, are linguistically and socially constructed; (2) the Symbolic/Patriarchal order, via the Law of the Father, defines by virtue of exclusion, meaning that women, people of colour, homosexuals, or any other minority are

constructed as 'Other', a sweeping term which allows for the easy (and often unquestioned) subordination and regulation of those persons, things or actions which are perceived as potential threats to dominant discourse(s); and (3) the Patriarchal/Symbolic order establishes normative categories of gender and compulsory heterosexuality with which the subject must comply or risk suffering a number of consequences ranging from ostracization to unintelligibility (unless, of course, unintelligibility itself becomes a means of resistance, an issue that will be discussed further along in this chapter, in reference to both jazz as a [sometimes] unintelligible music and resistance as a [sometimes] unintelligible effect on and of the body).

In her novel, *Fall On Your Knees*, author Ann-Marie MacDonald dramatizes and thereby puts into practice a number of these theories, most of which are embodied by James Piper, patriarch of the Piper family. Almost from the outset of the novel, it is clear that James, who wields the Law of the Father as deftly and violently as he wields his fists, is a product of the linguistic system which he, the embodiment of Lacan's signifying phallus, rules. A mere piano tuner by profession, James' lower-class status is made painfully clear to him by Mahmoud, the father of his Lebanese lover, who refers to him alternatively as "*enklese*" (translated as 'English' and used in this context as an ethnic slur) and "the yellow-haired dog" (MacDonald 17). What these terms do, besides humiliate and anger James, is position him within a binary in which he is made to be the Other to Mahmoud, whose wealth automatically situates him above James within the linguistic order and continually, in a repetitious fashion, reinvigorates and reinforces James' already keen sense of lack. In Mahmoud's mind, James could never win his daughter's love, as he has neither the background nor the economic standing to make him a worthy suitor. Like the worst kind of criminal, James is guilty of stealing *Materia* from Mahmoud and her up-standing family, quite like a "thief in the night...[would steal] another man's property" (MacDonald

17), and Mahmoud treats him as such. However, James does not rest easily or quietly as anyone's subordinate, especially a "filthy black Syrian" (MacDonald 19) like Mahmoud. Unlike Mahmoud, who is Lebanese, James is "Canadian" (19)—meaning, in this case, that he has the power of Western discourse operating on his side, a power which he regularly enforces in his relationship with Materia, Mahmoud's daughter.

From the start, then, Mahmoud, Materia's father, and James, her lover and eventual husband, have entered into a power struggle that has as much to do with class and race as it does with national identity. A complicated issue, nationalism plays a distinct role in the novel's preoccupation with identity because, quite simply, nationalism is almost solely about identity. As Anne McClintock, referring to Benedict Anderson's book *Imagined Communities*, explains,

nations...[are] "imagined communities"—in the sense that they are systems of cultural representation whereby people come to imagine a shared experience of identification with an extended community. As such, nations are...[also] historical practices through which social difference is both invented and performed. Nationalism becomes, as a result, radically constitutive of people's identities through social contests that are frequently violent and always gendered. (353)

While it is clear that James and Mahmoud are, indeed, locked in such a social contest—a nationalistic game of one-upmanship, if you will—how such a contest is in any way related to gender is not so clear. However, if nationalism is understood not just as a contest but as a *masculine* contest "structured around the transmission of male power and property" (353), the role of gender within nationalism becomes much more obvious. As the issue of contention between James and Mahmoud, Materia becomes, if only by default, a very important pawn in

each man's struggle for domination, nationalistic and otherwise, over the other, as whoever happens to 'win' her also wins the power and property she has come to represent.

Upon first meeting Materia, who is but thirteen years old, James exoticizes and eroticizes her into someone/thing more akin to an Arabian temptress than a naive child of privilege. He notes that she has "the darkest eyes he'd ever seen, wet with light. Coal-black curls escaping from two long braids. Summer skin the colour of sand stroked by the tide. Slim in her green and navy Holy Angels pinafore" (MacDonald 12) with hair that "smelled sweet and strange" (13), so sweet and strange that he is eventually overcome with "positively carnal" (13) desire. What James desires, however, is not Materia herself but the 'Other' she represents: dangerous, alluring, sexual, and sensual; basically, a whore in the form of an angel who, according to Lacan, "poss[esses] the privilege of satisfying needs, that is to say, the power of depriving them of that alone which they are satisfied" (286). What this means, Lacan explains, is that,

man finds satisfaction for his demand for love in the relation with the the woman, in as much as the signifier of the phallus constitutes her as giving in love what she does not have—conversely, his own desire for the phallus will make its signifier emerge in its persistent divergence towards 'another woman' who may signify this phallus in various ways, either as a virgin or as a prostitute. (290)

In other words, Materia becomes a "correlative for man's"—in this case, James'—"lack and helps him affirm his selfhood" (Makaryk 621), first by positing within language something—in this case, something 'other'— against which he can compare and justify himself, second by providing him access to and control over that which he lacks.

However, after he is forced by Mahmoud to marry Materia in a traditional Catholic

ceremony, James' image of her quickly alters. The 'otherness' that once attracted him suddenly becomes repulsive, so much so that "he winced at the thought of showing [her] to anyone" (MacDonald 24). Indeed, James begins asserting the Law of the Father—a reference not to an actual father wielding actual laws, but to an abstract set of rules which define one's placement within the symbolic order through a (sometimes violent) process of exclusion—almost immediately after he and his new wife begin their lives together, first through conventional means—which include physical, verbal and emotional violence, isolation, and intimidation — and then by forbidding her access to the only things that give her power: music and language. Both are, for Materia, the only connections she has left to her family and her culture. James, however, forces Materia to speak only English in his presence, a language which Braj B. Kachru claims is used as "a tool of power, domination and elitist identity" (291). As such, language, particularly the English language, gives James "access to attitudinally and materially desirable domains of power and knowledge [and] provides a powerful linguistic tool for manipulation and control" (295). By cutting her off from the language of her homeland, then, James further succeeds in isolating Materia—who has had little experience with the English language—from her culture and, perhaps more importantly, from a basic means of communication, without which she is made virtually powerless, a prisoner in her own home and a stranger in her own community.

As Materia begins to grow despondent in an increasingly difficult marriage, she takes refuge in music, often

playing whatever came into her head whether it made sense or not —
 mixing up fragments of different pieces in bizarre ways, playing a
 hymn at top speed, making a B-minor dirge out of 'Pop Goes the Weasel'...

all with the heavy hand of a barrelhouse hack. (MacDonald 23)

Although what she is playing is *not* jazz, Materia's methods of music-making share some characteristics with jazz music and related issues that will be discussed in much greater depth further along in this chapter, including her use of dissonance and improvisation, both of which Ajay Heble believes are "politically and culturally salient act(s) for oppressed groups seeking alternative models of knowledge production and identity formation" (20). And Materia is certainly oppressed by James, who finds her piano playing to be "disturbing, unhealthy even" (23), not to mention *noisy*. Although he doesn't forbid her to play the piano right away, he certainly makes his displeasure clear, not by yelling at or striking Materia, but by ignoring her musical protests. James' silence, although not of the physically violent variety, inflicts a special sort of violence which, according to Foucault, simultaneously "functions as a sentence to disappear" and as "an affirmation of nonexistence" (293). In other words, silence functions as a means of castigation and exclusion inflicted upon those who, like Materia, disobey the normative rules of discourse, rules established in order to ensure that anything or anyone deemed unacceptable face certain repercussions for their infractions. On one level, then, James' silence denies the existence of Materia's voice—not to mention the existence of Materia herself—and renders her protests futile and ineffective, despite the fact that she continues to play. On another level, however, Materia's playing—a mish-mash of sounds or noises that, when heard individually or collectively, convey nothing particularly coherent—can be viewed as effective *because it is unintelligible*.

What I mean by this is that linguistic and/or musical unintelligibility can, in certain contexts, become a means of resistance, a point which finds support in the writings of certain feminist scholars. Helene Cixous, for example, a key figure in the (in)famous French Feminist

theoretical movement, believes that there exist many modes of feminine expression, and that each of these modes will be read as unintelligible because, to patriarchy, the feminine itself is unintelligible. As writers and bodies, and often as writers (in a literal and figurative sense) whose means of expression is the body, or who are said to write the body, women, according to Cixous, must, by necessity, operate either "(in) the in-between" (340) of patriarchal discursive modes of expression, or, alternatively, directly outside of discourse itself, which automatically situates them outside of the realm of the intelligible:

If woman has always functioned "within" the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this "within," to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of. (343)

This language, however, isn't always intelligible—specifically to the patriarchal figures, those like James, at whom it might be directed. Rather, as a language which finds its basis in the body, it is the antithesis of all patriarchal modes of expression. As Diane Price Herndl explains, where "*his* language is rational, logical, hierarchical, and linear[,] *her* language is a-rational (if not irrational), contra-logical (if not illogical), resistant to hierarchies, and circular" (331).

What this means, then, is that Materia's music—which, in this context, is her language—doesn't have to make sense, doesn't have to be readily intelligible to function as resistance. Indeed, the fact that what Materia plays is unintelligible to James only helps to reinforce the viability of Materia's music—mere noise to James—as resistance. In other words, by playing the piano, Materia is trying to locate a space in which she can express herself aside

and apart from James, whose mere presence—a very patriarchal presence—prohibits and inhibits Materia's access to various modes of self expression—linguistic, cultural, racial, and otherwise—that were, up until her marriage to James, a basic part of her identity. What James views as noise thus becomes something more akin to subversion to and for Materia, who uses music as an escape from James' oppressive rule, as a means of resisting that rule, and as a medium by and through which to rearticulate and resignify herself. In other words, music, for Materia, becomes a way to perform identities alternative to those which have been imposed upon her by James, a fact which becomes clearer when Materia finds herself momentarily free of James' domineering and prohibitive rule.

After James leaves to fight in the First World War, we are told that "Materia comes to life" (MacDonald 86). Or perhaps it would be better to say that she moves from the margins to the center, finding and renewing numerous forms of self-expression that had been foreclosed by James' constant and oppressive presence. She begins to work outside of the home, finding pleasure in her own self-sufficiency as a performer after she takes a job as a pianist with a vaudeville company; she reestablishes maternal bonds with her daughters, with whom she was never able to completely connect due to James' prohibitive and controlling actions; and she rediscovers the language of her homeland, which James often prohibits her from speaking. But, most interestingly, with James gone, Materia rediscovers and reclaims her own body, which James, as the harbinger of the Symbolic order—one who bears the power language and culture—had previously regulated through numerous forms of violence and isolation. And she does so through the music and dance of her Arabic culture. "At least once a week," writes MacDonald,

Materia takes [a] record from the hope chest, carries [her daughter's]

gramophone down to the kitchen and winds it up. She aims the brass bloom and places the needle on the spinning wax: First the antechamber of snowy static, airlock to another world, then...open sesame: the *deerbeki* beats rhythm, ankle bells and finger cymbals prance in, the *oud* alights and tiptoes, a woodwind uncoils...rising reedy to undulate over thick strings thrumming now in unison. It all weaves and pulses into a spongy mesh [...] Materia [then] gets up and dances the *dabke*. Her mother taught her this dance, and Materia has taught [her daughters]. The *dabke* is a continuous series of small lifting steps in quarter-swirls which sway your hips, laze your shoulders back and forth and breeze your arms like treetops over your head. Your hands are supple seaweed, waving on unresisting wrists, encircling, grazing, flirting with each other. [...] [T]he whole point of the *dabke* is to get up and do it in the centre of [a] gathering, where you acknowledge everyone until you pick out the person you will invite into the dance. Then you lower your arms towards them, hands still weaving to the music, and you lure that person until they get up and join you because they can't refuse. Then they become the centre. (89-90)

The ways in which MacDonald describes the Arabic music that James has forbidden from his home are, I think, quite telling, because each description seems to refute and/or challenge James' conception of Materia's culture. Where Materia hears a music that, like the culture from which it derives, "alights", "uncoils", "weaves" and "pulses" as though alive, James, judging from his previous proclamations against all things 'Other', would mostly likely hear noise (indeed, he refers to her piano-playing as a disruptive "racket" on page 23), or worse, something as "filthy"

as Materia's Arabian heritage. However, when viewed through Materia's eyes rather than James', the music opens the door to a culture which has been unfairly characterized as paradoxically dangerous and insignificant, depending on James' mood. In other words, the music from which Materia has been banned becomes a means of resisting the oppressive representations forced onto Materia by Western culture and its most dedicated representative, James.

Dance plays as important a role as music in this particular passage, for, like music, with which dance is inextricably twined, dance functions as a form of resistance to various modes of normativity enforced by patriarchy. But it is also, according to McClary, exceedingly difficult "to explain [music's] uncanny ability to make us experience our bodies in accordance with its gestures and rhythms" (23). And like music, dance, according to Ann Cooper Albright, "foregrounds a responsive dancing body, one that engages with and challenges static representation of gender, race, [and] sexuality" (xiii) by relying "on the physical body to enact its own representation" (3) in and through dance. Thus, dance becomes, for Materia, a way of controlling and constructing her own subjectivity, which, up to this point, has been James' domain, while simultaneously permitting her the opportunity to openly "converse in different languages—both physical and verbal—at once" (5). Quite clearly, the open, unselfconscious, and confident woman Materia constructs herself as in this passage is quite different from the closed, frightened, and terribly insecure woman James has constructed throughout the course of his marriage.

Materia does not remain so for long, however. Immediately upon his return, James reasserts his patriarchal law, reclaims possession of his daughters, and reestablishes control over his wife's body, language, and life. Finding all of this too much to bear, Materia responds

by slipping first into depression, then into madness, where she is greeted once again by unmitigated silence—a silence which is, in part, of her own making. Materia thus ends up more powerless than she began. Trapped (perhaps willingly) within the void of her own mind, where any and all access to language—musical or otherwise—is cut off, resistance is made virtually impossible and utterly unimaginable, as Materia is now outside of the very systems in which she once located agency. Eventually, Materia does the only thing left for her to do: she permanently surrenders to James and his patriarchal rule by taking her own life, an action which not only reinforces James' power but also leaves him in a position to further mold his children, specifically his daughter Kathleen, in his own normative image.

James begins his attempts to control and manipulate his daughter's identity from the moment of her birth. It is, of course, James rather than Materia who names Kathleen, and it is James who "repudiat[es] the primary relationship to the maternal body" (Butler 101) in a scene that quite brilliantly dramatizes the moment when the mother/child bond is severed by the **Father's Law**:

One evening in the fourth week of Kathleen's life, James snatched his child from [Materia's] breast in horror.

"You've hurt her, Jesus Christ, you've cut her lip!"—for the baby's smile was bright with blood.

Materia just sat there, mute as usual, her dress open, her nipples cracked and bleeding, oozing milk.

James took one look and realized that the child would have to be weaned before it was poisoned. (MacDonald 34)

Once again, Materia's body and its natural, biological functions are constructed by James as

unnatural. The appearance of blood, which signifies both Materia's determination to bond with and feed her daughter despite the pain and difficulty she experiences with each attempt and the unerasable fact of her culture, is immediately construed by James as a further sign of Materia's 'Otherness'. Materia and her body become, in this scene, not only abnormal, but dangerous, a source of physical and cultural 'poison' which will eventually contaminate his daughter and turn away from the influence of her father. Thus, by severing the developing bond between Kathleen and Materia, James is not only ensuring that his child will remain 'uncontaminated' by her mother's body, but by her "filthy black" culture—her blood—as well.

This accomplished, James is now free to usher his daughter into the Symbolic, where a number of expectations await her. "She was going to grow up a lady" (32), he muses at one point, "She'd have accomplishments. Everyone would see" (32). Indeed, everyone does see Kathleen grow up and into the restrictive roles James prescribes for her. What everyone, including Kathleen, does not see, but what I wish to point out, are the insidious practices which force individuals into pre-arranged, naturalized categories that work to stabilize and reify the binaries upon which normative categories of gender and sexuality are built, categories which begin with the *sex/gender/desire* system (Butler 184).

According to Teresa de Lauretis, society has long laboured under the notion that sex and gender are interchangeable categories; or, more simply, it is usually assumed that gender *is the same as* and *functions in the same way as* medical and scientific, or biological and natural, notions of sexual difference. To find examples of such assumptions at work in society, one need look no further than the forms we have to fill out in order to become members of clubs, or to apply for loans or credit cards, or to receive a driver's licence or replace a birth certificate. Beneath the bolded, blocked category of 'GENDER' there are two and only two

boxes which an applicant is expected to choose from, male or female. Check your genitals, check the correct box, and thereby declare to society as a whole that your sex is your gender. Quick, painless, and simple — right?

