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*LITERARY NEEDLE DROPS:  
THE USE OF MUSIC AS A POST MODERN TOOL  
IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION*

By

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THESIS

For the degree of a Master of English

Governors State University  
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## ABSTRACT

An examination of musical references (“literary needle drops”) in contemporary literature: Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, Zadie Smith’s *On Beauty*, and Haruki Murakami’s *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*. The novels are viewed through the various conceptual lens, literary and otherwise, such as Marcel Danesi’s Modal Flow Principle or “perceptual stimulations” as defined by Guillemette Bolens.

Egan’s novel utilizes punk bands and tracks to construct her characters’ identities, and send them on a journey through lost time to reflect on who they once were, who they have become, and whether they have been able to preserve the authenticity the Bay area music scene once demanded of them. Smith transforms the genre of hip-hop into an authentic Black cultural proxy in order to juxtapose the artform with classical music, which is largely propelled by a lily-White discourse. Lastly, Murakami creates a work with a carefully curated selection of jazz and classical pieces, as well as pop songs, to enrich the narrative through added characterization and the establishing of mood.

*Keywords:* literature, contemporary literature, literary criticism, music, music in literature, Jennifer Egan, A Visit from the Goon Squad, Zadie Smith, On Beauty, Haruki Murakami, Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage

“After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music.” –  
Aldous Huxley

***Literary Needle Drops: The Use of Music as a Postmodern Tool in Contemporary Fiction***

In “Music as Hook in the Literature Classroom” author Catherine G. Bellver states, “Music today is ubiquitous, incessant, and indispensable. In this era of iPods and MP3 players, music is everywhere, all day long” (887). Now while the devices Bellver references are already out of date, her sentiment is as relevant as ever: combined Spotify and Apple Music touts over 250 million users, and according to research firm YouGov-over two billion people consume music via YouTube. Music is ubiquitous. Bellver writes:

People seem to be predisposed to music; they universally display ‘musicophilia.’ In his book by this name, psychiatrist and neurologist Oliver Sacks examines the powers of music on ordinary people... His conclusion has widespread implications: music is irresistible, haunting, and unforgettable. Music, he affirms, is so deep in human nature that it seems innate” (888).

It is this innate quality Sacks refers to that serves as the 21st century author’s inspiration for what we will refer to as “literary needle drops.” A literary needle drop consists of musical references made by an author in an attempt to tap into the reader’s emotions, memories, and even biases in an attempt to further flush out a novel’s theme, tone, mood, characters or narrative. A literary needle drop can be the mention of the song that is playing on the radio, lyrics quoted by a character, or a complex musical analogy constructed by one character to explain the motivations of another. The term “literary needle drop” is derived from the film term “needle drop,” which is when a director opts

to utilize an existing recording in place of an original score, with the hope that the recording, with its existing cultural cache, will elicit a stronger response from the audience. Like film soundtracks, literary needle drops (hereby referred to as LNDs) utilize music to stir the emotions of the reader/audience, but unlike soundtracks, LNDs lack the audio component, and thus the onus is placed on the reader. A reader must excavate their knowledge and memories, or choose to research the musical reference in order to deepen their understanding of the text.

These musical references can be utilized to make use of Marcel Danesi's "Modal Flow Principal," which contends that information is better processed, or a deeper connection is built, when a reader's brain is allowed to process information in terms of an R-Mode (experiential) to L-Mode (analytical) flow (Bellver 889). Which is to say if a reader can first have their own lived experiences activated, say by way of a song, the understanding and analysis of the information that follows will likely be deeper.

To borrow an additional musical term, the use of a song can be viewed as the "hook" when constructing a narrative. The song will grab hold of the reader's attention, and provide them with additional layers of context by which to experience and understand the material surrounding the hook. As with any reference, the strength of the connection will vary depending on the reader's background knowledge. The LNDs utilized by authors work on multiple levels. On a surface level they could simply serve as color, or a way of fleshing out a character. But if a reader has personal knowledge of an author's LNDs, if they have their own experiences and stories attached to the tracks, albums, artists, and genres authors invoke, they gain access to those additional layers. By



including these drops, or hooks, the author has made the tool for deeper analysis available to the reader.

A large part of the success of the hook hinges on the concept of embodied reading, which occurs when cognition is dependent on some level of physicality. In “Embodied Reading: A Multisensory Experience,” author and researcher Susana Sanchez discusses how literature shares many characteristics with other narrative art forms, for example, theater. The difference being that while theatrical performances are delivering narrative like literature, they also make use of stage design, lighting and sound effects, creating an embodied experience for audience members. Sanchez contends that literature “is not yet capable of providing a polythetic meaning, as print has made this form of narrative silent and only perceivable by the eye” (1460). With this in mind, Sanchez and her team construct and conduct an experiment that makes use of sound effects and haptic feedback while text subjects read, and thus create an embodied reading via auditory cues.

My contention is that LNDs are essentially creating the same embodied experience of Sanchez’ experiment without the novel or gimmicky auditory cues of an adult soundbook. In “The Embodied Reader’s Cascades of Cognition” author Karin Kukkonen quotes Kevin O’Regan and Alva Noë, in describing the embodied reading experience as “a mode of exploration of the world that is mediated by knowledge of what we call sensorimotor contingencies,” or structures that exist within our mind and that work in tandem with the physical exploration of a new environment. In essence, when an author describes an unknown space to us in terms of its physical presence, we create a visual action plan to make sense of the new environments based on what we know about or have experienced in the physical descriptions. In the case of LNDs, a reader’s

sensorimotor contingencies are activated by an pre- auditory cue in the form of lyrics or a song title. Once that song has been activated in the reader's mind, a physical reaction occurs, and a mood is set within the reader based on the cue. The mood then becomes a vital component to how a reader will interpret the text that follows the activation.

However, the embodied experience extends beyond physical environments, and can also be used to better understand abstract concepts from a kinesthetic perspective. Kukkonen provides an example of a reader trying to understand the fear a character is feeling, or better yet, the state of mind created by fear *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* by Tobias Smollett. Kukkonen points out that Smollett utilizes kinesic language in describing the fear with words like "filips", "stabbing," and "volleys." Kukkonen contends that the language provides the embodied reader with a fairly precise idea of how the fear is impacting the character, because the descriptive language allows for a certain replication to take place "in the reader's own embodied resonances to the kinesic shape and directedness of the words" they read. The violent action the reader conjures in their mind allows for a better understanding of the impact of a particular fear (368).

Just as kinesic language like "stabbing" or "volley" can aid in the understanding of a character's experience of fear, a reference to a specific song, a certain genre, or even a set of lyrics can be used as a kind of "pre-auditory" cue in the mind of the reader. In effect, the reference is likely to activate the music which plays as the reader processes the material that supervenes. While the track offered by the author may be a familiar tool for the reader, and perhaps is designed for a specific use, the author cannot be sure how, or even if, it will be utilized by each individual reader. Literary critic Wolfgang Iser,

contended that it was the gaps in texts, what the author leaves unsaid, that gives permission to the reader to use their imagination, which allows the text to fully gain shape in their mind, when the reader supplies what the author has omitted (Iser quoted in Kukkonen 370). An LND inherently provides those gaps, because an author cannot be sure of the potential experience or relationship a reader has with a given song.

The flexibility of an implied reader is crucial when it comes to the utilization of literary needle drops, because while there might be a general tone, cultural significance, period, etc. attached to any given piece of music or genre, there will inevitably be a spectrum in regards to how it is applied to the text based on a given reader's relationship with said musical reference. But even with a certain leniency afforded the reader, a 21st century author making use of literary needle drops will be doing so with the distinct purpose of framing a multitude of abstract literary concepts: tone, frame of mind, time, essence, world views and personal philosophies.

In "Embodied Reading and Narrative Empathy in Cormac McCarthy's 'The Road,'" author Christopher T. White discusses the narrative of point of view modulations made by McCarthy in his novel, and how said modulations are "ultimately designed to stimulate the reader's empathic identification" with the central character, though McCarthy controls these modulations in a way that allows the readers to experience the cruel circumstances of the character, without ever feeling overwhelmed by said experience (533). LNDs also aim to modulate a narrative by inserting a familiar voice to both reader and author alike. By inserting a familiar song or lyrics, an author might be looking to make what follows manageable for the reader. For instance, if a character is dealing with indelible grief, an author might choose to have that character listening to a

song on a portable device, a song that captures the character's pain, but without delving so deep that it becomes too difficult for the reader to process. Regardless of the intended effect of an LND on the reader, the author is looking to bring about said effect through an immersive experience. White writes, "Empirical evidence confirms that readers respond to written narratives at a bodily level through perceptual simulations triggered by the act of reading. In effect, literary narratives frequently invite readers to simulate not only the thoughts and feelings of the characters, but also their sensorial perceptions" (534). LNDs have the intent of immersion, in that they attempt to trigger an auditory sensation in the reader, even if the melody or lyrics of a particular song play only in the reader's mind. This sensory trigger activates a cornucopia of additional context for the reader, such as nostalgia, mood, empathy, and tribalism, all of which they use, consciously or subconsciously, to strengthen their connection to the characters and their stories.