Not quite. Although de Lauretis agrees that “a child does have sex from “nature” (5), she quite rightly points out that

it isn't until it becomes (i.e., until it is signified as) a boy or a girl that it acquires a gender. What the popular wisdom knows, then, is that gender is not sex, a state of nature, but the representation of each individual in terms of a particular social relation which pre-exists the individual and is predicated on the *conceptual* and rigid (structural) opposition of two biological sexes. (5)

If you'll recall, it is through (linguistic) opposition and exclusion that foundational categories of identity—such as ‘male’ and ‘female’—are established. Thus, writes de Lauretis, “The cultural conceptions of male and female as two complementary yet mutually exclusive categories into which all human beings are placed constitute within each culture a gender system, a symbolic system or systems of meanings, that correlates sex to cultural contents according to social values and hierarchies” (5). Consequently, when James unilaterally decides that his daughter is “going to grow up a lady” (32), he is invoking a gender system that automatically, simultaneously and insidiously situates Kathleen as his subordinate within a naturalized gender hierarchy and assigns her meaning/identity—and *regulates* that meaning/identity—by virtue of her placement within this hierarchy.

The term ‘regulate’ becomes extremely important when looking at the aforementioned concepts of sex and gender because, as Judith Butler points out, concepts of sex and gender

are "produced precisely through the regulatory practices that generate coherent identities through the matrix of coherent gender norms" (24). What this means, Butler further explains, is that normative concepts of gender

require...and institute...the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between "feminine" and "masculine," where these are understood as expressive attributes of "male" and "female." The cultural matrix through which identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of 'identities' cannot 'exist'—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which practices of desire do not follow from either sex or gender. 'Follow' in this context is a political relation of entailment instituted by the cultural laws that establish and regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality. Indeed, precisely because certain kinds of 'gender identities' fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain. (24)

In other words, the categories of 'male' and 'female' which arise from our biology give way to 'natural' expressions of a biological "truth" of sex" (Butler 23) that metastasize into 'masculine' and 'feminine' character attributes which, in turn, give way to 'natural', compulsory expressions of desire—expressions that arise out of the 'natural' semiotic opposition between 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Gender identities that do not follow along this sex-gender-desire continuum, such as gay and lesbian identities, are immediately construed as unnatural and/or aberrant. That such identities persist and proliferate throughout society despite the threat of cultural unintelligibility and/or social ostracism leads Butler to contend that they "provide critical

opportunities to expose the lines and regulate the aims of that domain of intelligibility and, hence, to open up within the very terms of that matrix of intelligibility rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder" (24). Much the same could be said of jazz, specifically those varieties (such a free jazz) which "pose...problems for the unseasoned listener precisely because [they] refuse...to be coded or instituted according to traditional theories of representation" (Heble 52). When confronted by tonal, chordal, rhythmic, harmonic, or melodic structures that, in one way or another, deviate from (or directly challenge) traditional and/or acceptable conventions of music, many listeners are inclined to immediately classify jazz as unintelligible 'noise'. This does not, however, mean that jazz is unintelligible. Quite the contrary, it means that jazz communicates its meanings in ways that are not easily recognized by those who, in Heble's words, "expect...riddles to have answers, signs to have referents, and structures to have readily identifiable intent" (54-5). In other words, jazz sometimes aligns itself with the unintelligible more or less on purpose, for such unintelligibility allows it "to operate below the level of deliberate signification" (McClary quoted in Heble and Siddall 145), which in turn allows jazz to do its (often but not always) subversive work while still "remain[ing] largely invisible and apparently immutable" (145). In these terms, the unintelligibility of jazz, like that of gender, functions in such a way that the very terms of that unintelligibility can be opened up, questioned and resisted without risking immediate recognition by the dominant discourses of music that create the conditions for and regulate intelligibility in the first place.

At this point, having already examined the various attempts—arguably failed attempts—at resistance made by *Materia*, whose madness eventually situated her outside of rather than inside of the linguistic order where resistance is made possible, I now wish to explore the ways in which resistance is successfully enacted in *Fall On Your Knees* by Kathleen

Piper, who, as a proverbial daddy's girl, does not, at first, appear to be the resistant and/or rebellious sort. However, one cannot easily resist what one doesn't recognize, and, indeed, throughout most of her life, Kathleen does not recognize the interlocking and historically specific system(s)—cultural, gender, social, linguistic, and otherwise—which have constructed her entire identity. James ensures that she does not by making sure that she is "chaperoned every moment" (MacDonald 96) she spends away from him. Kathleen does, however, almost from birth, have access to and, later, an interesting understanding of music, both of which eventually allow her, through performativity, to subvert and challenge a number of normative definitions of gender and sexuality established and reinforced through patriarchal discourse.

"Kathleen sang before she spoke" (MacDonald 36), we are told very early on in the novel, which is an indication that Kathleen has access to certain realms which were unavailable to Materia due to James' constant and continual interference. We are also told of James' efforts to take what is nothing less than natural talent and hone it—like he has honed his daughter—into something which he can control. It is not until the last quarter of the novel, in a section entitled 'HEGIRA' — a term that refers to, among other things, the flight of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina, which signaled the beginning of a new era—that Kathleen experiences anything remotely close to personal freedom, or agency. For, until she voyages from Cape Breton to New York to work with a well-known vocal coach, Kathleen is indeed stuck within a normative paradigm, one that begins to collapse the moment she experiences life away from the her father.

Thus, Kathleen goes through an interesting transformation throughout the course of her HEGIRA, a transformation that begins with her discovery of a latent performative impulse which

has, for all intents and purposes, remained concealed by "positions that take identity categories as foundational and fixed" (Butler 187). "I am burning," she writes in her journal upon her arrival in New York. "I have to live, I have to sing, I want to transform myself into a thousand different characters and carry their life with me onto the stage" (MacDonald 456). Such an impulse begins to grow as Kathleen, much like Dorothy of *The Wizard of Oz*, starts to realize that she's not in Cape Breton any more. New York is unlike anything she's ever seen. In fact, she writes that New York "is not a city. [...] It's a whole amazing world. You can walk for an hour and never hear a word of English, you can eat in five different countries in five blocks, you can hear music everywhere" (464). However, there are within New York certain gender restrictions, some of which she is already aware because, as a woman, even a woman from Cape Breton, gender is always an issue. While wandering about the city, she discovers that she likes to stand by the loading docks and watch the "huge crates with Chinese writing swing through the air and pile up...alongside every other language known to man" (MacDonald 464). But, as a woman, she can't "linger too long [around the docks] 'cause of all the tough customers wondering what a nice girl like me is doing...ect [sic]. [...] I'm not allowed to say anything at all because they'd think I was asking for it. Men get to chat to strangers and learn all kinds of things. Women get to take a book out of the library" (464). But knowing the rules doesn't necessarily mean that one has to like or abide by them, and Kathleen, a performer in every sense of the term, certainly doesn't like feeling obliged to live or act according to anyone's rules but her own.

This aspect of Kathleen's personality is exhibited most explicitly in her reaction to the methods of instruction employed by her vocal coach, a man she refers to as 'Kaiser'. Rather than have his students continue to learn to sing via the methods favored by James, which included those laid out in the foundational and very traditional text, *Vaccai Practical Method of*

Italian Singing (MacDonald 36), Kaiser prefers to start from scratch, with scales, which he requires Kathleen repeat day in and day out, ad nauseam. At first, Kathleen believes that “[h]e wants to ruin [her] voice” (460). Eventually, however, her attitude begins a slow and subtle shift, which she lays out in diary entry dated only Wednesday:

I have had an epiphany. I now know what people mean when they say you have to suffer for your art. I always thought they meant rehearsing till you drop, performing when you’re not in the mood, starving until you get discovered and I always thought, “Great, I can’t wait to suffer” but that’s not it at all. The real suffering is this teacher trying to kill me with boredom by marching me up and down every scale known to man. Fine. I will beat him at his own game. I have begun repeating the entire morning’s lesson three times every day. (463)

Eventually, Kathleen begins to understand that her lessons are not meant as a subtle form of torture, but that the scales she continually rides up and down and back again are something of a tool, much like language is a tool. As though commenting directly on this link between music and language, Kathleen notes that the scales which order and align musical expression, and which had previously been the source of much of her irritation, are really

just a safe place where all the music can fold itself down and get stored, like seeds. [...] Like in the end, if you had to be stranded on a desert island, you wouldn’t take *Traviata* or *Boheme*, you’d take one scale. Because it has everything in it. (468)

Music theorist Chaz Bufe, in his manual entitled *An Understandable Guide to Music Theory: The Most Useful Aspects of Theory for Rock, Jazz & Blues Musicians*, supports Kathleen’s

observation on a technical level when he writes that "All scales and chords are simply patterns of intervals, and intervals are simply the distances between notes" (1). Just as all the possibilities of resignification rest within the linguistic order for Butler, for MacDonald and for her characters, "all the music"—and all possibilities for personal and musical redefinition— "[are] in this scale" (468), the traditional use of which can be manipulated and subverted through the use of improvisation, one of the mainstays of jazz, which plays an important and intriguing role in Kathleen's transformation, and in her subsequent—and quite performative—subversion of a number of normative categories of gender, race, and sexuality.

Kathleen first comes into contact with jazz around the same time that she first comes in contact with Rose Lacroix, the Kaiser's accompanist, who is, we are told, "an extremely good pianist" (MacDonald 125). However, Kathleen takes little to no notice of her, "for two reasons" (125):

First, because when you're training with a famous bastard in New York City, with one eye on the Met and the other on obscurity, you don't notice the quality of the piano accompaniment during your lesson unless it is incompetent. But this pianist is doubly inaudible because she is black and therefore outside any system that nurtures and advances a classical virtuosa. So Kathleen thinks of Rose not as a pianist but as an accompanist.
(125)

Macdonald's use of the term "system" in the above passage once again calls attention to the fact that there are a number of systems—including those of race, gender and, indeed, music, which is itself politically and culturally constituted—at play within the realm of *Fall On Your Knees*, and these systems function by and through exclusionary means. By virtue of her skin

colour, Rose is not only excluded as a musician from Kathleen's very limited frame of reference, but also excluded from the very systems that provide her with any and all intelligibility as a subject of the linguistic order. To Kathleen, Rose is the 'Other' who/which James has trained her to ignore, someone who is neither of her station nor her race and who is therefore viewed as insignificant; or, as an accompanist rather than a pianist.

When Kathleen finally does take notice of Rose, she describes her in a way that is somewhat reminiscent of James' initial exoticized description of Materia. Rose is, in Kathleen's words, "imposing" and "arrogant",

Especially with her eyes closed. She has a tall round forehead and a high straight nose that flares out at the base of the nostrils, and her lips sit against each other like dark pillows. Almost purple. [...] Her eyes go up slightly at the outside corners almost as if she were Oriental. She has high cheekbones and a dimple in her chin which is entirely wasted on her, dimples being accessories to girlish charm. She reminds me of the pictures of African women on P.T. Barnum posters except she hasn't got the rings around her neck. (MacDonald 472)

Quite obviously, Kathleen's first impressions of Rose are influenced by a learned racism that materializes in a number of stereotypical comments and assumptions evidenced in her own diary entries. "I thought," Kathleen writes at one point, "[that] coloured people were supposed to have rhythm" (MacDonald 469), and later, mistaking Rose's reticence for arrogance, Kathleen refers to her as "The Queen of Sheba" (477). In a particularly revealing passage which occurs after Rose, who has previously mentioned that she has many "responsibilities" (477) aside from her job with the Kaiser, turns down one of Kathleen's many invitations to meet outside of the

studio, Kathleen wonders if Rose is "so poor that she's ashamed to let me see where she lives. Maybe she's married. Maybe she has an illegitimate child" (479). Assumptions such as these, while certainly typical of Kathleen at this point in the chapter, are also somewhat surprising, considering that, as a young woman of Arabian heritage, Kathleen, too, felt the sting of racist comments and assumptions, having been subjected to school-yard taunts and ridicule, the likes of which included choice phrases such as: "Kathleen Piper belongs in The Coke Ovens!" and "We should've never let coloureds into this country in the first place" (97). But, as James has previously demonstrated, having once been a victim doesn't necessarily prohibit one from becoming a victimizer. Kathleen, oppressed and humiliated by the children at home in Cape Breton, slips quite easily into the role of oppressor once in New York, where her family heritage and history are as undetectable as her Arabian blood.

However, Kathleen does not stay within the boundaries of this role for long, especially not when it's Rose with whom she must contend. Unlike many others who have crossed Kathleen's past, Rose is not so quickly or easily pigeonholed by someone she regards as a "daughter of fortune" (MacDonald 125), although an admittedly talented one. In fact, Rose's intelligence, abilities, and experience in the realm of music far outweigh Kathleen's, whose assumptions are challenged first by Rose's talent as a musician, and then by Rose herself.

Having decided to "beat the Kaiser at his own game" (MacDonald 463) by fully dedicating herself to her lessons, Kathleen begins showing up early to the studio to practice and discovers, quite by accident, that "Rose can really play the piano" (470). In fact, Kathleen finds her playing "the most sublime, the most beautiful music" (470) which, at first, sounds somewhat similar to Chopin or Debussy. Yet, Kathleen writes,

There was too much space in between some notes and not enough

between others and time changes that slipped by before you could pinpoint them and sudden catches of achingly sweet melody that would just end like a bridge in mid air or turn into something else, and though there were many melodies, you could never hum the whole thing, nor could you figure out how they could all belong in the same piece and yet somehow they do, and you have no idea how or when it should end. (470)

What immediately becomes apparent in the above passage is that (1) the Rose playing this alternately “thoughtful” and “dreamy”—and quite complicated—music is not the same Rose who at other times plays like an “automaton” (469) and sticks to the notes as they appear on her sheet music; and (2) the music that this particular Rose creates bears a remarkable resemblance to certain types of jazz, specifically those which employ techniques of syncopation and improvisation, the former of which “affects the rhythm of a musical piece by moving the strong beat off the even counts of ‘time’” (Kubitschek 141), the latter of which allows musicians to “use a set melody or recognized tune but vary it” in innumerable ways and forms (141).

Although it may at first appear so, Kubitschek is *not* implying that jazz is entirely unstructured or extemporaneous. Rather, she is pointing out that, by employing methods of improvisation, jazz, its musicians in general and Rose in particular, “makes...change, originality and unpredictability *within a recognized structure* into central parts of musical processes. For this reason, it provides an apt metaphor for social change” (141 italics mine). That change occurs within a recognized structure is of paramount importance and interest because it connects music to language, which is also a ‘recognized structure’ in which change—social, political, and otherwise—can occur.

Although she doesn't yet recognize that the music she is playing is jazz, as she is loath to consciously associate herself with what she considers "Darktown music" (409), or that jazz, as music—which is itself a system of signs—functions like language, Rose does implicitly understand the fundamentals of improvisation and the danger inherent in putting her improvised compositions onto paper, choosing not to write her music down because doing so would, in her words, "kill the bird" (MacDonald 483). Moreover, she understands that what Kathleen learns from the Kaiser, who is, according to Rose, "a brilliant technician" (482), is not as important as that which she *unlearns*. For, as Judith Butler points out, neither the grammar nor style(s) of language—nor, I would add, of music—"are politically neutral. Learning the rules that govern intelligible speech is an inculcation into normalized language, where the price of not conforming is the loss of intelligibility itself" (xviii). What this means is that in order really to begin to find her voice as a performer, Kathleen, both with Rose's help and on her own, must come to recognize and (possibly) discard a number of the insidious rules which she has, up to this point, been living by and for, the sort of rules that establish, enforce, and regulate normative categories of gender and create a world in which the practice of heterosexuality is not just the desired norm, but the *required* norm. It is worth adding that these are the same rules which construct jazz, an improvisational music which subverts a variety of musical norms even as it works within them, as unintelligible noise, the same rules that both jazz and gender performatives work to bring to the surface where they may become recognizable and thus lose their sustaining power.

At nineteen years of age, finally on her own and able to experience life away from and out from under her father, Kathleen begins to take notice of her own body and begins to detect an awakening desire for physical contact, a desire from which she had previously been prohibited by James. In her diary, she admits,

I look at myself naked. Yes, this is my confession. In the full-length mirror in the armoire in my room. I look at myself just to remind myself that I'm there. No, I look because I like to look and that's how I know that it's wrong. But how could it be? I feel an ache. I want someone to see me and touch me before I'm old. Before it wrinkles and fades and falls, I can't believe that will ever happen to me. (MacDonald 459)

That Kathleen considers her desire(s) to know, understand and experience her own body, both physically and sexually, to be somehow "wrong" indicates that "[t]he power of language to work on bodies is...the cause of sexual oppression" (Butler 148). That language rather than nature creates bodies much the same way as it creates and regulates normative identity categories is not surprising, considering what we know of the sex/gender/desire system. What is surprising, however, is that our conceptions of our bodies and the desire(s) that are said to follow from them are not 'real,' just as gender is not 'real.' This is not to say that the body does not exist as a material thing, concrete and tangible. Rather, it means that there is a marked difference between the material body as we traditionally view it—the body as flesh, blood and bone—and 'the body' as a material manifestation of the concept of 'sex'. In Butler's words, "the body is not a 'being,' but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality" (177). It is upon this surface that normative and/or compulsory categories of gender and sexuality are inscribed and enacted.

Exactly *how* normative concepts of gender and sexuality are enacted is by and through the practice of heterosexuality, which is, in the realm of the sex/gender/desire system, compulsory. As previously established, the sex/gender/ desire system stipulates that sex

(male/female) produces gender (masculine/feminine). Gender, in turn, invokes desire for the opposite sex, the only 'natural' expression of which is achieved through engagement in heterosexual sex. Clearly, more than something one should *want* to do, heterosexual sex is something one *should* do, a requirement of sorts, which is exactly how Kathleen views her sexual relationship with David, a young soldier whom she meets in the city. When she sleeps with David, Kathleen does so not because she loves or even desires him, but because her virginity is something that needs to be "taken care of" (MacDonald 475). The entire episode, when over, leaves Kathleen somewhat confused and wondering exactly what the big deal is:

Well, I liked the kissing part and the next part. And I didn't mind the rest too much but he seemed more—well, he went to the moon and I stayed here on earth. And he looked totally overcome like a sweet stupid puppy and said, "I love you." I felt like we'd just been to two different moving pictures and didn't know it. (475)

Kathleen's confusion becomes much more pointed when she begins to question her feelings about David. She writes,

I think I'm in love with David. Or at least, when we're alone together I feel like I'm in love with him. But then I don't think about him again until I see him so can that be love? I realized something funny yesterday, I realized I haven't even told him I'm a singer. I wonder what he thinks I do all day? (475)

What Kathleen reveals in this particular passage is that, although she knows how she is *expected* to feel, she can't quite reconcile these expectations with what she truly does feel, which is close to nothing at all. When David leaves for France, Kathleen doesn't cry, although

David does. Out of guilt, she tells him that she loves him, but it is clear that she doesn't. She does, by this time, feel something for David, but it is neither love nor desire; a relationship that is compelled by the expectations, rules and regulations of the dominant discourse does not tend to inspire such emotions. It does, however, inspire in those caught between learned definitions of 'right' and 'wrong' or 'normal' and 'abnormal' the desire to act out—or perform—in ways that are socially acceptable, if only to perpetuate the appearance of 'normal' behavior for both self and others. The problem inherent in this sort of performance is, however, that the appearance of normalcy remains just that, an appearance.

Running parallel to her involvement with David is Kathleen's growing involvement with jazz, which she 'discovers' while exploring Harlem, the locale of the now famous Harlem Renaissance, a bustling artistic movement that saw African Americans making huge breakthroughs in the realms of art, literature, music, theatre, and dance. Like the loading docks she likes to visit, Harlem is a space that is normally prohibited to someone of Kathleen's gender and race, not because the area is particularly dangerous, as someone like James might claim, but because Kathleen, white, the very embodiment of 'femininity', and a product of the dominant discourse, is placed in the subordinate position of 'Other' immediately upon entering Harlem's city limits. In her diary she writes that she has noticed

that coloured people and foreigners in general are totally different here. In New York, it's not like they're in someone else's city, at least not in their own neighbourhoods. The neighbourhoods are whole cities themselves. At home when I passed by the Pier or Fourteen Yard I always felt sorry and thought how lucky I was not to be born into that, but here when I went into Haarlem I felt weird for being white. [...]

I felt conspicuous. But I never fit in down home either, so what's the difference? (465-466)

This is one of Kathleen's defining moments, for it is here, in Harlem, that she begins to understand and, to an extent, confront, her own 'Otherness,' which persists no matter where she happens to be. This is, I would argue, the beginning of her real lessons, in which she slowly begins to question, then dismantle, and finally rearticulate through performativity the constructed nature of her own gender identity. Butler maintains, and I agree, that the ability to question is one of the most important facets of the process of resignification, for it is only

[w]hen [the categories which constitute the experience of the body in question] come into question, [that] the *reality* of gender is also put into crisis: it becomes unclear how to distinguish the real from the unreal.

And this is the occasion in which we come to understand that what we take to be "real," what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality. (xxiii)

Of course, jazz, too, plays a fairly large role in this process of resignification, for jazz, as an improvised form of music and as a language, provides a space in which it becomes possible for both Kathleen and Rose to subvert through performative acts of gender the normative binaries of male/female (through drag), masculine/feminine, and heterosexual/homosexual, white/other-than-white, and upper/lower class.

The moment she steps into her first jazz club, Kathleen begins to view herself and those around her quite differently. Jazz, she writes, makes her feel "like [she's] been living in a graveyard till now. Reading dead books, listening to dead music, singing dead songs about dying" (MacDonald 473). Harlem becomes "an enchanted city where you hear with different

ears and see with different eyes," (473), so different that Kathleen actually "fail[s] to see why colour should cause such a commotion" when she dances with "a coloured man named Nico" (473). Even her views of Rose—whose ability to make Kathleen "feel as though [she's] hearing music for the first time" (483) continually startles her—begin to change as she comes to learn more about her. Rather than an aloof, insignificant accompanist, Rose becomes "a genius" whose knowledge of, insight into, and advice about music Kathleen seeks out and follows more closely than that which is provided by the Kaiser. As a result, something akin to a friendship slowly develops between the two, until all at once Kathleen realizes that being with Rose makes her feel "like I did sometimes when I was with David" (494), an admittance of sexual attraction. Uncertain of what to make of such feelings—which Kathleen is careful never to name—she vows "to be *normal*" (494) with Rose and keep her desires, which she believes will put an immediate end to their somewhat fragile friendship, a closely guarded secret. However, she soon discovers that Rose has quite a few secrets of her own, secrets which require that we return to the notion of improvisation as means of provoking change from within the systems of identity formation.

What we know of Rose and Kathleen up to this point in the text, when their friendship is evolving into certain attraction and possible love, is only what the linguistic system will permit us as readers and Kathleen and Rose as subjects to know. We know, for example, that both are musicians, and we know that both have struggled under the weight of the rules which determine their intelligibility. Kathleen, in her relationship with David and her treatment of Rose, struggles to act "normal" and live up to the expectations of her gender, while Rose, fatherless and half-white, though her dark skin tone does not betray this fact, has been raised by her white mother "to be an example to The Race" (MacDonald 125), which means acting white and feminine and

never veering off to explore the other half of her heritage. We know that both have, for all intents and purposes, acted these roles to perfection, and yet neither feels completely comfortable doing so. But the point that I wish to make here is that they are, in fact, *acting*. Kathleen and Rose each participates in her own signification by repeating "rules that condition and restrict culturally intelligible practices of identity" (Butler 184).

That either of these women is actually able to participate in the construction of her own identity establishes Judith Butler's argument that there need not be "an identity in place...in order for political interests to be elaborated and, subsequently, political action to be taken" (181). Neither must there be "a 'doer behind the deed' [because] *the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed*" (181), meaning that the 'doer' and the 'deed' work through each other to reify naturalized notions of identity production. Once these naturalized notions are laid bare, however, it becomes possible to conceive of resistance to the dominant discourse(s), which is accomplished through performance, which is in turn made possible by improvisation. In the following pages, I will demonstrate that both of these concepts act as a means by which to disrupt foundational categories of gender and sexuality, with the former providing the means to the latter's end, which really isn't an end at all but an on-going process of resignification.

According to Ajay Heble, the link between improvisation and "processes of identity formation and struggles for self-definition has less to do with a creative actualizing of the self as a stable origin of meaning than it does with unsettling the very logic of identity" (95). Indeed, improvisation, with its focus on altering and manipulating—but never (in most forms of jazz) completely discarding or moving outside of—established melodies, "teaches us by example that identity is a dialogic construction...rather than something deep within us...[and] that the self is always a subject-in-process" (96). Heble insists "that improvisation is a powerful ally in

struggles for self-expression, self-determination, and self-representation" (93), for "while improvisation is about self-definition, about the creative powers of self-expression, it can also...be about social mobility, about finding innovative ways to trouble the assumptions (and the expectations of fixity) fostered by institutionalized systems of representation" (93-94). In short, improvisation is a tool that allows one not only to invent new melodies within the framework of the old standards, but also to invent new identities within the framework of the so-called foundational.

After discovering jazz and its identity-altering possibilities, Kathleen and Rose become able to trouble the assumptions they hold about one another, although often by accident rather than design. Entering Rose's neighborhood during daylight hours, for example, leaves Kathleen feeling like "the odd one out" (MacDonald 506). Here, away from the protective confines of linguistically constructed binaries, "everyone stares at [her]...till [she feels] like something out of P.T. Barnum, 'See the white slave princess, raised by wolves in darkest Canada!'" (506). Kathleen's reference to P.T. Barnum recalls her previous comments about Rose, who once reminded Kathleen "of the pictures of African women on P.T. Barnum posters except she hasn't got the rings around her neck" (472). What is occurring here, and what will continue to occur throughout the remainder of the HEGIRA chapter, is a subversion of the roles traditionally assigned individuals within the linguistic order. Kathleen becomes the 'Other' in Rose's neighborhood, just as Rose is the 'Other' anywhere outside of *her* neighborhood. Note, too, the use of repetition in this particular instance. Kathleen's repetition of a previous thought, which, at the time, functioned in the tradition of racial subordination, now draws our attention to its conventional nature, and actually provokes amusement at the absurdity of Kathleen's copy of her own thought, and at the original, which, in the end, loses its derisive power and becomes

benign and laughable.

The power of repetition, parody, and other tools of signification such as pastiche and performance to reveal the fictive nature of a number of concepts that have been naturalized into our collective psyches is something which is shared with jazz, which I contend exemplifies Butler's theory of gender as performative, for jazz, both the music and those who perform it, is always "working within yet subverting mainstream culture through irony and parody" (Page quoting Monson 16). Page further contends that "the jazz impulse...engages basic...concerns including the difficulty of defining, or even experiencing, the self; the fragmentation of public discourse; and the problematic meaning of tradition" (16). Hence, jazz operates as a means of "undermining and reconfiguring" (16) any notions of fixed, stable foundations of gender, race and class "so as to reveal the instability of the assumptions that give each of those positions its positionality" (16).

Kathleen, stuck within a normative paradigm that she herself helps to reinforce through her repetitious actions, begins the slow process of "undermining and re-configuring" these norms through the use of parodic repetition when she enters Rose's neighborhood, as witnessed above. Rose, too, subverts the normative definitions of race and gender which have, to this point, kept her bound within their foundational frameworks by altering the very bodily surfaces which are themselves enacted as normative. The body, in Butler's estimation, is nothing more than a politically regulated surface upon which foundational categories of gender and sexuality are inscribed and enacted. As such, it becomes possible first to view gender as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler 43-44), and then to subvert the appearance of the natural by acting out gender in a

parodic fashion, through drag.

Drag, or cross-dressing, is, of course, what allows Rose to experience, or perform, alternative aspects of herself which have for some time remained buried beneath the weight of a number of racial, social, and sexual expectations. It is also what allows her unchallenged entrance into one of Harlem's most renowned jazz clubs, called Mecca (a name which, incidentally, harkens back to the term 'HEGIRA' and its many meanings). As well, drag, according to Judith Butler, is a means by which to disrupt "the inner truth of gender", which "is a fabrication...a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies" (174). Moreover, writes Butler, "drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (174) by "play[ing] upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed" (175). More simply put, drag is a parodic and performative stylization of the body that calls into question and works to denaturalize popular and socially acceptable notions of gender as a fixed category of male and female, masculine and feminine.

What we may neglect to recognize, however, is that Rose has been 'performing' a particularly dominant model of femininity her entire life, specifically when she is amongst 'respectable' (read: white) society outside of Harlem. This much was made clear, although perhaps implicitly so, when we were first introduced to Rose, whose attire—made up of "pink [dresses], with puffed sleeves, pleated skirts and hemlines one inch above the ankle" (MacDonald 470)—is the sort that someone might choose to wear if he or she were trying to merely *look* feminine. The way one appears is, of course, of paramount importance to those trying to function (and/or hide) within a society that (often) violently eschews any sign of non-conformity. Appearance, which is nothing more or less than a carefully constructed illusion, thus

becomes the driving force behind displays of both compliance with (epitomized by Rose's pink, puffy dresses) and resistance to (epitomized by instances of cross-dressing, or drag) the dominant discourse.

At this point, the saying 'the clothes make the man'—or woman, as the case may be—not only comes to mind, but also rings true, as drag, a stylization of the body, "creates the illusion of an organizing gender core" (Butler 173) while at the same time calling attention to the fact that such a core is an illusion. Marjorie Garber says much the same thing in her book *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, in which she examines the practice and impact of various modes of cross-dressing on and in various social, political, social, and sexual contexts throughout history. States Garber,

A male transvestite's [or, crossdresser's] cross-gender identity as a 'woman' or a female transvestite's identity as a 'man,' is not, or not always, what some psychologists call a 'core gender identity,' for the word 'core' here insists on a *ground*, an identifiable 'real' gender identity, rather than on the complex interplay, slippage, and parodic recontextualization of gender markers and gender categories that characterize transvestic fantasy. [...] [T]he transvestite keeps the fantasy in play...by deploying a rhetoric of *clothing, naming, and performance or acting out*. (Garber 134)

Once the fantasy is in play, it becomes possible to fully subvert, resignify, and reveal the normative as nothing other than a set of fictions that have been naturalized (through the process of repetitive signification) into our collective psyches.

When Kathleen first suggests that Rose put on her father's suit—consisting of "Black and tan pinstripe trousers", "[b]lack waistcoat and tails", "[t]an cravat with black polka-dots" and

"a [s]tarched white suit with diamond studs" (MacDonald 514), all of which amounts to her entire legacy—and accompanies her to Mecca, Rose is not entirely shocked by the suggestion, "which is how [Kathleen] know[s] that in her heart of hearts it had occurred to her before" (MacDonald 514). When Rose finally puts on the suit, she is pleased to discover her transformation into "a beautiful young man with the fine-cut face between hat and cravat" (515). Dressed in a man's clothing, Rose is able to perform as Kathleen's escort, drawing little attention to her presence in the club. And Kathleen, inspired by Rose's transformation and the eroticism embedded in such performative behavior, becomes much more open and uninhibited, first dancing with various men in the hopes of making Rose jealous, and then kissing Rose, not in a chaste or coy manner, but "on the lips" in full view of the entire club. Rose responds in kind, and an erotic relationship, one that is as improvised as the music Kathleen once caught Rose playing in the Kaiser's studio, ensues.

To declare that cross-dressing holds erotic potential is neither new nor in any way earth-shattering. Quite the contrary, really, for if foundational and/or normative conceptions of gender "presuppose[s]...not only a causal relation among sex, gender, and desire, but suggests as well that desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire" (Butler 157), then "the *play* of masculine and feminine...can constitute a highly complex and strutted production of desire" (157 italics mine). As Butler explains it, once "the very notion of an original or natural identity is put into question...that question as it is embodied in these identities... becomes one source of their erotic significance" (157).

Clearly, one way to put foundational identities into question is to parody them, as Rose parodies the notion of an original and/or abiding gender identity through the use of drag. Another way to accomplish this is through pastiche, which is explained by Fredric Jameson as

being quite similar to parody, in that both involve

the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost it [sic] humor. (quoted in Butler 176)

In *Fall On Your Knees*, pastiche as tool of resignification is exemplified by, in, and through Rose's and Kathleen's sexual relationship, which the two embark upon and treat with the utmost seriousness. However, Butler points out that "The loss of the sense of 'the normal'..can be its own occasion for laughter, especially when 'the normal,' 'the original' is revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no one *can* embody. In this sense, laughter emerges in the realization that all along the original was derived" (176). This is the same sort of laughter—much more figurative than literal—that occurs during a jazz performance, when the musician, caught within an improvisational moment, brings the melody back to its origins only to strike a dissonant note or chord, thus revealing how flawed and unstable the 'original' melody actually is. By the end of the piece, the listening audience will (or at least should) recognize, that the the 'original' melody is not what is important to the performance. The *performance itself* is what is important, as the performance is what provides the opportunity for the process, of which improvisation remains a key element.

The improvisational elements of sexuality and sex become increasingly evident as Rose and Kathleen continue to explore their relationship and each other. There are numerous times during their love-making when sex and musical improvisation intermingle, so that music

becomes both a catalyst for and an impetus behind the pastiche embodied by, in and through lesbian sexuality. Not only does each character perform her alternative gender identity only after "a night of jazz and jive" (MacDonald 528), but each remains somewhat aware (at least implicitly aware) that they are, in some ways, subverting (and parodying) the 'normal' by their improvisational actions, specifically those which are blatantly sexual in nature. Kathleen, for example, shocks Rose, "who is as serious about sex as she is about music," by "sing[ing] a line of *Traviata* between her thighs" (MacDonald 531). She also admits to her diary that, "When she's inside me I sometimes think of her fingers on the piano" (531). In both of these instances, there occurs a moment when the reader might pause long enough to recognize these passages work on two levels, the first quite obviously erotic, and the second, less obviously, as pastiche in the way that Butler conceives of it; that is, as occasioning (figurative) laughter at the realization that *there is no original, no normal* to begin with. What there is, however, is performativity and improvisation, consisting in this case of the "replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames [which] brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. [...] The parodic repetition of 'the original'...reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the natural and the original" (Butler 41).