These connections are primed by the use of these musical references. Based on the LND selection, an author can begin nudging readers in a preferred direction. In the film industry, this technique is referred to as "forward and backward priming." In "Viewers' Interpretations of Film Characters' Emotions: Effects of Presenting Film Music Before or After a Character is Shown," author Siu-Lan Tan writes, in relation to playing music before or after a character arrives on screen, "The affective primes are typically seen as serving a framing effect, or as activating relevant schemata that then affect subsequent evaluations of more ambiguous objects" (138). An example might be Bill Conti's "Gonna Fly Now," which primed audiences to be moved by Rocky Balboa's grit, demonstrated through his street level training regiment. The upbeat horns might remind the audience of a marching band looking to rally the football team on Friday night,

while the horns (and strings) in John Williams' "Imperial March," warns the audience of the destructive military might of Darth Vader and his Imperial Army.

Nearly all LNDs exist as diegetic music, even said music that exists solely in a character's head as a piece of a recalled memory. It is the specificity of an LND that creates an embodied simulation for the reader. White contends that McCarthy's description of the character's movements in *The Road*, leads to the cognitive process of "constructing the fictional world projected by the novel," which requires "the reader's simulation of these movements... This embodied simulation is crucial to the reader's phenomenological experience of being transported to the novel's storyworld" (534). The same can be said about the auditory simulation created through LNDs. The name of a track, or its lyrics may serve the same purpose as McCarthy's movements, to place the reader inside that car, on that military base, in that music venue, to further embody the emotions of the novel's characters.

Much of the power of LNDs have to do with the universality of music and its ability to convey an emotion or build a connection in a way that eludes traditional prose. In "The Sounds of Silence in 'Sirens': Joyce's Verbal Music of the Mind," author Jon D. Green writes, "Perhaps the modern writer's espousal of music as handmaiden to literature is partly rooted in Walter Pater's provocative claim that 'every form of art is perpetually aspiring' to the condition of music" (489). This idea is not foreign to any music lover. There is a reason the National Anthem is played at live sporting events, as opposed to the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance, or that great emphasis is placed on a married couple's first dance, or even that mixtapes for a romantic partner, turned into mixed CDs, and now Spotify playlists: because certain feelings are best captured by the right song, as

opposed to the right words. Green continues, “It has something to do with the expressive realms of nonverbal reality that modern novelists have accessed by means of musical allusions... the nonverbal strategies they have used to unlock elusive universal truths beyond any specific cultural context” (489). LNDs allow for the scratching of an emotional itch that was thought unattainable in conventional literature. LNDs allow authors to trade in the logic of syntax and diction for what Green refers to as the “ineffable magic” of musical analogies.

Music’s magic can also be found in its ability to transport the listener to a different place and time altogether. In “Music, Memory and Emotion are Interwoven,” psychologist Dr. Nikki Rickard refers to music-evoked autobiographical memories as a “phenomenon,” and Dr. Kelly Jakubowski, a professor at Durham University’s Department of Music, states, “We know music can cue vivid and emotional memories.” In “Why Does Music Evoke Memories?”, author Tiffany Jenkins explains this time machine effect music has on our memories:

The hippocampus and the frontal cortex are two large areas in the brain associated with memory and they take in a great deal of information every minute.

Retrieving it is not always easy. It doesn’t simply come when you ask it to. Music helps because it provides a rhythm and rhyme and sometimes alliteration which helps to unlock that information with cues. It is the structure of the song that helps us to remember it, as well as the melody and the images the words provoke.

In addition, explicit memory is a deliberate and conscious retrieval of past events, often evoked by questions or conventionally composed statements, those typically found in traditional prose. While music evokes implicit memories, those memories that are

reactive, or unintentional—memories that the chair of the sound programme at the Art Institute of Chicago, Robert Snyder, refers to as “outside of consciousness.” Snyder explains, “things that can affect us from outside of consciousness are often regarded as powerful.” In that lies the power of the LND. An LND provides authors an additional layer of accessibility to the reader. An accessibility that strengthens the relationship between the reader, the author, and the text itself. Narrative theorist Marco Caracciolo contends, “the only real consciousness which readers come into contact through a literary work is that of the author,” and literary critic Georges Poulet implies the same: “reading literary fiction as a merging of the reader’s consciousness with the authorial consciousness” (qtd in White 538). There’s good evidence to suggest that what I’m calling an LND creates a kind of merging of an authorial consciousness with the reader's subconscious.

In an attempt to solidify how an LND is utilized, we will examine an example from the novel *All The Light We Cannot See*. In the novel author Anthony Doerr makes use of French composer Claude Debussy’s “Clair de Lune,” and in doing so provides a snapshot of the kind of tool the LND can be for contemporary authors. The LND can first be viewed as an embracing of Marcel Danesi’s “Model Flow Principal.” Werner, one of the novel’s protagonists, finds an old radio in a shed, and this discovery is viewed as a gift from God. Shortly after the discovery, author Anthony Doerr utilizes one of classical music’s more popular pieces, and in doing so allows the reader to activate prior knowledge and experiences, which in turn allows for a deeper analysis of the memories and emotions “Clair de Lune” will eventually conjure in the character of Werner. However, Doerr does not initially provide the name of the track, that drop comes later;

instead Doerr provides the reader with the feeling one has upon first listening to a piece of music that deeply resonates with you. Doerr describes the character of Werner first hearing that piano, “a lonely song that sounds to Werner like a golden boat traveling a dark river, a progression of harmonies that transfigures Zollverein: the houses turned to mist, the mines filled in, the smokestacks fallen, an ancient sea spilling through the streets, and the air streaming with possibility” (49). “Clair de Lune” changes the way Werner views the world around him, even if just for that moment; it is a moment that allows him to see beyond his world. As a reader, the specific song is not yet required, because Doerr is simply imploring us to recognize the power a song has had in our own life, in order to use that personal connection/experience, to help us better understand Werner’s relationship to the song as the novel progresses. In addition, Doerr has primed the reader moving forward, to associate the song with a significant moment in not only Werner’s life, but our own, that subconscious connection immediately ratchets up the importance the reader will place on the events directly preceding or following the next invocation of “Clair de Lune.”

Later in the novel Doerr uses the “Clair de Lune” LND to highlight the relationship music has with memories—particularly, implicit memories, buried in our subconscious. In the midst of World War II, a disillusioned Werner finds himself trapped in a building with Volkheimer following a cave in. Volkheimer is a friend from the training school, and a Nazi ideologue. While the two are trapped, the radio once again picks up the Etienne LeBlanc broadcast, and as the Frenchman signs off and “de Lune” begins to play, Volkheimer is also transported, “A single piano runs up the scales. Then back down. He listens to the notes and the silences between them, and then finds



himself... trudging through snow behind his great-grandfather.” Doerr allows the reader to become immersed in Volkheimer’s memory, to visualize his memory, and the intimacy attached to it. Doerr wants the reader to understand, or at least question, how does a seemingly innocent and kind young man embrace and make sense of Nazi ideology? The LND that has been set up by Doerr as a tool for realization and reflection for the novel’s characters, is now offered to the reader.

These offerings, while not yet ubiquitous, have become far more common in contemporary literature. Exploring a few contemporary works in greater depth will better clarify the impact of LNDs. This thesis will focus on three specific works: *A Visit From the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan, *On Beauty* by Zadie Smith, and *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* by Haruki Murakami. In chapter 1 I discuss how author Jennifer Egan primes her reader by invoking the Dead Kennedys and a number of Bay Area punk bands. How she aims to engage with the reader’s subconscious through characterization based almost entirely on mentions of musical genres or fusions of artists like Cyndi Lauper and Pretenders’ Chrissie Hynde. In *Goon Squad*, Egan uses LNDs largely to build the novel’s characters. In Chapter 2 I examine the way in which author Zadie Smith provides her readers with foundational knowledge, and activates existing schemas, in order to effectively drop Tupac and Mozart references that work as stand ins for the character’s lived experiences or dispositions. While Egan’s LNDs center around the characters, Smith employs them as thematic stand-ins. Lastly, Chapter 3 explores how author Haruki Murakami looks to trigger an auditory sensation through a character’s immersive experience with Franz Liszt’s *Years of Pilgrimage*, as well as a few Elvis Presley tracks. The chapter also focuses on the manner in which Murakami takes full

advantage of music's effect on memory with the use of a surreal frame story, and a Thelonious Monk classic. Murakami's approach most closely resembles the needle drops made in films, as they are used largely to support tones or set moods for specific scenes.