What Rose's and Kathleen's relationship comes to represent, then, is nothing stable or reliable, only a sustained challenge to a number of roles, never settling on a single one, and never abiding by the rules and procedures which have long guided and regulated gender and sexuality, although it is clear that performance—both musical and gender oriented—always takes place within the established linguistic order, for to step outside is to risk unintelligibility and/or extinction. Yet this is, I contend, the point of Rose and Kathleen's subversive sexual relationship, one which automatically disturbs the binaries of white/other-than-white,

heterosexual/homosexual, and so on. To settle firmly into any one role would defeat the purpose of both performativity and improvisation by establishing yet another set of binaries. But to continue to play the spaces in between the binaries (or the notes) is to continually and parodically trouble and (hopefully) denaturalize the very foundations upon which any and all binaries rest, particularly those which have to do with the body, gender, sexuality, and desire.

Thus, gender performativity calls attention to the fact that

there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there [is] no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity [is] revealed as a regulatory fiction. That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality (180).

But even if this is so, and I believe wholeheartedly that it is, there remain certain insurmountable problems embedded within the theory of gender performativity, problems which Judith Butler herself locates and acknowledges, and warns against.

"[A]s a strategy of survival within compulsory systems," Butler notes, "gender is part of what 'humanizes' individuals within contemporary culture; [as such] we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right" (178). What this means is that subversive practices of gender, those which go against social and political norms, are not without certain repercussions and/or

consequences that take the form of socially (and patriarchally) instituted and excusable (if not allowable) punishments. These punishments, more often than not, tend to be physically (in terms of various forms of abuse inflicted upon the body) or psychologically (in terms of various forms of mental abuse and/or cruelty, ranging from name-calling to isolation and alienation) violent in nature. So, then, while Butler's theory of performativity provides the subject with a strategy of subversion, "it [is] difficult to bring this violence into view precisely because gender [is] so taken for granted at the same time that it is violently policed" (Butler xix). In other words, gender and sexual norms have been so naturalized into the social psyche that most are blind to the fact that such norms are constructs that continue to be maintained and monitored by the institutions (social, political, industrial, medical, legal, and so forth) that created them in the first place. Furthermore,

because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction 'compels' our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (Butler 178)

In *Fall On Your Knees*, we have seen the various ways that normative and/or compulsory categories of gender and sexuality are challenged and, sometimes, subverted through gender performativity, which has itself been aligned with jazz improvisation, as both take place inside of recognized structures. The ease with which two of the novel's main characters,

Kathleen Piper and Rose Lacroix, resignify their gender roles is, however, somewhat deceptive, as neither their relationship nor their lives end on a high note. Kathleen specifically must suffer the consequences inherent in her deviation from established and regulated norms, which are always insidiously present despite the illusion of absence created by the successful performance of alternative identities.

After receiving an anonymous letter informing him that his daughter has become prey to "miscegenation," a term that refers to extramarital relations between persons of different races but is characterized by the letter writer as "a modern evil" (MacDonald 235) singlehandedly responsible for "weakening the fabric of our nation" (235), James becomes incensed. The letter, which further claims that Kathleen, "Through cunning seduction and flattery...has been ensnared in a net of godless music and immortality" (235), prompts James to fear for his daughter's morality and safety, and so he immediately heads for New York.

When he arrives, he finds Kathleen in bed with Rose, which is a sight that James, locus of patriarchal and Symbolic power, finds incomprehensible, as it goes against every norm and construct which he helps to reinforce and sustain. His response to the scene before him is base and simple. James throws Rose from Kathleen and "descends upon the dazed girl, enveloping her as though she were in flames, slings her from the room, down the hall, out into the corridor where he flings her, a mummy-sack of bones" (549). Following this act of rage, James beats and rapes his own daughter, thus reinserting the Law of the Father and reclaiming Kathleen as property of the Symbolic realm through violent means. James' actions not only put an end to Kathleen's relationship with Rose, but also to her life, as Kathleen later dies while giving birth to James' children in a scene which reinforces the violent and brutal ramifications visited upon those who dare to contest socially accepted and sustained categories of race,

gender, and sexuality.

Despite the doom and gloom embodied in Kathleen's dramatic and violent end, there remains some hope for those who continue, despite the possible consequences, to challenge normative and/or compulsory definitions of gender in Rose. Rather than continue to work for the Kaiser and spend her life trying to fit into someone else's discourse(s), Rose leaves home, dons her suit and an alternative and performative gender identity, and becomes a little-known but well-respected *male* jazz pianist called "Doc Rose." Although her career never really soars, Rose continues to improvise her life and her gender identity throughout the remainder of the novel. That Rose felt the need to alter her gender identity in order to succeed, however minimally, says something about jazz as an institution, one which is very much a part of the very system which it claims to subvert. According to Danica L. Stein, jazz is, more often than not, perceived as an "exclusively male territory" (284), one in which female musicians "are... challenged to prove themselves in ways that male musicians are not" (284). Furthermore, writes Stein,

From the earliest days of jazz, women have been discouraged, at times even forbidden, from taking part in the creation of music. Women of the early twentieth century who were concerned about their reputations would not consider entering any establishment that featured jazz, much less playing the music themselves. [...] Women who did venture into the performing arena found the range of opportunities limited. Singing and playing the piano seemed to be appropriately "feminine" pursuits. (284-5)

But even when women did break into jazz, either by ignoring the obvious limitations imposed upon them or by choosing to stick to the more 'feminine' roles prescribed by the establishment, they still had to contend with the pervasive "belief that women are simply incapable of speaking

the 'male' language of jazz, that they lack the necessary experience to create the sounds" (285). Simply stated, no matter how good they happened to be, women were not accepted as jazz musicians. They were—and often still are—expected to "confine themselves to domestic pursuits and avoid any arena traditionally dominated by men" (290). When and if women "cross[ed] the line of acceptability they [left] themselves open to negative evaluation...[which was] often based less on...actual ability and more on nonmusical factors" (290).

Thus, it becomes possible to view Rose's decision to perform as a male musician not just as a political statement—although it is—but also as a necessity. For in order to actually become accepted as a musician, Rose had no option but to conceal the fact that she was a woman, which, in this context, was her greatest liability. But despite the contradictions embedded in its practice, or maybe even because of them, jazz remains the impetus behind Rose's actions. Furthermore, that Rose is, indeed, able to succeed in performing an alternate gender within the context of this male-dominated sphere speaks to the many subversive possibilities of jazz, as a music and as a political expression. Rose's actions at the end of the novel further illustrate the fact that all genders, all sexualities, and all practices of each, subversive or otherwise, are constructs which, once exposed as such, lose at least a little bit of their sustaining power and become, to a degree, less threatening than they once were.

Chapter Two

The Talented Mr. Ripley: From the Outside In

"A number of scientific men who have been working on experiments in musico-therapy with the insane, declare that while regular rhythms and simple tones produce a quieting effect on the brain of even a violent patient, the effect of jazz on the normal brain produces and atrophied condition on the brain cells of conception, until very frequently those under the demoralizing influence of the persistent use of syncopation, combined with inharmonic partial tones, are actually incapable of distinguishing between good and evil, right and wrong."

— Anne Shaw Faulkner,

"Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?"

Like *Fall On Your Knees*, Anthony Minghella's film *The Talented Mr. Ripley* exposes and examines the relationship between jazz and gender performativity, both of which acted as the means by and through which to subvert normative categories of gender, race, and sexuality in the previous chapter. In *Ripley*, however, jazz isn't used so much as a means of subversion as it is an entrance into the same categories that were challenged within the context of *Fall On Your Knees*, thus allowing us the opportunity to address in much greater detail the role jazz plays in upholding the social, political, and cultural norms upon which our society runs and which jazz, as both a music and a means of political resistance, often claims to undermine. *Ripley*, then, much more than *Fall On Your Knees*, reveals some of the more problematic aspects of jazz, which, as an overwhelmingly masculine domain, works to sustain compulsory categories of gender and sexuality. At the same time, *Ripley* makes clear the potential for change embodied

by both the music and the performative impulse enacted by the film's title character, Tom Ripley, who becomes, in Minghella's hands, a character as complex and contradictory as the music which narrates the film he inhabits.

Interestingly, when Minghella began writing the screenplay for *Ripley*, he decided to make two very important alterations to Patricia Highsmith's novel of the same name, on which the film is based. The first of these alterations involved changing playboy and man-of-the-moment Dickie Greenleaf's hobby from painting to music, specifically jazz music. The reason for this change, Minghella explained in an interview with reporter Erik Floren, was that the film, as he envisioned it, was much more about what the audience *heard* than what they saw. In other words, in the film version of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Minghella thought that "sound would more pungently and dynamically evoke the...[late 1950's, the period in which the movie is set] in a film than the motif of painting that Highsmith uses in her book" (Floren). Jazz, then, as much as the conventional elements of story, plot, and focalization, becomes the key to *The Talented Mr. Ripley* as a film and to its namesake, Tom Ripley, as a character. It may even be possible to claim, as I will, that music *is* the film, as the former actually articulates and makes viable the latter rather than the other way around, as might typically be expected.

However, 'typical,' or its counterpart 'traditional,' are not terms easily attached to *Ripley*. At every turn, it seems as though Minghella goes out of his way to confound audience expectation, specifically in the way he has structured music as the engine that drives the movie, so that music, rather than the traditional visual elements, is "[a]t the heart of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*" (Floren). Minghella has been quoted more than once as purposely constructing his movie so that the viewing audience "could listen to [it] and understand it as well as watch it and understand it" (Bambury). For this reason, it is possible to view Minghella's intricately woven

jazz score as a brilliantly conceived narrative device, one that anticipates and predicts character actions and development, pushes along the plot, and provides a context for and often facilitates or provokes every thought, feeling and image that occurs over the two-and-a-half hour duration of the film. In addition, music functions as a backdrop for the film's setting, Europe of the 1950's, a time during which many American citizens living abroad found themselves caught between a sense of post-war anxiety and existential angst, states of being which jazz captures and expresses in a way that no other music possibly could because, as I will soon explain, jazz is about redefinition.

The second change Minghella made when making the leap from Highsmith's novel to screenplay and, finally, to screen, was to make Tom's homosexuality much more pronounced and identifiable than it was in the book. In Highsmith's rendition of *Mr. Ripley*, Tom's homosexuality is nothing more than a subtext, a character trait—for that is what it is treated as—that runs beneath the surface of Tom's strange and often psychopathic behavior and, at least implicitly, goes a long way towards explaining his murderous actions.¹ In the film, however, Minghella chose to bring Tom's homosexuality to the forefront while at the same time allowing his character to develop a number of complexities that stem from his desire to become

¹ This is, of course, an interesting issue, for two reasons. First, the link between psychopathy and homosexuality, first made in the 1930's and never fully discarded, becomes, in the context of all five Tom Ripley novels Highsmith produced over the years, a tenable—if underlying—theme, one that happened to coincide with the then current belief that gayness was the result of a variety of psychological disorders—including but not limited to insatiability, effeminacy, gender dysphoria, uncontrollable desires, compulsive behavior, deviancy, sexual or otherwise, predatory activities, and/or pedophilia (Kinsman 11-12). Indeed, everything that was known and accepted about homosexuality during much of the time Highsmith was writing about Tom Ripley was the result of a variety of studies conducted by forensic psychiatrists who, in all their scientific wisdom, deemed 'homosexuality' "a form of congenital inversion" (9). Second, the issue of homosexuality, which runs beneath the surface of most of Highsmith's work, was a very personal one for the author, herself a lesbian. In her novels, then, it is possible to read Highsmith's treatment of Tom as oxymoronically charming and dangerous, sexually alluring and deviant, as a covert attempt by the author to work out, perhaps even reveal, her contradictory private and public selves as well as (possible) internal conflicts regarding her own homosexuality. Whatever her intentions may have been, however, the Tom Ripley created and presented by Patricia Highsmith remains throughout the entire *Ripley* saga implicitly rather than explicitly gay as much as he remains explicitly rather than implicitly psychopathic, the link between the two ever-present and undeniable though always insinuated rather than stated directly.

something—and someone—he's not, namely a straight socialite with enough money to buy rather than beg for social acceptance. That such aspirations—to redefine and refashion one's identity in a style that is much more easily negotiable and socially acceptable—are connected to jazz is not surprising. As Ajay Heble has made clear in *Landing On the Wrong Note: Jazz, Dissonance, and Critical Practice*, jazz is, both by accident and design, inextricably entwined in the process of identity formation, as it "encourages us to query naturalized orders of knowledge production" (28) and aids in, even facilitates, the rearticulation of normative categories of gender and sexuality by and through the use of improvisation and performativity.

The need to perform and/or improvise identity, the need to resignify the self, becomes, in Minghella's hands, one of the main themes and issues at work within *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, and helps to further illuminate the writer/director's choice of jazz for the movie's soundtrack and score. Unlike most other forms of music, jazz is essentially about redefinition. "Jazz," explains Minghella, "with its mantra of freedom and improvisation, carries the burden of expression for the existential urges of Americans"—like Ripley and Dickie both—"leaving home to redefine themselves in Europe" (Minghella). Dickie, a devout jazz fan and the object of Ripley's many and varied desires, for example, embodies "the idea of living in a state of improvisation. So by just hearing Dickie and seeing him with the saxophone, you [are able to] establish a chunk of his character" (Watters). It is the perceived anti-establishment element of jazz that draws Dickie, a self-styled American dissident whose only real goals in life are to spend as much of his father's money as fast as he possibly can and to keep any and all forms of social responsibility at bay. He often betrays himself as much more conservative at mind and heart than he wishes to believe, not only buying into such Western systems of thought as classism, capitalism, and consumerism, but upholding them through his actions; it thus follows that Dickie fails miserably

as a jazz musician. His playing often comes across as strained, as artless, and as shallow as his character, which might imply that his success as an improviser is not as clear-cut as Minghella intended, an issue I will return to later in this chapter.

Ripley, however, succeeds as an improviser of both music and identity where Dickie fails. Like the music which dramatizes his performative impulse, the character of Ripley is, according to Minghella, "entirely unpredictable [and the embodiment of the] chaos of a Bird solo or the searing meditations of Coltrane" (Minghella), all this despite Ripley's intense dislike of jazz music (listening to Charlie Parker, Ripley utters a quite passionate "Yuch!" after recognizing Parker's unique style). Ripley, one must realize, desires to be as mainstream as Dickie desires to be unconventional because, unlike Dickie, he tends to exist *outside* of the social stratum—a gay man trying to achieve success, peace and happiness in a predominantly heterosexual world. Furthermore, Ripley is not wealthy, charming, or self-assured, all traits to which Dickie can lay claim; Tom, rather, is Other, different, abnormal, and well aware of it. He therefore spends the entire film—and his entire life—trying to resist, in a performative context, and escape his own difference and conform to the norm. This is why Ripley does not particularly *like* jazz, but has no problem *using* it. To Tom Ripley, jazz represents anti-establishment inclinations, and Ripley very much wants to be a part of the establishment. Thus, he performs an alternative identity that will permit him entrance into that establishment through Dickie.

Interestingly, the soundtrack which accompanies the film was designed to correspond with Ripley's performative nature. Addressing the creation of the film's score, a task shared by Minghella and composer Gabriel Yared, Minghella is quick to point out that the music was purposely designed to correspond with, perhaps even precipitate, Ripley's actions:

we agreed on a syncopated theme, Baroque in feel, which could be translated to music box voicing, its inherent sweetness tinged with something strange and disquieting..., and repeated. Ripley hears it at moments when he is most unhinged or excited, most child-like. [...] Such... musical games are central to the film's architecture, and they are written into the screenplay as a kind of code... . (Minghella)

Minghella's use of the terms 'repetition' and 'code' are two obvious stand-outs in this particular comment, as they immediately link jazz to language (code) and the process of signification (achieved, in part, through repetition), both of which have been discussed at length in the previous chapter as necessary facets of identity formation and re-formation. The process of signification, of course, always takes place within established linguistic systems. As language, a system of signs, is often referred to as 'code,' and since music is itself a system of signs, it therefore follows that the music of which Minghella speaks is itself a code. It is this code that indicates and dramatizes the performative impulse, which finds Ripley engaging in parody and repetition of his upper-crust victim, Dickie Greenleaf, in order to linguistically, physically, and sexually refashion himself as Dickie.

The Talented Mr. Ripley begins in a most interesting and telling fashion, one which visually and musically outlines a number of the film's predominant themes. Before the viewer sees a single image, s/he hears a particularly haunting melody that will recur throughout the course of the film at crucial moments. The melody, entitled "Lullaby for Cain," was written by the director, Anthony Minghella, and composer Gabriel Yared and succeeds in setting the tone of the film right away. Like the characters of Ripley and Dickie, "Lullaby for Cain" does not conform to a single set pattern. It is, rather, a piece of music that perfectly establishes and

aurally conveys the benefits found in crossing established lines of musical cadence and coherence and redefining paradigms so as to become something altogether new while at the same time retaining certain recognizable qualities that at once recall and subvert the foundational. Quite like the character of Tom Ripley, who finds an entrance into performativity through jazz music but whose passion (and musical training) lies in classical music, "Lullaby for Cain" "employ[s] some of the articulations of jazz and some of the articulations of baroque music, but the score never really becomes either" (Watters). In a sense, the score and the performative impulse it dramatizes, by never really settling on a single, permanent musical or social groundwork, opens up a space in which a number of normative and/or foundational categories of musical expression, gender, and sexuality can be—and actually are—subverted throughout the course of the film, a point to which I will return later.

As "Cain" begins to swell, credits slowly appear upon the screen, while behind them the image of Tom Ripley emerges, played in the film by Matt Damon. Or at least *parts* of Ripley's image emerges, as his entire body is fragmented, his face split momentarily by ribbons of black that eventually fade into each other but are quite clear for a brief time. What this immediately indicates, especially when coupled with the slightly disturbing, somewhat discordant, and often dissonant music swelling in the background, is that the man whom we are watching as he prepares for some sort of engagement that requires a jacket and tie, is the fragmented nature of Ripley's character. We find out soon after this fragmented image disappears from the screen that Ripley is a man with many demons and many selves, none of which he is particularly comfortable with.

While accompanying a vocalist on piano, dressed in the same jacket we watched him iron only seconds earlier, a disembodied voice, presumably Ripley's, speaks over the music. "If

I could just go back," he states, notes of regret and resignation, and perhaps sadness, conveyed simultaneously by his voice, "if I could rub everything out, starting with myself, starting with borrowing a jacket..." The jacket, the same one Ripley is wearing, suddenly takes on new-found importance, as does the retrospective voice of a future Ripley, one who knows the perils into which he is about to thrust himself. This is the voice with 20/20 hindsight, able to recognize that life-altering events often start with the smallest indiscretion, often not even viewed as an indiscretion at the time. The jacket that Ripley wears is a Princeton University jacket, class of 1956. Although Ripley is wearing the jacket because he is filling in for a friend with a broken arm, it allows him to appear a part of a class (as in social class and University class) to which he does not really belong. Wearing the jacket becomes the catalyst behind one of Ripley's many attempts—successful attempts, I might add—to "rub everything out, starting with myself" by creating an *alternative* self, a self who is recognized and accepted by the likes of shipping magnate Mr. Greenleaf, who mistakes Ripley for a Princeton-educated, upper-class, and, by default, heterosexual man by virtue of his jacket, a potent symbol of all these things. As a symbol, or a sign, the jacket functions in an interesting way, one which Daniel T. O'Hara sees as conveying the appearance of material "endowments" (417). 'Endowments,' explains O'Hara, work as signifiers of class and

are what people possess or own: some means of economic and/or cultural production and reproduction, such as: general knowledge, technical expertise, physical labour-power or the machinery of capital formation, circulation, and distribution. Signs of privileged class position—the right clothing, a good house, a luxury car, and so on—are just that: signs of power, but not the power itself. (417)

However, the jacket, as a sign of power, does not have to be the power itself. The fact that it represents power, along with a life-time membership to an elite society, that of the wealthy, worldly, Princeton graduate, is "enough to promote...[the] strategic critical recognitions" (417) necessary for Ripley to pass by virtue of appearance.

And pass Ripley does, almost effortlessly, in fact, as the school-mate of Dickie's that Mr. Greenleaf mistakes him for in one of the film's key scenes. Immediately willing to trust Ripley on nothing more than a jacket and the accompanying claim that, indeed, Ripley was acquainted with Dickie Greenleaf back at Princeton (a claim that follows Greenleaf's assumption, based entirely upon a borrowed jacket, that Ripley is who he appears to be), Mr. Greenleaf makes Ripley an offer. His son, who is currently living abroad, is spending too much time honing his only talent, "spending his allowance." Mr. Greenleaf wants him brought home, and offers to pay Ripley \$1000 to travel to Italy and do the honors. Ripley, of course, accepts, and immediately begins learning what he can about Dickie's favorite musical pastime, jazz.

"To my ear jazz is just noise. Just an insolent noise," Mr. Greenleaf tells Ripley during one of their brief but constructive meetings. Ripley agrees, finding the conventional strains of Bach and Mozart more to his liking. Even so, Ripley attacks the task at hand with determination and vigor. He immerses himself in the music of Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Chet Baker, whose rendition of "My Funny Valentine" leaves Ripley wondering if "this is a man or a woman," an uncertainty which can at once be aligned with Ripley's own gender troubles and calls attention to certain issues apparent within jazz, including those which involve the blurring of gender and sexuality.

According to jazz critic and scholar Krin Gabbard, "Jazz is usually about...sexuality and spectacle" (1). Despite the critical urge of many jazz Formalist scholars to cast the music "as

an autonomous art form which can be pursued outside its historical and cultural moment" (1), Gabbard insists that it is impossible to separate jazz from "displays of race, sexuality and art" (1), themselves products of particular historical and cultural moments. For Gabbard, jazz "provides a unique opportunity for sex and gender display" (7). Furthermore, he states, "Part of what has made jazz so intriguing are the number of alternatives it has offered to conventional notions of masculinity and male sexuality" (7), two issues, we see as the movie progresses, that are central to Ripley as a character and to the movie in which he resides. Again, I would argue, this is why Ripley becomes so good at jazz, because, as Gabbard puts it, jazz "offer[s] appealingly unconventional paradigms of masculinity that [do] not necessarily involve the brute simplicity" (7) of other forms of male (musical) play. Through jazz, (male) musicians are able to express elegance, vulnerability, and romance [typically thought of as feminine features] alongside the more conventional desiderata for young men such as power, technical mastery, and cool strutting. With varying degrees of consciousness, most jazz artists cultivate these qualities in their performance demeanor even if only within purely musical gestures. And, of course, the articulation of maleness and sexuality takes different forms as the age, social class, and historical moments of the artists change. (7-8)

What Gabbard is saying in this citation is that jazz allows men to express both their masculinity and femininity through music and performance without suffering the ridicule, abasement or disapproval that such expressions would garner them in a different context. As interesting and applicable as Gabbard's theories may be, they are not without their problems, two of which I'd now like to examine.

Firstly, and perhaps most noticeably, Gabbard neglects to define exactly how he is using the term 'masculinity' (except to note that he is working with—or against—'conventional notions of masculinity'), which, as Michael A. Messner points out, must always be considered in the plural, for "at any given historical moment there are various and competing masculinities" (7). There does, however, exist a hegemonic model of masculinity that, according to Michael S. Kimmel, "continues to remain the standard against which other forms of manhood are measured and evaluated" (124). This hegemonic conception of masculinity, explains Kimmel, "defines white, middle class, early middle-aged, heterosexual men" (124-25) as the rule against which other men are measure[d] and, more often than not, found wanting. [...] The hegemonic definition of manhood is a man *in power*, a man *with power* and a man *of power*. We equate manhood with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control. The very definitions of manhood we have developed in our culture maintain the power that some men have over other men and that men have over women. (125)

If this is the model of masculinity that jazz, in Gabbard's estimation, is challenging, I find it peculiar—even troubling—that he neglects to mention that jazz, no matter how masculinity-conscious the music or its performers may be, remains an overwhelmingly masculine domain which tends to reify hegemonic conceptions of masculinity as much as it may (or may not) challenge them. For example, the same musicians who locate in jazz a space in which to explore their more 'sensitive' qualities—the 'elegance, vulnerability, and romance' Gabbard mentions the quotation I've provided—are the same ones who willingly exploit their positions of power and dominance within the jazz industry by ensuring that women don't (often) enter their clique or, if they do, remain subordinate to the all-important *jazzman*.

Secondly, and no less importantly, Judith Butler has revealed that biological categories of 'male' and 'female', from which masculine and feminine character/gender traits are said to follow, are fictitious and phantasmic. There are, according to Butler, no 'natural' expressions of gender, just as there is no real category of gender. There are only gender performances, or, more specifically, there are only gender *performatives*. This complicates Gabbard's theory that jazz allows for the expression of masculinity alongside femininity, as the categories he appears to support are not actually real. However, Gabbard's claims are not necessarily negated by his apparent support of phantasmic categories of gender, as one might assume. Although he invokes the false categories of 'masculine' and (by its very exclusion) 'feminine' in the above cited quotations, Gabbard never really claims that these categories are factual. Having previously stated that "jazz is about...sexuality and spectacle" (1), and having acknowledged that jazz is also about "sex and gender roll-playing" (7)—in the sense that gender is about role-playing—as much as it is about the music itself, Gabbard more or less implies that jazz, like gender, promotes performance, not just in terms of artistic display, but in terms of bodily display and transgression, as well. Thus Ripley finds in jazz the perfect tool by and through which to resignify himself, first as Tom Ripley, heterosexual upper-class Princeton graduate, jazz fan, and Friend-of-Dickie, then as Dickie himself.

When Ripley arrives in Montebello, Italy, the city where Dickie currently resides, he locates Dickie and his girlfriend, Marge, right away, but does not immediately approach them. Rather, he studies them, much like he studied and memorized the various nuances and idiosyncracies of jazz, although in this case he does so through a set of binoculars. While he stares at his prey, Italian phrase book in hand, itself an indication that Tom's willingness to slip into the performative extends to the language of the area, he makes an unusual comment: "This

is my face," he says first in English, and then again in Italian. Knowing that the face he is looking at is Dickie's, the implications of such a statement (a repeated statement, no less) are clear. Dickie's face—indeed, his entire identity, including "his way of life, his physical charm, his status" (Lemon)—will eventually become, through performativity, Ripley's.

As though on cue, Ripley begins insinuating himself into Dickie's life right away. First, Ripley pretends to bump into Dickie on the beach, introducing himself as someone with whom Dickie had attended college. Next, he shows up at Marge's and Dickie's home unannounced, garnering a lunch invitation. When asked by a slightly suspicious Dickie where his talent lies, Ripley follows one of the best-known rules of successful lying: hide the lie within the truth. His response to Dickie's question is chilling. Ripley's talent, he states, is in "Forging signatures, telling lies, impersonating practically anybody." His talent, in other words, is in the performance of identities alternative to his own. Ripley then slips easily and spookily into the identity of Dickie's father, whose voice, gestures, and expressions Ripley imitates perfectly. The next day, Ripley further wows Dickie—and gains his trust and friendship—by staging a bit of an accident. Carrying a satchel under his arm, Ripley lets it fall to the ground, spilling jazz records all over the place. Spotting the records, Dickie exclaims, "Hey! You like jazz." Ripley obvious reply: "Of course I do."

Of course he doesn't, but this does not stop Ripley from accompanying Dickie to a jazz club in Naples, where the two get up on stage and perform "Tu Vuo' Fa L'Americano," an upbeat jazz number which celebrates, ironically enough, all things American, including baseball and whiskey and soda. The song, performed boisterously and in alternating tempos, dramatizes an intense and playful scene of male-bonding (and homoeroticism, in that Dickie, caught in the moment, ends the number by kissing Tom on the cheek) while at the same time

letting us in on certain aspects of Dickie's character. While on stage, for example, Dickie holds a saxophone, which he plays at various intervals with an enthusiasm tempered only by the fact that he really isn't all that connected to his instrument. It is, like most things in his life, nothing more than decoration, a material object that matters only as a material object, something he is willing to forgo much later in the movie for the drums, as though discarding one instrument for another is something one does all the time. Further, Dickie's self-representation as a jazz aficionado provides insight into his fickleness, as it appears to me that his love of jazz, which sometimes verges on obsession, actually lacks the depth necessary to truly understand that jazz isn't necessarily a music to which he can so easily lay claim. Jazz is, as I pointed out in my introduction, a music with very deep African American roots and has been referred to as a 'music of protest'. Dickie, wealthy, white, and very much aware of his own power, has nothing to protest, save the moral restrictions imposed upon him by his father. That he latches onto jazz reveals a desire—a very self-serving and implicitly racist desire—to escape the pressures of his own life by entering into another culture via music, which he probably views as the antithesis of everything his father represents, including morality, inhibition, and a certain level of respectability. In this regard, Dickie is nothing more than a 'poser,' a man who loves jazz because it makes him feel a little less white, a little less moral, and a little less clean while at the same time allowing him to use and, at times, abuse each of these attributes—his race, his class, his wealth—when and if it suits his purpose. Despite this level of shallowness, which is, for all intents and purposes, masked by the celebratory atmosphere of the club, Ripley and Dickie become fast friends, with jazz acting as the context for their relationship, which is, at least to some extent, sexual in nature.

Before this scene, there aren't many overt indications that Tom's sexual orientation is

anything other than straight, except that which can be drawn by inference and through the obvious stereotypes (Tom's need to become someone he is not, the portrayal of Tom as uncomfortable with his own body, his constant uncertainty and need to fit in, so to speak, all imply that Tom is a man suffering from serious issues of self-loathing), things appear to change after Dickie kisses Tom on the cheek at the jazz club. While Dickie, a consummate heterosexual, probably didn't consciously mean to imply anything other than brotherly affection (I use the word 'probably' because there does remain a strong homosocial undercurrent to all of Dickie's actions where Tom is involved and I am never sure what motivates him in this regard), Tom's expression after the kiss—he beams happily at Dickie, his eyes conveying something vaguely recognizable as desire—indicates something other than brotherly affection on Tom's part. A couple of scenes later, in what I will henceforth refer to as the "My Funny Valentine" scene, Tom's burgeoning feelings for Dickie become much more evident, as does his sexual orientation. Not only is this scene important to ongoing developments in Tom's and Dickie's relationship, but it is also quite intricate to the complicated and subversive use of music, particularly jazz music, within the film.

Writing on the subject of music in films, film critic Claudia Gorbman, in her book *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*, suggests that the use of music in films presents a number of challenges to casual and serious viewers alike. First of all, states Gorbman, film music is heard and not seen, and

Hearing is less direct than visual perception; to see something is to instantaneously identify the light rays with the object that reflects them; in hearing, we do not as automatically identify a sound with its source. Moreover, hearing requires a greater duration of the sound

stimulus than vision requires of an image in order to be recognized.

Thus hearing is at once more selective and lazier than vision. Now, in watching a conventional film whose dialogues and visuals are telling a story, we devote our concentration to its successive events and the meanings that are constantly accruing to them. Most feature films relegate music to the viewer's sensory background, that area least susceptible to rigorous judgement and most susceptible to affective manipulation. (12)

Although I have no real argument with Gorbman's analysis of the effects of hearing vs. seeing in motion pictures, I do wish to draw attention to the fact that she quite rightly qualified her generalizations by claiming that not all but most films exile music to background, where it will work its magic unconsciously rather than demanding the viewer's conscious attention. *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, though, is not most films, and its director uses music in a most unusual but stimulating manner. Rather than shoving it aside, Minghella keeps music in the forefront of the film, allowing it to function, in his words, as "a character in its own right" (Minghella). As well, music is made an intricate part of the film's narrative, a point which Gorbman believes is quite integral to the success of most films, as "it is the narrative context, the interrelations between music and the rest of the film's system, that determines the effectiveness of film music" (12)

To speak of music as an integral part of a film narrative is to pose an interesting paradox, for, as Gorbman points out, "the rhetoric of filmic discourse (representational, 'naturalistic,' rhythmically irregular) [is] incommensurate with the rhetoric of musical discourse (nonrepresentational, 'lyrical,' rhythmically regular)" (14), especially since film music is "constantly engaged in an existential and aesthetic struggle with narrative representation" (14).

And yet it is clear, specifically in *Ripley*, that music, while indeed "possess[ing] its own internal logic..., always bears a relationship to the film in which it appears" (14) and participates. In much of the available scholarship focused upon the narrative role of music within filmic discourse, there appears to be a deliberate attempt to limit the narratological capacity of music to the concepts of parallelism and counterpoint, both of which Gorbman explains as describing music that either resembles or contradicts "the action or mood of what happens on the screen" (15). Not a fan of such simplistic devices, Minghella bemoans music that "is...used like a baseball bat to beat the audience, [explicitly compelling them to] 'Feel! Feel! Feel!' or 'Love! Love! Love!' or 'Be frightened! Be frightened!' (Watters). Such placating tactics, those which tend to "whack...[the viewer] around as if [he/she is] incapable of experiencing any emotion without having [his or her] head pounded" Minghella has labeled "the Mickey Mouse syndrome" (Watters). This occurs in scenes "where the character is happy so you have to have some happy music, or the character is sad so you have to quickly change to a minor key" (Watters). Minghella, however, chooses to use music, an incredibly "powerful" (Watters) force, quite differently and, as a result, much more successfully, noting that

It can glue together moments in a film that are full of cracks and fissures.

When you use music in a subversive way, you can do something very interesting. Like the use of Wagner in the battle scene of *Apocalypse Now*. Who would have imagined that you could use that music to such profound effect? [...] Music can be much more important than simply mimicking the emotions. And often you clarify the emotions counter-intuitively by pulling against them in some way. (Watters)

And this, I would argue, is how Minghella uses film music: subversively, to provoke a 'profound

effect' in the viewing—and listening—audience, by complicating a relationship that, at first glance or listen, appears quite straightforward.