### Chapter I: *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

Of the three novels we will be examining through the lens of Literary Needle Drops, Jennifer Egan's 2010 work of "multi-protagonist fiction" deals with music the most explicitly, in that a few characters are either musicians, or work in the music industry. The novel is composed of a multitude of vignettes centering on a half dozen characters, each of whom connect through varying degrees of separation to Bennie Salazar, an aging record exec. Each story provides greater insight into Salazar and the difficulty he has coming to terms with his place in the industry. However, the Pulitzer Prize winning novel is not about music, but rather it is a novel that uses music to examine time and our relationship with it—how time frames the way we view who we were, as well as who we are. With music working as a metaphor for time, this framing technique is key, as Egan again and again uses music to frame the story's protagonist (Salazar), and more specifically, to prime the reader as to how this character would have acted in the past, in order to better understand and analyze their actions in the present.

Egan begins her work with an epigraph from Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*: "Poets claim that we recapture for a moment the self that we were long ago when we enter some house or garden in which we used to live in our youth. But these are most hazardous pilgrimages, which end as often in disappointment as in success..."(1). Music is the house/garden Egan chooses for her characters. It is the structure or construct they use to view their younger selves, to evoke autobiographical memories—often those memories that have been forgotten or tossed aside, and require a specific melody or structure to spark or reignite them. Egan demonstrates how the changes we incur as the years progress can be incremental, and the changes themselves go unnoticed. Which is

why Proust warns against revisiting these memories, making a pilgrimage into your past, because like Egan's characters, you might not like what you find. Add in the potency of music, or "the lush foliage of the garden", and the pain of one's findings is only exacerbated.

### **Sasha, The Primer**

"She and Coz were collaborators, writing a story whose end had already been determined: she would get well. She would stop stealing from people and start caring again about the things that had once guided her: music... " (6). Author Jennifer Egan kicks off this novel of intersecting stories with former record-exec assistant, part time publicist, and full time klepto, Sasha. She is in the middle of a therapy session when she considers an ending to her story that she and her therapist might find satisfying—one where she gains control over her disorder and can care about something again, and the first among those somethings, is music. This early inclusion of the importance music plays in a character's life is not only used to establish the significant role music will play in the novel, but it also primes readers to consider their own personal musical connections, which in turn activate in the reader the necessary schemas that Egan will tap into throughout the rest of the novel.

The priming continues as Egan describes how our relationship with music inevitably becomes entwined with our identity. As a date explores Sasha's home, a one bedroom apartment, Egan describes her living room-den-office as essentially a disheveled place with a couple of upholstered chairs, photo frames, and tables and window ledges filled with various souvenirs courtesy of Sasha's disorder. But there is also a clean desk,

set aside for projects outside of work, “publicity for bands she believed in” (14). Egan highlights the special, almost sacred relationship we have with music, that even in the most turbulent of times, we carve out a space to be with it.

However, Jennifer Egan does not begin her novel with only subtle hints or metaphors to signal the importance of music and its correlation with personal identity, she also shrewdly uses specific musical references to design the dust jacket of those identities. For instance, the work Sasha really cares about, in addition to publicity for bands she believed in, was writing reviews for publications such as *Vibe* and *Spin*. The selection of these publications are meticulous decisions made on the part of Egan to establish just who Sasha is. In the early aughts, *Spin* had transformed from straightforward punk and college rock publication to a destination for humorous but thoughtful musical pop culture critiques, whose style was most aptly reflected by their most famous senior writer, Chuck Klosterman. *Vibe* was the publication for news on Hip-Hop and R&B, at a time just before the genres were to emerge as the dominant form of pop music across the world. Writing for these publications allows Sasha to see herself as a molder of pop culture, or what Lee Konstantinou refers to as a “cool hunter” in his work, *Cool Characters: Irony and American Fiction*. The “cool hunter” is not overly concerned with being cool, but focused on how one can commodify what it is to “be cool” (112). Music is utilized as “cool” shorthand by the “cool hunter.” Dropping the right “favorite” album, rocking the right band-t, or repping the right label is a sure-handed way of ensuring your particular cool fetches a high market value.

### **Bennie and The Time Machine**

In the 2010 summer issue of *BOMB Magazine* interviewer Heidi Julavits makes the following statement to Jennifer Egan about *Goon Squad*: “I felt like there was no time in your time. Time was eradicated.” Egan responds:

I don't experience time as linear. I experience it in layers that seem to coexist. I feel like 20 years ago was really recent even though I was much younger and had a different kind of life. Yet at the same time I feel like I'm still kind of there. One thing that facilitates that kind of time travel is music, which is why I think music ended up being such an important part of the book. (85)

The character of Bennie Salazar, like Sasha, is introduced with a seemingly benign description that is actually working as a microcosm for the character's relationship with music. Bennie is a former punk who now runs Sow's Ear record label, and is introduced by Egan in the midst of a discussion with one of his senior record executives, who at the time is proposing dropping the band, Stop/Go, a sister duo Bennie signed a half-decade back. Bennie remembers the promise the band once had, back when he described them as “Cyndi Lauper meets Chrissie Hynde” (18). Bennie's description is a significant one, because it reveals that his relationship with music is one in which he uses the artform to relate to the past: He believes the Stop/Go will be good because they sound like music he enjoyed two decades prior.

Many of the LNDs Egan employs in the introduction of Bennie Salazar center on music as memory. As Bennie is driving to pick up his son from school he alternates between songs by the Dead Kennedys and the Sleepers, two bands he listened to growing up in the bay area. These songs serve as reminders to Bennie of not just his youth, but

what that youth consisted of. He describes said youth through the production of the bands that become the soundtrack of that era. There was a “muddiness” to the music, “the sense of actual musicians playing actual instruments in an actual room” (22). Bennie contrasts the music of his youth with that of his present, the music his label is responsible for: “bloodless constructions” (22). He compares the deep thrills produced by the old songs, the surges of sixteen-year-old energy they induced, to the tracks he and his team now churn out for people to buy and download as ringtones, all in an attempt to keep the multinational crude-oil company he sold his company to happy.

There is an authenticity Bennie identifies with the passion of his youth that he can't seem to find in the work of his adult life. Egan uses the DIY and non-conforming principles and aesthetics of punk music, specifically the bay area punk scene, to establish Bennie as a man who feels he has lost his way. He finds himself unhappy in his forties, and believes said displeasure is a result of his having sold out. As Bennie listens to Kennedys' Jello Biafra thrash his way through “Too Drunk to Fuck,” he thinks back to an awards ceremony from a few years back. As he was introducing a jazz pianist he referred to her as “incompetent” when he had meant to say “incomparable.” He chastised himself for trying to use the word, thinking, “wasn't his word, too fancy; it stuck in his mouth every time he'd practiced his speech...” (23). Here, Egan carefully selects the appropriate musical reference with the precise LND in order to create a microcosm for Bennie's depressed state. The raw, brash, simplistic nature of “Too Drunk to Fuck” juxtaposed with the elegant and incomparable acumen of a jazz pianist, makes Bennie Salazar feel incompetent. This is true with respect both to the new world he finds himself in, and his inability to stay true to who he once was.

Who we are and who we once were is a large and constantly looming existential question we wrestle with as humans, and Egan understands that such a question manifests itself in many ways, but she is clever enough to string such manifestations together, as if one begets the next. Bennie's crisis of faith, or his feeling of incompetence, is captured in his impotence. It is this physical failing that Bennie spends equal time ruminating on, and the two come to a head as Bennie sits in on an impromptu recording session of the Stop/Go. As the band gears up to play Bennie sips from his coffee and ponders the reasons for his feeling of exhilaration: "He'd been delegating too much. Hearing the music get made, that was the thing: people and instruments and beaten-looking equipment aligning abruptly into a single structure of sound, flexible and alive" (29). Like Sasha's at-home workstation, which offers her hope, the recording session offers Bennie healing. In this particular case, Bennie's healing comes in the form of an erection, which Egan describes as a rebirth of sorts, complete with religious vernacular.

Then the sisters began to sing. Oh, the raw, almost threadbare sound of their voices mixed the clash of instruments — these sensations met with a faculty deeper in Bennie than judgment or even pleasure; they communed directly with his body, whose shivering, bursting reply made him dizzy. And here was his first erection in months... He seized the cowbell and stick and began whacking at it with zealous blows. He felt the music in his mouth, his ears, his ribs — or was that his own pulse? He was on fire! (30)

Egan utilizes music to capture the impact our passions can have on us as individuals, both mental and physical. Egan's description of Bennie's response to live music and to the recording process allows the reader to tap into his consciousness, to experience his



physical expression of passion, with the hope that the same might be activated in the consciousness of the reader, thus strengthening their understanding of Bennie.

Time is the central theme of the novel, and music is Egan's dispatcher of choice. In a chapter that focuses on the fall of Conduits' (a band discovered by Bennie) frontman Bosco, the musician is discussing the press around his final tour and album, which will be titled *A to B*. In yet another meta move on the part of Egan, her novel itself is split into two sections: six chapters that fall under the section "A", and seven under "B". The novel's set-up works as an homage to classic albums, which is a metaphor for the past (A), and the present (B), or perhaps vice-versa, given the nonlinear structure of Egan's work. In his book-length study *A Visit from the Goon Squad REREAD*, author Ivan Kreilkamp refers to an interview in which Egan speaks on the novel's structure:

The novel is an homage to a form that's sadly gone—the LP... Now we buy music in this atomized way which I find sad from the point of view of the musicians, because now they're unable to conceive of large visions. They can only sell their vision in defragmented form. Who sees the whole thing? I found that poignant, and since the book is so much about time and change, it's a poignancy that seemed apt. (5)

Kreilkamp contends that to read *Goon Squad*, is to call attention to the passing of time, but specifically the passing of "modern time" (12). Kreilkamp writes, "The novel is suffused by a fear that aesthetic experience, as we used to know it, has been irrevocably transformed, downsized, rendered inauthentic and immaterial" (5). Kreilkamp's reflections here reflect the views and worries espoused by Bennie as the primary protagonist of the work. Kreilkamp contends that *Goon Squad* can even be viewed as a

work that warns us of the “Spotify era” (the platform launched in 2008, 2 years before Egan’s novel was published).

In reference to his final album, *A to B*, Bosco states, “the question I want to hit straight on: how did I go from being a rock star to being a fat fuck no one cares about?” (134). He continues, “Time’s a goon, right?” (134). Kreilkamp discusses the fact that “Time’s a goon” is not an idiom he is familiar with or came across in his research, which means in all likelihood, it is one Egan has invented. Kreilkamp hypothesizes that Egan’s idiom could have stemmed from a musical source: Elvis Costello’s “Goon Squad” from the album *Armed Forces* (18-19). The track contains the following lyrics: “Goon squad / They’ve come to look you over and they’re giving you the eye / Goon squad / They want you to come out to play / You’d better say goodbye.” If indeed Egan views Costello’s “Goon Squad” as the personification of time, it not only makes the title of the novel itself an LND, but an apt metaphor for Egan’s phrase. Bennie, Bosco, and quite a few other characters in the novel find that viewing who they are through the sands of time can be unforgiving, and can have lasting impact.

Author Gerard Moorey builds on Kreilkamp’s hypothesis in his essay, “Age, Death, and Revival: Representation of the Music Industry in Two Contemporary Novels.” The phrase, “‘Time is a goon’ explains the otherwise enigmatic title of the novel: time is a thug or bully, so that receiving ‘a visit from the goon squad’ means to be subjected to the violence and cruelty of time and its passing.” Music plays a vital role in highlighting that cruelty. Moorey discusses how time seems particularly harsh when it comes to Bosco, and Bennie because they spent much of their lives as the torchbearers of youthful energy and non-conformity, which stands in stark contrast to who they have become.

### Mixtape

In “Understanding The Delicate Art of the Mixtape” NPR music writer Stephen Thompson is quoted as saying, "I think very often with mixtapes, you're sending a little bit of a letter to the person in music form. You're mindful of the messaging but you're also saying a little something about the music you like” (Shah). The same can be said about the art of the literary needle drop. While an LND may be infinitely more nuanced (as the author often aims to be far less explicit, and yet still precise), the concept regarding messaging is the same. The collection of LNDs is a mixtape an author slides their readers, and it is the reader’s job to decipher the letter in music form using 300 pages of subtext.

Egan seems to subscribe to Thompson’s mixtape philosophy, and in a bit of metafiction includes said philosophy in her work via Bennie Salazar. In a flashback chapter Egan places the reader inside the home of Lou Kline, a record executive who eventually becomes Bennie’s mentor in the business. Bennie’s band, the Flaming Dildos, have just finished playing a show at the Mabuhay Gardens, and the gang find themselves back at the San Francisco apartment for an after party. The dynamics of the group are laid out by Rhea, the chapter’s narrator. Everyone is in love with someone, and no one is in love with each other. Alice, Bennie’s unrequited love, is lying in the lap of Scotty, who is the Dildo’s guitarist and lead singer. Scotty has decided to settle for Alice, despite being in love with Jocelyn. As the party unfolds in various corners and rooms of the apartment, Bennie plays songs from Lou’s studio, responsible for the construction of the night’s unofficial mixtape.

In his melancholic state, Bennie first plays The Beatles' "Don't Let Me Down," a love song written by John Lennon to Yoko Ono. Lennon spoke about the song, in a 1970 interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine, "When it gets down to it, when you're drowning, you don't say, 'I would be incredibly pleased if someone would have the foresight to notice me drowning and come and help me,' you just scream." The song selection seems to be a plea on the part of Bennie, for Alice, Rhea, Scotty, or any of his friends to see that he may be drowning. Bennie's second song choice is Blondie's "Heart of Glass." The song is a classic lost love track, but the pronounced disco vibe was a detour for the band, and marked a bit of transition for frontwoman Debbie Harry and guitarist Chris Stein. The same can be said for Bennie Salazer, who was in the midst of giving up on Alice, and looking toward his future with Lou. The last song dropped by Egan is Iggy Pop's "The Passenger" off his 1977 album, *Lust for Life*. Egan quotes the the first few lines of the tracks's opening verse:

I am the passenger  
 And I ride and I ride  
 I ride through the city's backside  
 I see the stars come out of the sky (55)

The track foreshadows Bennie's eventual descent to cultural vampire—the man riding around in his car, moving from club to club looking for the next music act to exploit for his corporate overlords. The line Egan delivers that ties the macro LNDs to the micro playlist/mixtape as a letter in music form is delivered by the character Rhea, who thinks in relation to Bennie's song selections, "Listening, I think, You will never know how much I understand you" (55).

The unofficial party mixtape is not the first time Jennifer Egan alludes to the concept of musical curation as a form of intimate communication. Following the impromptu erection at the impromptu recording session of the Stop/Go Bennie, drives his son home with Sasha in tow. After dropping off his son, Bennie and Sasha head back to the city, and as the two approach Lower Manhattan, Bennie plays some early Who and The Stooges before moving on to Bay Area bands like Flipper, the Mutants and Eye Protection, the groups his crew slam danced to as teenagers. Egan writes:

He sensed Sasha paying attention and toyed with the idea that he was confessing to her his disillusionment — his hatred for the industry he'd given his life to. He began weighing each musical choice, drawing out his argument through the songs themselves — Patti Smith's ragged poetry, the jock hardcore of Black Flag and the Circle Jerks giving way to alternative, that great compromise down, down, down to the singles he'd just today been petitioning radio stations to add, husks of music, lifeless an cold as the squares of office neon cutting the blue twilight.

“It's incredible,” Sasha said, “how there's nothing there.”

Astounded, Bennie turned to her. Was it possible that she'd followed his musical rant to its grim conclusion? (36)

For many, music is their language of choice, an opportunity for them to express themselves, to articulate their positions in a way they cannot in speech. Bennie is hoping to communicate with his live mixtape constructions, and he does, but not with whom he expects. While Sasha is unable to follow the mixtape thread to its conclusion, Bennie still has the opportunity to express himself. Music often allows us to have the conversation we

need most, the one we need with ourselves. After all, LNDs are ultimately a conversation the author is having with themselves, that they hope by inviting the reader to witness, they too may share in the conversation. At the end of Bennie's playlist he remembers a conversation he had with his former mentor Lou Kline in which Lou tells Bennie that nineties rock peaked with Monterey Pop. Bennie remembers thinking, "'You're finished.' Nostalgia was the end" (37). Bennie's live mixtape down memory lane reminds him that there is only the path forward, and that living in the past is to stop living.