Such complications can be noted in Minghella's blurring of the distinction(s) between diegetic and non-diegetic music. Originally conceived of by Russian Formalists as encompassing the "basic distinction between 'fable' (the narrated story, the represented, the diegesis) and the 'subject' (the textual treatment of the story, that is, its narrative representation)" (Gorbman 20), the term *diegesis* took on a new life at the same time that film studies came into fashion, specifically when applied in reference to the study of film narrative. Film critic Etienne Souriau, quoted in Gorbman, was one of the first to define 'diegesis' in reference to its application to film theory as including

all that belongs, "by inference," to the narrated story, to the world supposed or proposed by the film's fiction. Ex: (a) Two sequences projected consecutively can represent two scenes separated in the diegesis by a long interval (several hours or years of diegetic time). (b) Two adjoining studio sets can represent locations supposedly hundreds of feet apart in diegetic space. (c) Sometimes there are two actors (i.e., a child and an adult, or a star and a stuntman or double) to successively depict the same diegetic character. (21)

While the examples listed above belong to "the image track" (Gorbman 21) of the film, music is also used both diegetically and non-diegetically to much the same ends. For example, the use of non-diegetic "voiceover commentaries and verbally narrated flashbacks...punctuate many film narratives" (Gorbman 22) while sound effects emanating from the film-world "tend to remain diegetic" (22). Most of the time, film-makers stick quite rigidly to the diegetic/non-diegetic model

explained above. Minghella, however, plays with the diegetic/non-diegetic distinction throughout the entire first half of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, so as to subvert and destabilize the normative uses of film music, which in turn further support challenges made to normative identity categories that take place within the film.

This brings me back to "My Funny Valentine" as a means by and through which such challenges, which proliferate throughout the course of *Ripley* but are particularly evident in the first half of the film, are accomplished. When we first heard "My Funny Valentine" being played, it was quite early on in the movie, during the scenes in which Ripley is conducting his crash-course in jazz. The second time the song appears is during a montage of scenes in which we witness Ripley and Dickie in a number of male-bonding scenarios, some of which include Dickie jumping onto Ripley's back for a piggy-back ride down the streets of Montebello and Ripley and Dickie on a scooter, Ripley's arms wrapped snugly around Dickie's waist. While these scenes could be viewed as providing a glimpse of various forms of male play, they take on a homosocial (and vaguely homoerotic) tone when coupled with the accompanying music. It is easy to imagine that there is a little more going on than meets the eye when lines like "You make me smile with my heart" and "You're my favorite work of art" are crooned to music that is nothing less than candle-light romantic.

That the music, both instrumentally and lyrically, is a sort of "narrative intrusion" (Gorbman 22) upon the diegesis of the film is obvious, as there appears to be no source from which it is emanating save that of soundtrack. However, the montage of boys-at-play scenes fades out and the image of Ripley sitting at a piano and singing the very song that was, only seconds before, unheard by Ripley and Dickie as they went about their fun and frolic implies the blurring of the diegetic and non-diegetic distinction. Now, as we listen to and watch Ripley play

the piano while he sings Chet Baker's song in the style of Chet Baker, the music is unquestionably diegetic, as it stems from a source (Ripley) in the movie. And yet a question still remains. Was our earlier and quite logical assumption that "My Funny Valentine" was non-diegetic false? It does appear so when we realize where the music is emanating from. However, for that brief time, it was non-diegetic, for we, as viewers, could not have known that Ripley was the song's musician and vocalist until we actually saw him, and we didn't see him until the song was at least half over and the scene had jumped from one point in time to another completely different point in time. And yet, the song, once we do become aware of its origins, becomes a classic example of diegesis, a basic narrative device, in action. Spatially and temporally, "My Funny Valentine" acts as a bridge between a number of disconnected scenes, keeping them tied together by one overwhelming theme: desire. This is what film music, when used properly, is supposed to do. But it doesn't usually blur the lines so that they become almost indistinguishable. In *Ripley*, though, nothing is ever what it appears, a credo that applies to Dickie and Ripley's friendship as much as it applies to Minghella's use of music as a narrative device.

Following the scenes which are narrated by "My Funny Valentine," it eventually becomes clear that Ripley's relationship with Dickie has, indeed, taken on a new dimension. Watching the scene closely, it unfolds in such a way that it becomes impossible to miss the longing—the desire—in Ripley's voice or in his expression. Ripley, I believe, is not singing "My Funny Valentine" to an audience (he is, at this point, in a jazz club, Dickie at his side playing his sax), but to Dickie. The two are, after all, the only ones the camera focuses on, and the tone and delivery of the song itself have a certain love-lorn quality about them, the sort one might expect to witness (or hear) in teen-age infatuation. Thus, a certain note of homoeroticism is struck,

one that lingers beneath the surface until a scene arrives which finds Dickie and Ripley playing chess together. It is at this point that Ripley's somewhat ambiguous homosexuality becomes obvious and unarguable—and, I might add, an unmitigated source of trouble for Ripley.

Again, the scene in which Ripley reveals his homosexual inclinations, like the "My Funny Valentine" scene before it, is clearly homoerotic. It begins, as I have already mentioned, with Ripley and Dickie playing chess, while Dickie sits relaxing in a bath and Ripley, fully clothed, sits beside the tub. "My Funny Valentine," this time an instrumental rendition heavy on the sax, plays in the background. The camera, which focuses first on Dickie and Ripley as they talk and play their game, shifts its point of view so that we are watching the scene through Ripley's eyes, which more or less caress Dickie's body in a manner that is overtly sexual—Ripley notes his muscled chest and torso, and watches Dickie's lips move as he speaks. As Dickie makes a move on the chess board, Ripley makes a move on Dickie, so to speak. Dipping his hand into the bath water, Ripley tells Dickie that he's cold, and asks if he can get in. Ripley's expression, on which the camera focuses before turning to Dickie, is one of guarded desire. As he awaits Dickie's response, one thing is certain: even the slightest indication of a nod or blink in his favor would be enough to get Ripley into the water with his friend.

Dickie, however, does not reply in the affirmative. Rather, he searches Ripley as though trying to figure out if he's actually serious, and then offers an uncomfortable, "No." Ripley, now caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place, immediately attempts to save face. "I didn't mean with you in it," he says, but by now it is clear to us as viewer that he did, in fact, mean it the other way around. As Dickie gets out of the tub and walks out of the room, his image reflecting in a full-length mirror, Ripley becomes enraptured by the sight of a stripped and dripping Dickie. As though to regain the playful innocence of earlier times and break the

tension—a very sexual tension—between them, Dickie snaps a towel at Ripley on his way out. While such actions might allow Dickie a certain amount of relief, they only serve to further taunt Tom, whose desire is verging on unbearable.

At this point, a number of questions might occur to the viewer, who has been following the strange dips and turns of Tom and Dickie's relationship from the beginning and who is quite aware that there are a number of unknown factors involved in that relationship, whatever it may or may not actually represent. For example, I wonder how Tom and Dickie reached a stage in which their playful bonding activities became imbued with sexual tension, as real as it might be imagined? What, if anything, might have been left out of the diegetic narration that led to the chess scene? And exactly how did Dickie end up in a bath tub while Tom, whom we may or may not view as 'only' Dickie's friend, sits beside him? Are we supposed to be witnessing a sort of false seduction, one in which Dickie is aware of Tom's growing attraction towards him and chooses to play it up rather than down at Tom's expense? Or does the burgeoning attraction—which, at least up to this point, appears to affect both Tom and Dickie—exist only in Tom's troubled mind? And, finally, what are we really supposed to make of Tom and Dickie's relationship thus far, given the information we have accumulated about the two?

The fact that we—or at least I—don't know the answers to these questions points to what I have begun to regard as a problem with *The Talented Mr. Ripley's* treatment of homosexuality, one that stretches back to the novel version but which, despite Minghella's claims, remains unresolved in the film version. If, for example, Tom's attraction to Dickie is one sided, as it might well be, then Tom's sexuality becomes irrevocably tied to his strange psychological state, one that continually finds him blurring the lines between fact and fiction until the two are indistinguishable. While it might be tempting to relegate Tom's feelings for Dickie to

the realm of unrequited love (or lust, as the case may be), the film's context makes it difficult—if not impossible—to do so, as Tom is never presented as psychologically stable. As sympathetic as his plight may be, Tom is presented as undeniably disturbed, neurotic even when he is at his best, psychotic at his worst (such as in the various scenes in which Tom brutally murders anyone who threatens to expose him as an imposter). But that he's gay and psychotic complicates and problematizes things to such a great degree that it becomes possible, even necessary, to question whether or not Tom's homosexuality equals, or at least explains, his psychopathology. If, however, we read Tom's and Dickie's relationship as one in which attraction occurs on both ends, the same issues remain, for Dickie, whatever he may be feeling for Tom (even if what he is feeling is nothing more than curiosity), doesn't exactly permit Tom an easy or dignified escape from an ultimately (self-) destructive situation. Rather, he manipulates Tom's desires, perhaps for the sole purpose of mocking them, which may help to explain the homosocial over- and undertones at play in the film, for homosociality, as explained by David Buchbinder, "function[s] to protect the dominant model of masculinity— which is above all heterosexual—from confrontation or encroachment by possibly subversive elements" (64-65). Thus, as much as homosocial relationships are "founded on desire" (65) they are nonetheless "system[s] of surveillance whose purpose is to ensure that men behave in certain ways, if they wish to be accorded the status of 'masculine'" (64). In either case, the film, no matter how unintentionally, inscribes a certain level of homophobia into its presentation of homosexuality, which is, depending on your view-point, (a) a case study in psychopathic behavior, (b) something to be ridiculed, casually dismissed, or disdained as 'unmasculine', or, as I've already mentioned, (c) ultimately self-destructive.

Whatever the case may be, it is clear that Tom does desire Dickie in a number of ways,

and this desire could be viewed as his downfall. As a gay man (a gay man living in the late 1950's, which compounds the difficulties of the situation), he is already on the outside of what is deemed acceptable. Rather than viewing himself—or having others view him—as a 'real' man, he views himself as something less than normal. In fact, he could be described— and I am drawing on the work of Brian Pronger here—in the context of an implied masculine code of behavior, as monstrous, which coincides with something Pronger refers to as the 'monster myth'.

A phrase coined by Pronger, an openly gay critic, the monster myth paints a dismal picture of homosexuality, one that has worked its way through the culture and has been enshrined not only in a multitude of sociocultural institutions such as religion, medicine, law and athletics, but also in the minds of most people. The monster is 'a person of inhuman and horrible cruelty or wickedness.' It's also an animal or plant deviating in one or more of its parts from the normal type; specifically an animal born with some congenital malformation; a misshapen birth; an abortion' [OED]. (77)

This is the myth, or one of them, that straight society perpetuates in order to sustain its own power, which, if questioned or challenged, could be irreparably damaged or lost. It is the myth that, in Pronger's words, constructs homosexuality as "[m]arginal and ugly" and demands that "heterosexuality be pursued" (77), no matter what the cost. If not, individuals risk alienating themselves or being alienated from the dominant discourse, a process which often results in cultural unintelligibility and/or obliteration.

It is not, however, just straight male society that has constructed, bought into play, and

sustained this myth of the gay male as an irredeemable and incontrovertible monster. Parts of gay society, specifically those parts inhabited by men already subjected to disempowering feelings of inadequacy, also help to support the construction of homosexuality as deviant and, in many cases, less-than-human (which basically adds up to less-than-*man*). This internalization of homophobia, perpetuated by patriarchy and reified by the very individuals who suffer oppression at homophobia's hands, are termed "self-oppressors" by Pronger, who writes that, "By appropriating the [myth of gay males as monsters] and seeing themselves and others in its grips, homosexual men and boys, whose erotic desire...undermines the power of [patriarchy], reinstate that power and give a hand to its patriarchal oppressiveness" (99). Tom Ripley, as demonstrated by his actions, which involve trying to hide his homosexual inclinations behind a mask of masculinity, is indeed a man caught in the grips of self-oppression. His every move often appears designed to promote and establish himself as the sort of man that hegemonic masculinity demand that he be, despite the various feminine elements that remain a part of his character. And who can blame him? As David Forrest points out, Ripley, like most gay men, especially those living within an especially intolerant era like the 1950's, "wish[es] to be seen as real [man]" (David Forrest 103). To be seen as a 'real man' is to be masculine, and, states Forrest, "to be masculine is not to be feminine...or gay; not to be tainted with any marks of 'inferiority'" (103).

Tom Ripley is tainted with many 'marks of inferiority', though, including those of class, social status, and his nearly insuppressible desire for Dickie, a desire that continually bubbles to the surface at the most inopportune times and makes the task of sustaining any sort of masculine facade somewhat difficult, especially considering what and who defines the terms and limits of masculinity in society. Even the terms 'masculine' and 'masculinity' themselves

“depend...on a series of explicit and implicit premises” (11), all of which are outlined by social anthropologists Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfame in their essay “Dislocating Masculinity: Gender, Power and Anthropology”:

First, masculinity and maleness are defined oppositionally as what is not feminine or female. Second, gendered identities implicitly depend on the social acquisition of appropriate attributes. Third, anatomy, learned behavior and desire are conflated so that ‘normal’ sexual orientation and identity are heterosexual. And, lastly, through biological, sexual and social connotations, the idea of masculinity is reified and universalized. Masculinity appears as essence or commodity, which can be measured, possessed, or lost. (11-12)

Butler, whose theories of gender performativity were applied in the previous chapter, describes the workings of gender in much the same way as Cornwall and Lindisfame. The only notable difference between the theorists’ arguments is that Butler focuses her critical eye on normalized concepts of femininity while Cornwall and Lindisfame look specifically at masculinity.

The two concepts, those of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity,’ are, to my mind, inextricably entwined, specifically when viewed in conjunction with homosexuality. Considering, as Forrest does, that both women and “Women’s associated gender characteristics—such as gestures, concerns, dress, mannerisms, language and the like—are seen as inferior ways of behaving, regardless of whether they are taken on by a man or a woman, and regardless of whether they originate within a working-class or middle-class milieu” (103), it seems clear that Tom, homosexual, stereotypically effeminate in many ways (he is, for example, acutely sensitive, always self-conscious, and lacks self-confidence), is, indeed, inferior and subject to the same

hostility directed towards women (Forrest 103), and thus makes the "connection between misogyny and hatred of homosexuals" (103-4) even more tenable.

The only way for Tom Ripley to avoid becoming (or remaining, as the case may be) socially ostracized is through a successful performance of masculinity, which amounts to a performance of heterosexuality, both of which are not merely performances (those which are contained within a moment), but are occasions of performativity, in that both are, in the context of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, examples of "dramatic and contingent construction[s] of meaning" (Butler 177). Tom succeeds, to a degree, by finding an entrance into the persona of a straight, upper-class Princeton graduate through jazz, but continually puts himself at risk of discovery by failing to keep his desire, a very homoerotic desire, under wraps. Ripley, simply stated, wants Dickie, a fact which is constantly reinforced up until the moment of Dickie's death at Tom's hands. And it is because of this desire that Tom's performance ultimately fails. He can never stay 'in character' long enough to sustain the facade, too often overcome by a fantasy that he almost convinces himself is true, a fantasy that is revealed when Tom and Dickie are riding a train from Montebello to a jazz festival in San Remo.

While Dickie sleeps in the seat beside him, Tom lowers his head onto Dickie's chest, as though listening to his heartbeat. While resting against Dickie, Tom looks at their reflection in the compartment's window, enjoying the image projected back to him. With Dickie fast asleep and Tom nestled against him, it looks as though the two are lovers, something which does not escape Tom, who stares at the reflection until Dickie stirs awake, turns to Tom, and calls him "spooky." A dissonance is struck in this scene, one that echoes the obvious difference between fantasy and reality, by pairing Tom's love-lorn actions with the strains of "Lullaby for Cain," the song Minghella inserts into the film whenever there is a point to be made about Tom's troubled

psychological state. In this case, the point being made seems perfectly clear. While merely an image, a false reflection on reality, what Tom sees reflected in the window is, in his mind, reality itself. Thus, the image in the window remains embedded in Tom's mind even after Dickie clues into the truth lurking beneath Tom's lies, which are revealed in the following scene.

"I didn't know you at Princeton, did I?" Dickie yells over blaring trumpets at the San Remo jazz festival. Tom's refusal to respond is enough to affirm Dickie's suspicions. "Do you even like jazz," he asks moments later, "or was that for my benefit?" Although close to being fully revealed for what he really is, Tom provides the most honest answer he is capable of providing. "I've gotten to like it. [...] I've gotten to like everything about the way you live. It's one big love affair," he exclaims, providing what amounts to a three-part admission that seems to go over Dickie's head. That Tom has "gotten to like" jazz implies what we'd already figured out earlier: Tom never liked jazz as music, but, once able to decipher the "noise", became quite adept at using it to his advantage. This, more than anything, is what he grew to like. Jazz, as an intricate part of Dickie's life, provided an opening into a world Tom knew only peripherally before meeting Mr. Greenleaf in New York. Once inside that world, Tom really did fall in love, not only with Dickie, but with his entire life. The "love affair" he mentions refers to more than the fantasy relationship Tom has conjured between himself and Dickie. In addition, it refers to the 'love affair' Tom has been having with a much higher level of class, status and wealth. Tom, in one comment, reveals all of this, and yet expects his performance of all things Dickie to stand unchallenged. Of course, it does not. And yet Tom, ever the actor, manages to sustain his performance (of Dickie, of heterosexuality, of a member of the wealthy upper-classes) despite the loss of both Dickie and jazz. To explain how this is accomplished, I will now turn to the theories of Freud, whose work on melancholy appears in Judith Butler's book *Gender Trouble*

and provides an interesting way of viewing Ripley's performative actions. Melancholy is, I contend, essential to our understanding of Ripley's need to become—in performative terms—Dickie Greenleaf, even after Dickie has denied and thus rendered unintelligible not only Tom's desires, but Tom himself.