### **For The Culture**

The chapter detailing Bennie's youth begins with Bennie and his buddy Scotty driving around in a pickup with friends listening to bootlegs of the Stranglers, the Nuns, and Negative Trend (39). Egan chooses to have the teenagers listening to little known punk bands, on bootlegs nonetheless, in order to establish that one's passion for music doesn't begin with recollection, but with construction. Music allows one to establish their identity—in the case of Bennie, one rooted in counterculture and perceived authenticity. It was not enough to listen to a proto Bay Area punk band who released a single EP, they had to listen to live bootlegs that captured the raw power of the band's live performances, an energy and authenticity that could not be reproduced in a recording booth.

A page later the chapter's narrator Rhea states, "Nineteen eighty is almost here, thank God. The hippies are getting old, they blew their brains on acid and now they're begging on street corners all over San Francisco... We're sick of them" (40-41). What matters for the teens listening is not so much the music's energy itself but the opportunity to utilize that energy to establish a culture of their own—to rebel against the previous

generation, to look down their noses at them: look what peace, love and drugs got you. To Bennie and his friends, punk was cultural parricide.

Where we live, in the ZSunset, the ocean is always just over your shoulder and the houses have Easter-egg colors. But the second Scotty lets the garage door slam down, we're suddenly enraged.. Marty plugs in his violin and we launch into our best song, "What the Fuck?":

You said you were a fairy princess

You said you were a shooting star

You said we'd go to Bora Bora

Now look at where the fuck we are... (44-45)

The song captures the rage Rhea mentions, the disillusioned spirit, the frustration a younger generation often feels towards their predecessors. They were promised a utopia by the hippies they now saw staggering around San Francisco; the hippies lost, the punks wouldn't. That confidence drove the culture, and everyone could be a part of it, even spectators, fans like Rhea, who says, "we launch into our best song" (44).

Just as music allows one to establish who they are, it can also be used to establish who they are not. Bennie's story begins a year after he transfers from a high school in Daly City, a city with a population made up of citizens who are primarily of Filipino, Salvadorian and Mexican descent, to the school in Sea Cliff. Bennie is a bit of a mystery to those in his new crew. His skin is described as light brown and he has shiny black hair. When the crew hangs down by The Pit, the cholos in leather jackets and hair nets speak Spanish to Bennie. Bennie smiles but never answers. When Rhea questions why the cholos speak Spanish to Bennie, Jocelyn responds, "Rhea, Bennie's a cholo. Isn't that

obvious.” To which Rhea shockingly fires back, “That’s factually crazy... He has a Mohawk” (42). Now, while that response may be indicative of the naivety or simplicity of youth, what can not be ignored is the impact music, and the culture it breeds, has on the ability to project or conceal one’s identity. In *The American Short Story Cycle* by Jennifer J. Smith, Jennifer Egan is quoted on record as saying, “I let Bennie be racially ambiguous, which seemed in keeping with his wishes. Bennie wanted to create himself anew, as so many Americans do” (157). Smith contends that Bennie chooses to be a punk because it allows him to brand himself differently, particularly as it relates to peers and family. Part of that branding is access to specific scenes, and specific women. Bennie’s first love is Alice, but that love is unrequited, and Jocelyn shares a theory with Rhea, on why that might be, “... rich girls won’t go with cholos. So he’ll never get Alice, period-the-end” (42). Smith believes that Bennie’s desire for Alice has everything to do with “her blond whiteness, family stability, and private-school background,” and that Alice’s rejection of Bennie, potentially due to his ethnicity, sends him on a lifelong pursuit of WASPy blonds, all stemming from his own anxieties about his background. Smith states, “He hopes that proximity to whiteness will lend him the cultural capital and sense of belonging he associates with it.” Bennie wants to establish his identity free of societal racial restraints, but in the process falls into the trap of relying on those same societal restraints to define who he is.

The bootlegs, the garage rage, and the WASPy women are all attempts on the part of Egan to establish Bennie Salazer as an adolescent through the use of punk music and its culture. The establishment of this younger Bennie Salazer is key in priming the reader to better understand the eccentric, almost comical Bennie they were introduced to in the



previous chapter, and the more grounded version that will emerge later in the novel. The priming of Bennie through music, specifically punk music, allows the audience to empathize with his frustration as he realizes the paradox of constructing his identity around a genre that loses authenticity as it gains an audience. The audience Bennie needs to grow in order to achieve the success he desires—a desire born out of a need to combat a part of his identity he cannot come to terms with. The punk bands and tracks referenced throughout the novel are indicative of Bennie’s character and his journey through lost time, but also of Egan’s keen understanding of how music impacts identity, and vice versa.

## Chapter II: *On Beauty*

The second novel we will be taking a look at is *On Beauty*, the 2005 Orange Prize winner from Jamaican-British author Zadie Smith. The novel deals with two diametrically opposed families, the Belseys and the Kipps, as their lives intertwine in a university town outside of Boston. Unlike Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, Smith's novel has no explicit connection to music in that there are no record executives or has-been rock stars mucking about, and yet music is key to framing Smith's narrative, particularly her use of the hip-hop genre. Smith employs hip-hop in a variety of contexts: bars and motifs as philosophy, rap battles as raw energy, seminal albums as bonding agents, and the academizing of hip-hop—all of which serve to highlight and present the genre of music as real, authentic, and combative, specifically as it pertains to Black culture. It is of great importance to Smith to establish hip-hop as a uniquely Black artform in order to cast the genre opposite liberal arts academia, as well as classical music, both of which are largely propelled by a lily-White discourse. Such a juxtaposition allows Smith to frame much of her novel through the lens of hip-hop.

It is no surprise that Smith would turn to the genre of hip-hop when selecting a lens by which to view her work. Zadie's brothers are Ben Harvey Bailey Smith and Luke Smith, better known for their stage names, Doc Brown and Luc Skyz. The former makes a cameo in the novel as an MC of a local Spoken Word event, and also gets a shout out in the author's note, "Thank you to my brother Doc Brown for some of Carl Thomas's imaginary lyrics" (445). Both Brown and Skyz are successful hip-hop artists in their own right, with a solid discography under their belts. According to Skyz's official site, the brothers grew up listening to A Tribe Called Quest, Wu Tang Clan, and Tupac. The role

hip-hop played in Smith's life and in the lives of her loved ones is evident in the care with which she presents the genre to establish and frame the characters of her novel, specifically Levi Belsey, the youngest of the Belsey family, and the aforementioned Carl Thomas, an aspiring rapper, and a friend of Levi's.

When viewing the LNDs found in *On Beauty* through Danesi's Modal Flow Principle we can better understand how Smith makes use of LNDs to flesh out her characters and the larger themes of identity and duality. The Modal Flow Principle hinges on experience, or connection, before analysis. It is difficult to analyze a character or a concept you lack familiarity with, but when that character or concept is associated with an intimate experience or recognizable context it becomes easier to dissect. Smith wants the decisions of Levi and Carl to be dissected, reflected on, analyzed, but she first wants to provide readers with a connection to help them do so effectively; in large part, that connection comes in the form of hip-hop.

Smith allows readers to build their understanding of *On Beauty's* characters through the central themes. The building of this understanding is strengthened by the readers' experiential acquaintance with the music of Tupac Shakur, Big Pun, Chuck D and Public Enemy, and more broadly, hip-hop motifs and the genre in general as an authentic Black cultural proxy.

### **Levi, Caught Up In the Mix**

Early in the novel Howard, the patriarch of the Belsey clan, is preparing to fly to London to prevent his eldest son from making what Howard views as a monumental mistake. On his way out the door Howard asks his youngest son, Levi, if he has a

message for his older brother. Levi quickly fires back, “tell him ‘I’m just another black man caught up in the mix, tryna make a dollah outta fifteen cents!’” (24). The words spouted by Levi are lyrics from Tupac’s “I Get Around”, one of the singles from his 1993 album, *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.*. This early LND by Smith works to frame Levi as a character, and Tupac is the contextual framework provided to help readers better understand Levi’s central struggle: his own his bi-racial identity (White English father and a Black Southern mother). In addition, the drop places the reader in the appropriate mood to better identify with the frustration and indignation expressed by Levi, and react physically to such emotions. In his essay, “Reading for Mood,” Jonathan Flatley writes, “...aesthetic experience is not a step out of the world of everyday life into an autonomous sphere with different rules and effects but a powerful social and political force shaping subjectivity as such... mood is ‘primordial’... establishing the conditions for our encounter with the world before cognition and volition” (142). Mood cannot always be controlled, it is not always a desired effect, but an instinctual one. By utilizing lines from Tupac’s track, Smith sets the stage for the reader’s visceral reaction to the previously discussed exchange between Levi and Howard, which directly follows the LND.

In order to better appreciate the Tupac LNDs Smith is utilizing, it might be helpful to recall some details about the late rapper. Tupac Shakur was a man at odds with himself, a man constantly dealing with his dueling identities. In “From Poetry to Rap: The Lyrics of Tupac Shakur” author Walter Edwards attempts to support this idea by using Tupac’s own words. In an interview with *Vibe* Tupac is reported as saying, “Everybody is at war with different things... I’m at war with my own heart.” A war is perfectly illustrated on the aforementioned album, *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.*, which

contains both “I Get Around” and the hit song “Keep Ya Head Up.” The former, as highlighted by Levi, sees Tupac comfortably playing the thug who objectifies women, kicking off the track with the following line, “Back to wreck / All respect to those who break their neck to keep their hoes in check.” Yet, only three tracks before Tupac attempts to combat that very same objectification when he raps, “I wonder why we take from our women? Why we rape our women, do we hate our women? I think it’s time we kill for our women, time we heal our women, be real to our women” in “Keep Ya Head Up.”

Derek Iwamoto explains how the “thug” portion of Tupac’s identity came to be in his essay “Tupac Shakur: Understanding the identity formation of hyper-masculinity of popular hip-hop artists.” Iwamoto suggests that because Tupac was teased as a boy for being “pretty, feminine, and artsy” he began to take on a tougher and more “manly” attitude. This new attitude is described as the “idealized portrayal of the ‘real man.’”--a man who is the opposite of what is traditionally considered feminine. While Tupac’s duality manifested over his struggle with gender expectations, Levi’s duality is born out of racial expectations. Levi finds himself stuck between two worlds. In her essay, “Kipps, Belsey, and Jegede: Cosmopolitanism, Transnationalism, and Black Studies in Zadie Smith’s *On Beauty*” author Kanika Batra describes the first world as the posh life Levi lives in a wealthy suburb with his White academic father, which creates a certain discomfort for Levi being the only black kid in a white neighborhood. The other world is one in which Levi is “trying to gain racial authenticity via experiences with hardship and oppression” (Warikoo 469). The former world leads to the creation of the second, because the only way Levi can keep himself feeling “half normal, half sane, half black” (Smith 193) is to escape the White dominated Eurocentric world of academia in which he was

raised. The world that seems oblivious to his need to better understand his racial identity. Howard's obtuse nature is evident in an exchange he has with his son about a durag he had become prone to wearing. Howard says to his son in a sort of interrogation, "What's the deal with this? Is it a political thing? An aesthetic thing. For looks only." To which Levi responds, "I guess, yeah. Just what it is, just a thing that I wear" (22). Later in the novel Howard also makes a joke of Levi's position on the concept of being "street." Levi states, "This ain't America [in reference to their posh neighborhood]. You think this is America? This is toy-town. I was born in this country - trust me. You go into Roxbury, you go into the Bronx, you see America. That's street" (63). Howard responds to his son's passionate, albeit naive, comment with, "I wonder if I'm street. I'm still healthy, got hair, testicles, eyes, etcetera. Got great testicles... I am full of verve and spunk... Can't I be street?" (63). Howard's response leads to Levi bemoaning that his father has to make everything a joke, and enlisting the help of his mother to get Howard to drop the bit. Howard's callousness toward Levi's attempts at Black expression makes it that much more difficult for Levi to establish his authentic identity. The indirect isolation imposed on him by his father leads him to rely on some fairly dubious sources for guidance. Those sources often lead to Levi viewing the world and race from a fairly shallow perspective.

Smith highlights the shallowness of Levi's view through the use of musical genres. Smith keenly employs the "Rob Gordon perspective" here. In Stephen Frears's adaptation of Nick Hornby's novel *High Fidelity*, the protagonist and record store clerk Rob Gordon states, "What really matters is what you like, not what you are like." Smith captures such a mentality as she describes the various employees at the mega-store Levi works at. There's Candy, who is in charge of the Alt. Rock/ Heavy Metal section. Candy

mopes around the store and sighs when she is asked a question, and her physical appearance is boiled down to her lightning bolt labret piercing, pink hair streaks, and torn cuticles (182). There is also “Tom from Folk Music.” Tom is against the war, and according to Levi, cool. He doesn’t let the customers get to him, he is easy going, and thus easy to be around (185). Levi’s co-worker in the “Hip-Hop, R&B, and Urban” section, LaShonda, is a single mom from Roxbury; her nails are described as talons, she has a bust that buttons can barely contain, and a “big old butt” (183). These descriptions are indicative of how Levi sees the world. Each race is placed neatly into a box of predictable behaviors and appearances –“genres”--determined by race, but held together by music. Levi’s Gordonesque view, and Howard’s indirect culture blocking is why Levi goes all in with [or *for*] hip-hop.

In a write up of *On Beauty* for the *Sociological Forum*, author Author Natasha Kumar Warikoo writes, “Levi struggles to acquire what Prudence Carter has called ‘nondominant cultural capital’ — ‘a set of taste, or schemes of appreciation and understandings,... that include preferences for particular linguistic, musical, or interactional styles’ among a low-status group” (470). It is this pursuit for nondominant cultural capital that leads Levi to adopt traits and interests that he views as “African-American-identified culture.” This is why Levi is thrilled when he stops having to float around the mega-store, and begins working exclusively in the Hip-Hop, R&B and Urban section. However, Levi is disappointed when working in the Urban section doesn’t provide him with the opportunities to discuss hip-hop in the way he thought it would. Levi loves rap, “its beauty, ingenuity and humanity... he could argue a case for its equal greatness against any of the artistic products of the human species. Half an hour of a

customer's time spent with Levi expressing this enthusiasm would be like listening to Harold Bloom wax lyrical about Falstaff" (181-182). In this description of Levi's passion for hip-hop Smith once again highlights the two worlds Levi is having difficulty reconciling. He knows the beauty of his Black culture, embodied by rappers, "the present-day American poets" (79), but he can't seem to appreciate it out of the context of the world he has known his entire life. It is not enough to recognize the beauty in hip-hop, Levi wants his other world to recognize it as well. Smith cleverly ties these worlds together with her Bloom analogy. Levi approaches hip-hop, consciously or unconsciously, the only way he knows how, academically.

The beauty and appreciation Levi has for the artform, as well as his propensity to view it through a literary lens, is captured by an LND later in the novel. Smith alludes to Puerto Rican rapper Big Pun, and his smash hit "Still Not a Player," just as Levi throws on his "Michelin Man coat" in preparation to skip out on school:

He pressed play on his iPod (the earphones of these had never left his ears). He got lucky. It was a beautiful song by the fattest man in rap: a 400-pound, Bronx-born, Hispanic genius. Only twenty-five years old when he died of a coronary, but still very much alive to Levi and millions of kids like Levi. Out of the coffee shop and down the street Levi bounced to the fat man's ingenious boasts, similar in their formality to those epic boasts one finds in Milton, say, or in the Iliad... His body simply loved this song; he made no attempt to disguise the fact that he was dancing down the street, the wind at his back making him as fleet of foot as Gene Kelly. (241-242)



Eventually, love and appreciation of hip-hop isn't enough for Levi; he needs more, but it is still hip-hop that works as the catalyst. After quitting his job at the mega-store, Levi finds himself walking around Roxbury, when he stumbles across a group of Haitian men selling CDs on the street. As the men attempt to lure potential customers over to their table, Levi falls into almost a trance-like state, so enamored and drawn he is toward people he perceives as “authentically” Black:

The men sang and bantered among themselves, as if prospective customers didn't even matter. Their display was so magnificent no further hustling was required. They struck Levi as splendid beings, from quite another planet than the one he had been in only five minutes ago — spring-footed, athletic, carelessly loud, coal-black, laughing, immune to the frown of the Bostonian ladies passing with their stupid little dogs ... “Hey, you want hip-hop? Hip-hop? We got your hip-hop here,” said one of the guys, like an actor breaking the suspended disbelief of the fourth wall. He reached out his long fingers to Levi, and Levi walked towards him at once. (193-194)

Levi quickly befriends the Haitian immigrants, and adopts their struggle as his own. Levi particularly grows close to Choo, after the two bond over the album, *Fear of a Black Planet* by Public Enemy. Smith's LND here serves to usher Levi along on his journey, to help widen the depth of his understanding of the Black diaspora. Choo says of the album, “That's when we knew, we understood! We were not the only ghetto. I was only thirteen but suddenly I understood. America has ghettos! And Haiti is the ghetto of America!” (360). When describing the desire of the human condition to imitate, to empathize when experiencing art, Socrates wrote, “...we give ourselves over to following the imitation;

suffering along with the hero in all seriousness, we praise as a good poet the man who most puts us in this state” (Flatley 142). Smith puts the reader in Levi’s mental and physical state as soon as she references *Fear of a Black Planet*, because for many, the album is synonymous with the track “Fight the Power”--a track that elicits the sort of pugnacity often required to bring about change not only within yourself, but with the society working against your interests.