The state of melancholy, which will be fully explained and examined shortly, has its roots in the Oedipal drama of rivalry, which, as Judith Butler explains, "produces the boy's repudiation of femininity and his ambivalence towards his father" (76) in conjunction with something called the "incest taboo," which "forbids the incestuous union between boy and mother [and thus] initiates the structures of kinship" (55) between them. After this taboo has been instated and the mother as a love-object has been lost, the boy feels an intense grief, which Freud characterizes as melancholy. In an attempt to resolve this grief, which itself is one of the conflicts that the super-ego's moral barometers—the conscience and the ego ideal—guard against, the boy begins the process of 'identification,' a term which refers to the transference of feeling—sexual and otherwise—from one object (in this case, the mother) to "another person who appears successful, realistic, moral" (Cridler et al 474b), thus *preserving* the original relationship from which he was barred while at the same time *denying* prohibitions of the incest-taboo altogether.

All of this, of course, takes place within a heterosexual frame, as the incest-taboo, while barring the son from his mother, also bars him from homosexuality (which is really just one more thing that the child *should not* do). And this is the problem Butler locates in Freud's theories, specifically his theory of melancholia. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that "there has been little effort to understand the melancholic denial/preservation of homosexuality in the production of gender within the heterosexual frame" (73). Although Freud has commented on

homosexuality numerous times in his writings, he tends to limit himself to establishing the perverse nature of homosexual desires and their eventual (and, in his mind, proper) *denial* through sublimation, which "provide[s] the energy for a great many cultural achievements" ("Dora" 199). (This leaves one to assume that, if not 'properly' sublimated, if somehow *preserved*, the positive energy of which Freud speaks would immediately become negative and result in more or less perverse cultural achievements.) Thus, Butler builds upon Freud's theories by filling some of the many gaps in his texts, specifically in his "Mourning and Melancholy", and in the process exposes the link between melancholia, the formation of gender identities, and the consolidation of compulsory heterosexuality.

Butler begins by providing an in-depth overview and breakdown of Freud's theory of melancholy, pointing out that in the wake of the loss of a desired love-object, "the ego is said to incorporate that other [that is, the love-object] into the very structure of the ego, taking on attributes of the other and 'sustaining' the other through magical acts of imitation" (73). It is, of course, these acts of imitation which constitute identification, the process by which the grieving individual "seeks to harbor that other within the very structure of the self" (73), thus overcoming the loss of the desired object. It is important to note, as Butler does, that "identification is not simply momentary or occasional, but becomes a new structure of identity; in effect, the other becomes part of the ego through the permanent internalization of the other's attributes" (74). Thus, the severed relationship between the individual and the object of his/her desires (sexual and otherwise) is recuperated and sustained within the ego and therefore need not be given up (74).

In Freud's estimation, the above described process of identification "has a great share in determining the form taken by the ego and...makes an essential contribution towards building up

what is called its 'character'" (quoted in Butler 74). However, what Butler concludes, quite unlike Freud, is that identification aids not only in the very masculine process of 'character-building,' but also in the "the acquisition of *gender identity* as well" (74). Writes Butler,

This process of internalizing lost loves becomes pertinent to gender formation when we realize that the incest-taboo, among other functions, initiates a loss of love-object for the ego and that this ego recuperates from this loss through the *internalization of the tabooed object of desire*. [...] In the case of a prohibited heterosexual union, it is the object which is denied, but not the modality of desire, so that the desire is deflected from that object onto other objects of the opposite sex. But in the case of a prohibited homosexual union, it is clear that both the desire and the object require renunciation and so become subject to the internalizing strategies of melancholia. (75)

In other words, identification, which is itself brought about by the incest-taboo, works differently in a homosexual context than it does in a heterosexual context. While the former allows for the recuperation of the original desire despite the loss of the original object, the latter prohibits, via the incest-taboo *and* the construction of an interior ego-ideal, which Freud describes as "the conditioning factor of repression" ("On Narcissism" 558), both object and desire and makes it quite impossible to sustain any sort of homosexuality in either thought or action.

Of course, the ego-ideal, the half of the super-ego which Freud links to repression and the sublimation of libidinal instincts ("On Narcissism" 558), is heavily involved in what Butler refers to as "the internalization of gender identities" (Butler 80), as it is "a solution to the Oedipal complex and is thus instrumental in the consolidation of masculinity and femininity" (80). As

Freud points out,

the super-ego is...not simply a residue of the earliest object-choices of the id: it also represents an energetic reaction-formation against these choices. Its relation to the ego is not exhausted by the precept: 'You ought to be like this (like your father.) It also comprises the prohibition: *You may not be like this (like your father)*—that is, you may not do all that he does; some things are his prerogative. (Quoted in Butler 80)

Thus, it becomes possible—if not essential—to view the ego-ideal as "a set of sanctions and taboos [which] regulate...and determine...masculine and feminine identification" (80). Moreover,

Butler suggests that

Because identifications substitute for object relations, and identifications are the consequence of loss, gender identification is a kind of melancholia in which the sex of the prohibited object is internalized as a prohibition. This prohibition sanctions and regulates discrete gender identity and the law of heterosexual desire. The resolution of the Oedipal complex affects gender identification through not only the incest taboo, but, prior to that, the taboo against homosexuality. The result is that one identifies with the same-sexed object of love, thereby internalizing both the aim and object of the homosexual cathexis. (80-81)

Although Freud's theories, and Butler's reading and ultimate expansion of Freud's theories, revolve around a very young boy (from infancy to the age of five, according to Freud) going through an Oedipal crisis (which explains the reference to the 'incest-taboo'), I think they can be applied to Tom Ripley, an adult male in body and, to a degree, in mind, but certainly

somewhat infantile—or at the very least child-like—in terms of sexuality. Indeed, Damon, in an interview with Brendan Lemon, backs up this reading of Ripley as sexually under-developed, or arrested, stating that “Our [Damon’s and Minghella’s] idea was that he was a virgin...[filled with] deep self-loathing.” Even in his relationship with Peter Smith Kingsley, Ripley appears to experience difficulty with both emotional and physical intimacy. Thus, I believe, and will spend the next few pages arguing, that Ripley’s post-jazz performance of Dickey embodies elements of Butler’s description of melancholy, as Dickie is (1) the object desired, (2) in Lacanian theory, the ‘Father’ (figure/symbol), or, in Freudian theory, the ego-ideal, who/that initiates and eventually (and dramatically) implements a wide variety of taboos, (3) the lost love object, and (4) the object with whom Ripley identifies and thus subsumes into his own identity.

The first of these precepts—Dickie is the object desired by Tom Ripley—is probably the most obvious of them all, as it is clear almost from the outset of the film that Dickie, wealthy, strikingly good-looking, utterly spontaneous, sexually uninhibited, and very heterosexual, is just about everything that Ripley is not but wants to be. There are, of course, overt signs of sexual attraction on Tom’s part, as well, such as those exhibited in both the chess scene and the various jazz-club scenes occurring throughout the first half of the film. Perhaps the most intense and telling of these scenes is the one in which Tom plays the piano and sings “My Funny Valentine”—a love song—on stage while Dickie accompanies him on sax. What is clear, and what I’ve already pointed out in a discussion of the “My Funny Valentine” scene, is that Tom not only croons this song to an audience, but to Dickie, with whom he shares the stage. The montage of scenes preceding the one in the jazz club—Dickie on scooter, Ripley’s arms wrapped around Dickie’s waist, both grinning wildly, Ripley giving Dickie a playful piggy-back ride down the streets of Montebello, and so on—make the connections I’ve drawn not only

plausible, but quite obvious, as well. What is also quite obvious is that Ripley wants everything Dickie has, specifically his freedom, his (sometimes) easy demeanor, and his self-confidence, all of which add up to something Ripley has never had: social acceptance. Dickie is, for all intents and purposes, the norm, while Ripley is Other to Dickie. Thus, Ripley's desire for Dickie is a complicated one, as it encompasses both the sexual and the social, the permissible and the forbidden, the moral and the decadent.

Now that it has been established that Dickie functions as the love-object desired by Ripley, Dickie's role as the initiator of a number of taboos becomes more credible and evident. Although the incest-taboo is what bars the son from the mother (and/or the father) in Freud's view, it is Dickie who bars Ripley from any sort of love-relationship, first by rejecting his advances, and then by rejecting Tom Ripley as an individual. In one of the film's most important—and violent—scenes, which occurs while Tom and Dickie are cruising around the waters of San Remo, Dickie informs Tom that not only does he not love him, but he considers him "a leach" who can be "quite boring." Tom's response is typical: he slips into denial, claiming that he knows there's "something" between them: "That evening when we played chess, for instance, it was obvious." Dickie's response to this accusation is fast and furious. After striking Tom and insulting him on the basis of class ("Who are you? Some third class loser? Who are you...to say anything to me?"), he states, "I really, really do not want to be on this boat with you. I can't move without you moving. It give me the creeps. You give me the creeps. [!] Can't move without *Dickie, Dickie, Dickie*, like a little girl all the time.." By referring to him as a "little girl", Dickie strikes Tom with a double-edged sword. On the one hand, he is assaulting Tom's carefully constructed masculinity and touching on what are obviously some very sensitive issues for Tom, who, having just opened himself up to Dickie (albeit in a frantic and somewhat

delusional fashion) by openly declaring his desires, is vulnerable to attack. On the other hand, Dickie is rejecting Tom in a most humiliating fashion and thus barring him from not only a love-object, but from any and all fantasies of acceptance, both social and sexual. Simply put, with a single comment, Dickie is reifying every one of Tom's doubts and fears about himself and once again rendering Tom the unintelligible other.

Tom's reaction to Dickie's verbal assault, one which immediately sets up a taboo against homosexuality, is brutally violent, but not altogether unexpected. As Peter Schwenger points out in his short essay on melancholia, once we are barred from the object of desire, "we destroy it. For Jacques Lacan, indeed, we *murder it*" (Schwenger). Ripley beats Dickie to death by striking him over and over again with the blunt end of his paddle, thus ensuring separation and beginning the melancholic process, which begins with grief at the loss of the desired love-object, dramatized by Ripley lying with Dickie's dead body for an uncertain period of time, looking at once like a mourning child and lover. However, the mourning period does not last for long. While the loss of Dickie (by Ripley's own hands) was, at first, painful, his death, according to Jacques Lacan, as quoted in Schwenger, "constitutes...the eternalization of his desire" in that Tom is now free to recoup his lost love through the process of identification, which is dramatized in and through Ripley's performance of normative gender and sexuality and is actually made possible by his performance of Dickie, in turn made possible by the taboos erected by the now-deceased Dickie Greenleaf. As Judith Butler explains it,

if feminine and masculine dispositions are the result of the effective internalization of that taboo, and if the melancholic answer to the loss of the same-sexed object is to incorporate and, indeed, to *become* that object through the construction of the ego ideal, then gender identity

appears primarily to be the internalization of a prohibition that proves to be formative of identity. Further, this identity is constructed and maintained by the consistent application of this taboo, not only in the stylization of the body in compliance with discrete categories of sex, but in the production and 'disposition' of sexual desire. (81)

Ripley indeed 'becomes' the lost love object, Dickie, whom he performs almost to a tee. His only problem is Peter Smith Kingsley, and the homosexual desire he once again arouses within Ripley.

Peter, who appears as a character in the film after Dickie's murder, becomes something of an unintentional foil to Tom, whose continued performance of Dickie is threatened by Ripley himself. At this point, Tom's many identities become quite complicated and difficult to follow, as each depends on the other for survival. Consider, for example, that Tom, upon arriving in Montebello, is already performing an alternative 'Tom', this one a Princeton graduate, compared to the 'real' Tom, whose occupation is that of bathroom attendant at a concert hall. The 'Princeton' Tom is the 'Tom' most everyone in the movie—Dickie, Marge, Peter Smith Kingsley, Mr. Greenleaf, and so on—becomes familiar with. This is not, however, his only identity. Upon Dickie's death, 'Tom' becomes 'Dickie', a performance which must be sustained despite the fact that everyone who knows 'Tom' also knows Dickie (the real Dickie, that is). Without 'Tom' (the performed 'Tom'), there would be no 'Dickie', and without 'Dickie'—whose identity comes with fringe benefits such as instant wealth and respect—'Tom' would not be able to afford an existence as 'Tom'. Although extremely hard to follow, there is a point to be made here, which is that performativity calls into question any and all origins. If there happens to be a real Tom Ripley somewhere amongst all of these performances, I certainly can't find him. Although I

know that the 'real' Tom is gay, the performed 'Tom' isn't really heterosexual, although he certainly tries to present himself as such. Indeed, when asked by a police inspector investigating Dickie's disappearance whether he is homosexual, Tom insists that he is not. That Peter, who is translating the entire interrogation, whispers to Tom that, "Officially, there are no homosexuals in Italy," provides a telling glimpse into the society in which Tom must live. Yet another response to a different police inspector, however, reveals that Tom, while performing as Dickie, is willing to cast himself (the Tom everyone knows at this point) as a homosexual aggressor who keeps asking 'Dickie' (the performed Dickie) to marry him. This despite Tom's intense fear of his own sexuality, a fear which is, for an instant, quelled by Peter, but which, eventually, pushes him towards violence once again.

An openly gay man who works as an orchestra director, Peter's relationship with Ripley follows the same pattern as Ripley's relationship with Dickie, save one important fact: this time, Ripley's desire is returned. Although Ripley tries many times to keep Peter at bay, even warning him that he (Ripley) can't open up the way he would like because "there are demons" lurking inside that he can't show to anyone, Peter nevertheless continues to pursue Ripley in much the same fashion as Ripley pursued Dickie, finally earning the symbolic key to Ripley's heart, which comes in the form of the key to his apartment. Yet the happiness Peter evokes in Ripley is short-lived, as the relationship soon becomes more of a liability than an asset. While he may be willing and able to offer Tom Ripley the opportunity to engage in a relationship based on mutual love, affection and acceptance, Peter knows Ripley only as Ripley, a problem considering that Tom's performance of Dickie must be sustained lest someone discover his deceit. When a casual acquaintance of 'Dickie's' bumps into Tom while he and Peter are alone together, thus unintentionally threatening to expose Tom's deceit, Tom, sobbing the entire time,

murders Peter while “You Don’t Know What Love Is” plays in the background—“a reminder,” suggests Minghella, “that Ripley’s journey into a nightmare of his own making is motivated by a longing to be loved at any cost” (Minghella).

It is at this point, during the murder of Peter, that jazz reappears in the soundtrack of the film. I have, you will note, been referring to Tom’s post-Dickie performance as a *post-jazz* performance as well, for one interesting reason, which Minghella points out in the liner notes to the *Talented Mr. Ripley* soundtrack: “[T]he sound of jazz dies along with Dickie” (Minghella).

What this implies is that improvisation, at least the musical sort, dies as well. However, Tom’s performance of Dickie does not die. It simply takes on a much greater and all-consuming form, so much so that Tom, as Dickie, composes a suicide note in order to deflect suspicion of murder. As we, the audience, watch as Tom sits down to write the note which is, ironically, addressed to Tom Ripley, a voiceover, distinctly belonging to Tom, narrates the words as he types them out:

I wish I could give you the life I took for granted. You always understood what’s at the heart of me, Tom. Marge [Dickie’s girlfriend] never could. [...] In all kinds of ways, you’re the son my father wanted. I realize that you can change the people, change the scenery, but you can’t change your own rotten self. Now I can’t think what to do or where to go. I’m haunted by the things I’ve done, and can’t undo. I’m sorry. I’ve made a mess of being Dickie Greenleaf, haven’t I?

Although written as Dickie, what Tom’s words convey are the regrets of Tom Ripley, along with the words Tom probably imagined Dickie saying to him, had he not murdered Dickie and had Dickie returned his affections.

The final scene of the movie, in which Tom murders Peter, reveals exactly how much of

mess he made of being Dickie Greenleaf. While we don't actually see the murder as it occurs, we do hear it and the accompanying strains of "You Don't Know What Love Is," which marks the return of jazz—and violent improvisation—to the film. When the scene finally fades to black, the song continues to play, and we, as viewers, are left with a mingling sense of unease, loss, and disquiet, for it is at this point that we become aware that Tom Ripley's survival now depends upon his ability to sustain a convincing performance of a number of normative categories of identity, and to remain convincing as the heterosexual, upper-class socialite he cast himself as means living and acting as such at all times. To let his carefully constructed performance slide for any period of time will result in the same cultural—and perhaps corporeal, if one takes into account the legal aspects of Tom's crimes—obliteration and/or intelligibility that continually threatened (and, indeed, still threaten) to consume the gay, lower-class, socially awkward Tom we met at the beginning of the film. In a sense, then, Tom's situation can be viewed as something of a paradox, for no matter who Tom chooses to 'be' at any given moment, no matter which 'Tom' is put on display, he will always remain on the outside looking in at social and cultural acceptance. As much as he desires to fit the norm and as badly as he wants to be viewed as 'normal', Tom Ripley, we now know, will always be a copy of a copy, a parody of a parody, and will thus never achieve true acceptance of any sort because a gender performance always remains just that: a performance rather than anything abiding or true.