Levi’s re-education is a process. First, he acquires a certain level of awareness from his Haitian friends. Levi is proud to be on the streets selling knock off Gucci and Prada to passerbys. Levi views the act as hustlin, which beats selling, which is what he did at the mega-store. During one of Levi’s soliloquies on hustlin’, Levi begins mocking the clientele, “Can you believe these stupid bitches be paying thirty dollars for a three-dollar handbag? That shit’s unbelievable. That’s the hustle” (246). At which point Choo asks Levi how much he paid for his shoes. When Levi proudly responds “A hundred and twenty dollars.” Choo then blows smoke from his nostril and states, “Fifteen dollars to make... No more. Fifteen dollars. You’re the one being hustled, my friend” (246-247). Levi getting checked by Choo for his ignorance is key to Levi’s development, and is reinforced by the aforementioned track, “Fight The Power.” The track contains the following lines, “To revolutionize make a change nothing's strange / People, people we are the same / No we're not the same / 'Cause we don't know the game / What we need is awareness, we can't get careless.” Levi, while still incredibly naive, attempts to take his developing self awareness, and run with it. Levi begins reading a book on Haiti, one that expounds on the history, circumstances and impact of the nearly 30 year reign of father-son autocrats François (Papa Doc) and Jean-Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier. Levi

begins to understand that most Black men are just caught up in the mix, and he boils down the book to two Black men, who had seen White people in a white house for so long, “that now it seemed reasonable to them that everybody should die so that they got a chance to live in it too” (355).

Smith returns to music to highlight the impact and overall trajectory of Levi’s journey of self-discovery, his effort to find his place in a world he knew he was meant to be a part of. While visiting Wellington Levi runs into Carl who shows him the work he has been doing as an archivist in the Music Library. Levi requests the music of a Haitian group he had heard his friends discussing, and provides a phonetic spelling of the group’s name to Carl. When Levi returns home from the library, his mother notices that he has been crying, and questions him about it. Smith writes, “she didn’t know the half of it: couldn’t know, would never know, the lovely sadness of that Haitian music, or what it was like to sit in a small dark booth and be alone with it - the plangent, irregular rhythm, like a human heartbeat, the way the many harmonized voices had sounded, to Levi, like a whole nation weeping in tune” (408).

### **Carl, Against A Sharp White Background**

It was Zora Neale Hurston who wrote, “I feel my most colored, when I am thrown against a sharp white background.” And while I do not think it was an accident that Smith names the lone daughter of the Belsey clan Zora, it is actually the character of Carl who most embodies Hurston’s sentiment. Carl, the aforementioned friend of Levi and up and coming rapper, desperately wishes to be thrown against a sharp white background, not for the experience of culture per se, but for the opportunities such a background affords.

When we first meet Carl he's listening in on the Belseys' conversation concerning Mozart, yearning to be a part of it, and badly wanting to inform the family that Mozart died prior to finishing *The Lacrimosa* and that a lesser known musician, Sussmayr, finished his work (72). The purpose for the Mozart LND is twofold. On a micro level, it is used as a source of hope and inspiration for Carl. He tells Zora that the best part of Mozart's Requiem is the part that was not written by him. Carl states, "it made me think damn, you can be so close to genius that it like lifts you up" (137). Carl intends to be lifted by becoming part of a world outside the neighborhood he grew up in. So he sneaks into the pool at Wellington to swim, attends free classical concerts in the park, and informs a well-off student from Wellington, that Sussamayr finished *The Lacrimosa*. On a macro level the LND is used to establish hip-hop's foil—he proxy for the dominant discourse, the sharp white background Carl yearns for. Smith establishes this perception through Kiki Belsey, Levi's mother. She is a Black woman who has gained access to the world of Mozart, and while at the concert in the park, her appreciation cannot be contained, "It's obviously the work of genius... I don't see how it's possible not to be moved by music like that... It's like God's music or something" (71-72). When Levi expresses a lack of gratitude and desire to listen to Mozart, Kiki chastises him, "We're not animals. We can sit for half an hour like respectable folk" (62)--the implication being that classical music is for civilized people. If Levi is looking to Tupac and hip-hop to help establish his authentic identity, then Carl is looking to Mozart and classical music to help establish his.

The door that leads to a sharp white background is oddly enough first cracked open in a Black space. Shortly after Mozart in the Park Carl performs at The Bus Stop in

Roxbury. The club is a cool spot known for hosting Spoken Word Poetry events as well as up and coming musicians. Carl's performance tears the place down, as he is quickly announced the new champion by the event's MC, Doc Brown. Carl is riding high, walking through a sea of cheering patrons, one of whom describes him as "Keats with a knapsack" (230), another merging of the worlds on Smith's part. And his pride swells; as he thinks "all is good with the world," he is confronted by Claire Malcolm. Claire is a professor at Wellington, and referred to as a "poet poet" by Zora (77). Claire asks Carl, "Are you interested in refining what you have?" (232). In other words, Claire wishes to transform Carl from inner city rapper to Wellington poet (Batra 1083). Carl eventually joins Claire's poetry class as a "discretionary" student and during his first class he sees his raw lyrics reduced to iambs, spondees, and trochees (259), and in her essay "After Theory: Academia and the Death of Aesthetic Relish in Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*" author Gemma Lopez states that Carl himself begins to be "ferociously filtered through Claire's relentless dissection (361). A few classes in, Carl begins to succumb to the sharp white background. After he receives positive feedback on a sonnet, he begins to second guess his process and presentation: "He had written his sonnet out sloppily, as he wrote his raps, with a pencil, on scrap paper crumpled and stained. Now he felt this medium was not quite good enough for his new way of writing his message. He resolved to type the damn thing out sometime if he could get access to a keyboard" (260-261). Carl begins to feel the contrast of that sharp white background, and opts to assimilate, and assimilate.

This assimilation on the part of Carl moves him further from his initial goal of self-actualization, and the cementing of an authentic identity. When Carl's status as a "discretionary" student becomes an issue for the university, he is ushered over to the

Music Library and given a low wage job as hip-hop archivist for the Department of Black Studies. The day Carl helps Levi find the Haitian musicians that end up having such a profound impact on the young man, Levi asks Carl if he is still making music. Carl replies in the negative before making a few excuses and then pivoting to his work at the library. Carl has allowed himself to be erased by Wellington, absorbed by the sharp white background, and all Levi can think is that Carl is a shell of his former self: “all that was beautiful and thrilling and true had utterly evaporated” (389).

Carl eventually comes to this conclusion as well; he realizes the world he had been yearning to be a part of was not what he thought it would be. He expresses as much in the midst of blowup with Zora at a Wellington party:

You people don't behave like human beings, man - I ain't never seen people behave like you people. You don't tell the truth, you deceive people. You all act superior, but you're not telling the truth... People like me are just toys to people like you... I'm just some experiment for you to play with. You people aren't even black any more, I don't know what you are... you got your college degrees, but you don't even live right. (417-418)

### **Crossroads & Concrete**

Both Levi and Carl's stories boil down to crossroads and concrete. One of Carl's most significant contributions to The Music Library are the mini-discographies he constructs based on specific themes or motifs. One such discography centers on the motif of crossroads in hip-hop: “All mention of crossroads, imagery on album covers of crossroads, and raps based on the idea of a crossroads in someone's life journey” (375).