While viewing Tom's predicament in these terms is not exactly uplifting or inspiring, it is, strangely enough, fitting, for it is now possible to see both sides of the improvisational coin. Earlier in this thesis, I stated that jazz functions as an extremely potent means of political resistance to a number of the systems by and through which identity is constructed, distributed, regulated, and enforced, that, as a form of music and of resistance, jazz is, quite paradoxically,

a part of the very system(s) that work(s) to construct, distribute, regulate, and enforce normative and/or compulsory categories of identity, and that there exists a relationship between jazz and the resistance to and/or collusion with normative and/or compulsory categories of identity through gender performativity. In *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Tom Ripley finds in jazz an entrance into the normative categories that eluded him as a gay man and is thus able to improvise/perform 'new' identities. In other words, Tom uses jazz not to subvert social and cultural norms, as the characters of *Fall On Your Knees* do, but to rearticulate himself as 'normal'—that is, as someone who fits into and abides by just about every social norm available. This, of course, once again points to the inescapable fact that jazz, at least in some ways, works to uphold the very norms it claims at other times (those which I've previously examined in *FYK*) to subvert. Unfortunately for Tom (and for anyone who might be able to expose his imposture), once the music and, by extension, the performance begins, it doesn't stop, as demonstrated by the sudden and dramatic return of jazz to the film's soundtrack. Ripley's life, it is clear, will never be anything more than a performance, and the music he "grew to like" and which provided him the means by and through which to improvise alternative identities will follow him around, always reminding him that there never will be an end to what he himself began.

Conclusion

Out of Tune?

The Legacy of Jazz and Gender Performativity

The jazz orchestra uses only those instruments which can produce partial, inharmonic tones more readily than simple tones—such as the saxophone, the clarinet and the trombone, which share honors with the percussion instruments that accent syncopated rhythm. The combination of the syncopated rhythm, accentuated by the constant use of the partial tones sounding off-pitch, has put syncopation too off-key. Thus the three simple elements of music—rhythm, melody and harmony—have been put out of tune with each other.

— Anne Shaw Faulkner,

“Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?”

When I began this thesis, I did so with certain goals in mind. First, I wanted to demonstrate that jazz not only functions as music, but as an extremely potent means of political resistance to a number of the systems by and through which identity is constructed, distributed, regulated, and enforced. Second, I wanted to show that, as a form of music and of resistance, jazz is, quite paradoxically, a part of the very system(s) that work(s) to construct, distribute, regulate, and enforce normative and/or compulsory categories of identity—but that resistance must, by necessity, always take place within the very systems that give normative and/or compulsory categories of identity their intelligibility. And, finally, I wanted to demonstrate that

there exists a relationship between jazz and performative practices of gender, the latter conceived of by theorist Judith Butler as a way to unsettle and subvert foundational categories of gender, sexuality, and, by extension, race. In the preceding pages, I examined the ways in which two texts, MacDonald's novel *Fall On Your Knees* and Minghella's film *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, do each of these things; that is, I explored how each text highlights and dramatizes the various ways in which jazz functions as a means of political resistance, how jazz upholds the normative categories resisted, and how the relationship between jazz and gender performativity provides the characters of each of these texts an opportunity to subvert (in the case of *Fall On Your Knees*) or participate in (in the case of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*) the foundational categories of gender, race and sexuality upon which identity is typically based and built.

In doing so, however, I left a number of issues and questions unresolved. For instance, how is it possible to reconcile the disparate uses (and, in some cases, abuses) of jazz as both a means of resistance to and collusion with normative categories of identity? And if jazz and gender performativity, either together or separately, are such effectual tools of resistance, why do each of the texts I've examined over the course of this thesis end on such ultimately dour and seemingly hopeless notes? *Fall On Your Knees*, for example, finds Materia's acts of resistance resulting in suicide, while Rose's and Kathleen's attempts to subvert the normative categories of gender, race and sexuality result in the violent death of latter while the former, by choice, circumstance and necessity, performs the rest of her life as 'male' jazz musician. Likewise, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* concludes with its title character, Tom Ripley, murdering yet another individual who might be in a position to reveal and thus destroy Tom's carefully constructed performances, the loss of which will almost certainly result in Tom's cultural, social,

and corporeal obliteration. If this is the case—and it might well be—how can gender performativity really be said to ‘work’ as a means of resistance if, time and time again, resistance fails so miserably and, more often than not, violently? Even if we assume that some sort of explanation can be offered for the eventual failings of gender performativity as practiced by Materia, Rose, Kathleen, and Tom, aren’t we still left with a theory that remains somewhat, if not entirely, ineffectual, or at least impractical, when placed side-by-side with the more daunting and ubiquitous—not to mention powerful—forces that have come to shape, determine, and regulate the categories of gender, race and sexuality which performativity attempts to subvert and/or challenge? In other words, aren’t the few instances in which performative practices of gender aren’t quite enough to actually put a dent into the greater and much more pervasive powers that circulate amongst and within society symptomatic not only of the inescapable problems found within Butler’s theory of performativity but of a much more insidious problem that stems from the proliferation of normative discourses themselves?

The answer to this last question, perhaps glaringly obvious, is yes. Of course there are problems with gender performativity, many of which, it has been argued by Martha Nussbaum, stem from Butler’s tendency to avoid the bigger picture, which is that discourses of power, those which determine what and who falls under the categories of ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ behavior, those which establish, regulate, and enforce normative categories of gender, sexuality and race, are just that: discourses of power. And power of any sort is quite difficult to resist or challenge when resistance itself is theorized not as a sustained act, but as something transient that might, if successful, allow us to briefly laugh at power structures even as they continue to hold us in their grips (Nussbaum). While I don’t necessarily believe that Butler’s theories are as short-reaching as some have suggested, I do believe what Butler herself has suggested, which

is that performative acts of gender, or any subversive action or activity, for that matter, "is potentially recuperable" and that "[t]here is no way to safeguard against [this]. You can't plan or calculate subversion. In fact, I would say that subversion is precisely an incalculable effect" (Osborne and Segal). Effectively, what Butler is saying here—and what she doesn't say in *Gender Trouble*—is that gender performativity is a very limited and limiting means of subversion, first because any performance which sets out to challenge—or maintain—normative notions of identity can quite easily and unexpectedly be reclaimed—or demolished—by power structures that sustain these notions, second because the effects generated by performative acts of gender are, for all intents and purposes, indeterminate—meaning that they cannot be predicted, planned, or anticipated no matter what the subversive intentions, aims, or goals of their practitioners may (or may not) be.

While Butler's admission that her theories are not as successful or as reliable as she first might have led us to believe (either unintentionally or by design) leaves those of us who put a great deal of stock into the subversive potential of gender performativity somewhat disheartened, it also leaves us with a certain sense of relief that the seemingly inexplicable failings of performance are, in actuality, completely—if not easily—explicable, at least in the immediate realms of *Fall On Your Knees* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. For while both texts end quite miserably, the former with James, Kathleen's domineering father, single-handedly putting an end to her subversive relationship with Rose, first by beating and raping her, then by forcing her to return with him to Cape Breton, where she dies while giving birth to his children, the latter with Tom Ripley murdering Peter Smith Kingsley so that he may continue his performance of Dickie uninterrupted and undiscovered, they do not, as it might first appear, end hopelessly. For if any performance is, as Butler claims, potentially recuperable, then James'

actions, violent and senseless as they may be, can be regarded as power's way of recuperating its losses. And if, as Butler claims, subversion and its effects can neither be calculated nor planned, then Tom Ripley's entire dilemma, brought about by his improvisation of identities alternative to his own, as well as by vicious acts of murder, becomes a little more conceivable to those of us who view Tom's actions, specifically those involving violence, with contempt and disgust (and, admittedly, a degree of sympathy), because Tom, like James before him, is simply doing what he must, although Tom is doing it in order to sustain the inevitable collapse of his performance while James does it, however unconsciously, to reclaim and reinvigorate his own patriarchal power.

While I'm not attempting to justify the actions of either James or Tom, both of whom act in deplorable fashions, I am attempting to offer an alternative way of looking at the conclusions of both *FYK* and *Ripley*, one which doesn't leave us or our faith in Butler's theory of performativity so subject to disillusion. For if we view gender performativity as not an attempt to "destabilize the larger system" but as "personal acts carried out by a number of knowing actors," then it becomes possible to see more clearly what Butler calls the "ironic hopefulness" of performance" (quoted in Nussbaum)—that which stems from the knowledge that we cannot "escap[e] altogether from...oppressive structures" but can find within them "little spaces for resistance" (Nussbaum). These 'little spaces for resistance' are, in my view, what make gender performativity, despite its many flaws, a viable theory, as it is through enacting resistance in small personal ways that change, even if short-lived, is made possible. And while the resistant efforts of *Materia*, *Rose*, and *Kathleen* may not have altogether altered the systems of power which give normative categories of gender, sexuality, and race their intelligibility and supremacy, they did, for a time, challenge these systems by calling them into question.

But I wonder if the same thing can be said of jazz, for while it is possible to look to either of the texts examined and declare that jazz functions as a means of resistance to normative and/or compulsory categories of identity, it is equally as possible to view jazz as a harbinger of normativity itself by looking at the same texts. What I mean by this is that although jazz provides a space in which it becomes possible for Kathleen and Rose to subvert through performative acts the normative binaries of masculine/feminine, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, white/other-than-white, and upper/lower class, and although jazz permits Tom Ripley the opportunity to redefine and refashion his identity in a style that is much more easily negotiable and socially acceptable by and through the use of improvisation, jazz upholds the fictional categories of 'feminine' and 'masculine' and everything these terms have come to represent by openly declaring itself to be an musical arena fit for men. This is at least part of the reason why Rose decides to alter her gender and become (or be perceived as) a *male* jazz musician, and why Tom Ripley must alter his identity in order to fit into the masculine, heterosexual standards partly defined and enforced by the institution of jazz. On the surface, then, jazz can be viewed as quite separate from Butler's theory of performativity, for while performativity is all about resistance, jazz, it would appear, is as much about resistance as it is about complicity.

And yet, I would argue, this is not entirely the case. Although I won't cut myself off at the knees by declaring that, for reasons mentioned above, jazz can be unquestionably and unproblematically aligned with performative acts of resistance, I will declare without reservation that the two—jazz and gender performativity—share many more similarities than they do dissimilarities. To begin with, jazz, like gender performativity, is not about a global movement that aims to change our perceptions of world and the domineering forces that keep it in check in

one fell swoop, but about very small, very personal declarations, often musical in nature, of resistance or allegiance (sometimes both at once) to the various norms that grease the cogs and wheels of society. And while these declarations, made within the context of music, are always politically motivated and often characterized by the musician's desire to make change through protest, they are not always subversive or even ethical in their content and/or effects, a point which Heble makes in a section of his book devoted to the very controversial but always interesting free jazz artist Charles Gayle.

For Heble, Gayle represents a particularly troubling paradox, one which helps to illuminate some of the more intricate problems I've encountered with the contradictions embedded within jazz as both a subversive music and a (sometimes) volatile political domain. On the one hand, Gayle's jazz can be—and often is—characterized as “genuinely liberatory” (202) in its “transgressive political potential” (208), much of which is can be found in Gayle's “unrelenting free-form intensity, abandon,...power [and] innovation” (223), all of which “re-present...a radical retreat from customary sources of musical meaning” (223). On the other hand, Gayle's personal pronouncements against homosexuality, many of which are made in the context of his public jazz performances, “run the real risk of reinforcing structures of oppression and dominance” (202). Thus, writes Heble, in Gayle “we have the case of a contemporary leading-edge jazz artist whose uncompromising music seems, whatever his intentions, at ethical odds with the reactionary politics expressed in his onstage monologues” (204). This is not to imply that an African-American Christian such as Gayle, whose moral and religious views are an intricate facet of his identity as a man and as a musician, should be barred from publicly practicing free jazz, or that we should expect Gayle to keep his moral and religious views off the stage. To even hint at such a suggestion would be hypocritical and would, indeed, defeat the entire notion

of 'freedom', musical and otherwise, embodied by free jazz. For this reason, I find it necessary to indicate that the unresolvable paradox that Heble points out is not located directly within Gayle's pronouncements (although Heble does, indeed, find them troubling), but rather in their context. Jazz, it would appear, provides Gayle's particular brand of homophobic, sexist diatribe a voice, and by doing so, functions quite readily as a means of sustaining certain foundational categories, those which Gayle supports in his pronouncements against such alternative modes of identity as homosexuality. What this means, according to Heble, is that "jazz...can[not], by [itself]...., provide an effective guarantee of a progressive cultural practice and politics. [...] After all, despite its private fields of signification, its intensely personal meanings for both musicians and audiences, jazz remains a public activity" (218-19) with very public ramifications.

Yet it is its status as a public activity, one in which individuals who might otherwise remain voiceless are able to express themselves, that gives jazz its power, subversive and otherwise. Consider, for example, the case of Tom Ripley, who finds in jazz a space where he can refashion his identity so that he appears to conform to, rather than challenge by his very existence as a gay man, normative definitions of identity. Although what Ripley does with jazz (and with his various and varied performances) is not particularly positive, it is *something*, an alternative expression of identity—'alternative' in the sense that Ripley is not, until he discovers the improvisational qualities of jazz and performativity, straight, rich, or socially adept—that would have otherwise remained unavailable had jazz been a private rather than a public activity.

Likewise, had jazz not been a public forum accessible to anyone willing to make the effort to learn or listen to its very difficult nuances, neither Kathleen nor Rose would have been afforded the opportunity to challenge normative definitions of gender, sexuality, and race, for it is jazz that opened up the space in which such subversive activities were made possible.

What this means, then, is that it is not necessary for us to fully reconcile the various paradoxes that jazz (re)presents, because, to a great degree, we simply can't. What is important, however, is that we note them, become aware of them, and recognize the ways in which jazz functions critically, politically, and musically. Jazz is, and will always remain, a music that is very much open—to interpretation, to debate, to subversive practices of sexuality, to declarations of homophobia, to new and alternative modes of identity, to sexist practices of exclusion, to subversive practices of inclusion, to just about anything imaginable but not always socially, morally, or ethically acceptable. As such, it is also open to, and very often creates, controversy, and this controversy can be traced back to jazz's status as a paradoxical, oppositional, contradictory music. And yet by operating in such an oppositional and contradictory fashion—that is, by simultaneously working to subvert *and* uphold normative categories of identity and identity formation—jazz can be further aligned with gender performativity, in that jazz, like gender performativity, calls attention to itself as a political forum, opens up spaces in which it becomes possible to question naturalized systems of identity and musical production, and allows each of its participants an opportunity to express him or herself that might otherwise not be available, even if those expressions happen to pose difficult moral or ethical challenges and/or problems to those of us who view jazz—or gender performativity—through a critical lens.

So, then, I think the point that I'd most like to conclude with—if it already hasn't become obvious—is that both jazz and gender performativity, while problematic in numerous ways, some that are difficult, if not impossible, to resolve within the pages of this thesis or, for that matter, at all, are systems by and through which individuals who are typically silenced by their marginal status can challenge, subvert or, quite conversely, reinforce the normative systems of

identity and identity formation that give naturalized conceptions of gender, race, sexuality, and class their power. This is true of Tom Ripley, who locates in jazz and gender performativity an entrance into the socially constructed and maintained norms which have prevented him from attaining the sort of cultural and social acceptance he desires, and it is true of Rose, Kathleen and Materia, who locate in jazz and gender performativity a means of subverting the socially constructed and maintained norms which prevented them from attaining any sort of personal freedom. While these individuals are unable to permanently alter their identities or the normative categories that give them their intelligibility, each does, for a time, call naturalized conceptions of identity—particularly those of race, gender, and sexuality—into question, thus providing us the opportunity to view them not as foundational or fixed, but as unstable and not quite as powerful—or as real—as they might have first appeared. In the process, we become familiar with such constructs as ‘sex’ and ‘gender’, ‘male’ and ‘female’, ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ as constructs rather than as anything abiding or true. We also become familiar with the ways in which such fictional categories are socially, culturally, and politically constituted and maintained, and, as a result, we become much more wary of their presence in and power over our lives. From this vantage point, the failings of jazz and gender performativity to enact and sustain any sort of lasting subversion becomes irrelevant. What is relevant is that in both *Fall On Your Knees* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, subversion, no matter how short lived, was made possible. And this, more than anything else, is the legacy of both jazz and gender performativity: the possibility of change, even if the change produced strikes us as discordant and disagreeable, which may, in the end, be exactly the point.

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