Both Levi and Carl find themselves at a crossroads of sorts. How will they break into the worlds that have eluded them? How will they help themselves establish authentic identities once they have gained access? Who will they become, as Black men? And the answers Levi hopes for brings us back to Tupac. When Levi fantasizes about a life with his co-worker LaShonda and their happily ever after, he imagines them “two roses growing out of concrete” (184). A book of Tupac’s poetry was published posthumously in 1999; the collection was titled *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*. The following is the titular poem in full:

***The rose that grew from concrete***

Did you hear about the rose that grew from a crack in the concrete

Proving nature’s law wrong it learned 2 walk without having

feet

Funny it seems but by keeping its dreams

it learned 2 breathe fresh air

Long live the rose that grew from concrete

when no one else even cared

What is most tragic about Tupac’s most famous poem, is that while Tupac indeed became a rose, successful and influential beyond his wildest dreams, he died in a way all too familiar to those seeds planted in concrete: violently. In a review of the collection for *Complex*, essayist Nathan McAlone wrote, “In the end the concrete choked the rose, but not its memory.” This is the sentiment Smith hopes to invoke with this final LND. Both Levi and Carl have demonstrated an incredible amount of growth throughout the novel, proving to be roses, pushing through the hard slabs of bi-racial imposter syndrome and

dominant discourse exclusion. But neither Levi nor Carl are naive enough to think the dangers that made their growth so improbable no longer linger. Smith wants the reader to acknowledge what the two men have achieved, while understanding that in America, the rose is always in danger of being “choked.”



### Chapter III: *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*

Very few contemporary writers embrace the literary needle drop like Japanese author Haruki Murakami. He is a true ambassador of the LND. His novel, *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, essentially doubles as a Murakami mixtape. The work makes mention of Dylan, Boone, Ellington, and Duran Duran, to name only a few. *Hard-boiled* also contains the following line, “Music brings a warm glow to my vision, thawing mind and muscle from their endless wintering” (369). The line emphasizes not only the mental impact music can have, but the physical impact as well. It acknowledges music as a potential bridge to our past. Yet to cross that structure is not always to arrive at nostalgia. In the short story “Yesterday,” Murakami warns that music might force the listener to relive memories, and not always ones of our choosing. In tackling this concept the author writes, “Music has the power to revive memories, sometimes so intensely that they hurt.”

In yet another novel, Murakami imbues music with far greater powers than that of resurrection. In *Kafka on the Shore*, Murakami poses the question, does music have the power to change people? To which the character of Oshima responds, “Yes, I have had that experience. Not often, but it has happened. It’s like falling in love” (379). Murakami believes in the transformational quality of music, to challenge and change who we are on a fundamental level. It is this relationship, this love for music, that makes it an essential component of Murakami’s writing. This is why Murakami includes what amounts to a listening guide for each of his novels on his website ([https://www.harukimurakami.com/resource\\_category/playlist](https://www.harukimurakami.com/resource_category/playlist)). The tracks Murakami selects to include in his novels are not pulled from the playlist of the day to be used as a

mere prop. They are purposefully collected artifacts, used as elements of the novel's mise en scene.

With this idea in mind, we will examine Murakami's music selections in his novel, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*. The novel focuses on a young engineer, Tsukuru Tazaki, who is still dealing with the fallout from being ostracized by a group of teenage friends two decades prior. Tsukuru was cut from his friend's lives abruptly and without explanation, and he becomes determined to settle his past as a means to preserve his future. In the novel, Murakami makes use of Franz Liszt's "Le mal du pays" and "Petrarch's Sonnet 47," Thelonius Monk's "Round Midnight," and Elvis Presley's "Viva Las Vegas" and "Don't Be Cruel," to trigger the reader, to invite them to engage in what Guillemette Bolens calls "perceptual simulations" (26). In the intro to her book, *The Style of Gestures: Embodiment and Cognition in Literary Narrative*, Bolens states: "In literary narrative, any kinesic information functions as gesture... since such information constitutes corporeal data 'uttered' textually and meant to communicate information about the plot and characters" (27). I contend that an LND qualifies as such an utterance: a kind of "pre-auditory" gesture in the form of nonverbal communication. Murakami carefully attaches pieces of music to specific characters. He inserts LNDs in the form of lyrics, ringtones, and diegetic performances to establish mood—a mood derived not only from the lyrical content and compositional background of said piece, but from the melody, tempo, and texture of the piece as well.

### Dueling Pianos

The first time the reader is introduced to Franz Liszt's "Le mal du pays" is in Chapter 4, shortly after Tsukuru meets Haida, a peculiar young man Tsukuru meets while swimming in the university pool. Tsukuru has little interest in music, a trait that symbolizes Tsukuru's lack of self identity or sense of self. Murakami seems to suggest that music injects life into the world; a failure to recognize that beauty is to exist, but not truly live. However, the novel makes clear that the state of living and existing is fluid. When Tsukuru hears "Le mal du pays," he recognizes the piece's melody. It is the soundtrack of his past. Tsukuru explains to Haida that his friend from high school, Shiro, often played the piece on her piano. While Tsukuru is a self proclaimed novice when it comes to music, he connects to the mood set by "Le mal du pays." In his conversation with Haida, Tsukuru states, "I don't know much about music. But every time I heard it I thought it was beautiful... It had a calm sadness, without being sentimental" (56).

Throughout the novel Tsukuru indirectly identifies the loss of his friends as the catalyst for his current lot in life, his period of isolation. When in reality, the loss of his friends was merely the lifting of the veil. Even when part of a "harmonious community" Tsukuru was alone, because others cannot provide one with a sense of self. It is the idea of self identity, or lack of it, that truly plagues Tsukuru. Which is why "Le mal du pays" becomes the character's leitmotif. The work appears in an abundance of chapters (4,7,10,11,13,16 and 19), and is described in the novel as "the groundless sadness called forth in a person's heart by a pastoral landscape. Homesickness. Melancholy" (57). The description of "Le mal du pays" put forth by Murakami is meant to encapsulate the character of a "colorless" Tsukuru Tazaki. The pastoral landscape painted by the piece

stands in stark contrast to Tsukuru, who if conjured up in a painting, would likely be depicted as a barren landscape. However, the pastoral landscape is not meant to be Tsukuru as he is, but as he could be. Or perhaps more pointedly, the pastoral landscape evoked by the song reflects what lies beneath the surface of Tsukuru, concealed by self-misperception. Haida describes such a perception of composer Franz Liszt, stating, “Most people see Liszt’s piano music as more superficial, and technical... but if you listen very carefully to his music you discover a depth to it that you don’t notice at first. Most of the time it’s hidden” (Murakami, 56). Haida’s description works as a parallel to one the reader might have conjured in their mind in relation to Tsukuru. On the surface, Tsukuru presents as an amalgamation of daily routines and apathy, technically stitching together enough attributes to constitute a life. However, as Tsukuru learns to maneuver around pitfalls and roadblocks, his depth is revealed to both himself and the reader. “Le mal du pays” is selected by Murakami to be the prism through which to view Tsukuru, one that both reveals his current shortcomings, and foreshadows his eventual growth.

Liszt’s piece extends beyond the establishment of character in the novel. It is also enlisted to set the mood of the novel. “Le mal du pays” appears in a collection of three Liszt suites titled, *Years of Pilgrimage*. We find Tsukuru in the midst of his pilgrimage, as one always is, but during a time of particular sadness. “Le mal du pays” roughly translates to “homesickness,” or the “melancholy” felt from it. Tsukuru’s homesickness was not a yearning for his hometown (he had very little affection for Nagoya), but homesickness entrenched in a larger philosophical idea of a homebase, a foundation from which to build an identity. Those we surround ourselves with are crucial to our personal development, especially during adolescence. Tsukuru was in the process of said

development when the means were ripped away. This placed his homebase in a state of flux.

The state in which Tsukuru perpetually finds himself is meant to be shared with the reader. At times, a mood may be better conveyed, or in the case of the novel, heightened through music. Words are powerful, but not always optimal in terms of capturing a visceral feeling, especially when those words must endure the process of translation. In her article, “Murakami Haruki’s Sound of Music: Personal Impressions of a Translator,” author Ursula Grafe contends that Murakami’s use of musical motifs helps translators of his novels understand the mood the author is looking to set. Essentially, music transcends language. Murakami has a keen understanding of this principle, and thus selects music to work as a companion to his novels.

Murakami’s inclusion of music certainly helps the author’s prose pack a punch when it comes to establishing characterization and mood. But if the reader is willing to follow the characters on their musical journey by listening to the specific selections, Murakami rewards the reader by revealing additional layers to the larger work. For instance, the first 10 notes of Lazar Berman’s rendition of “Le mal du pays” come in slowly, dispersed in anticipation of impending pain. These opening measures are followed by a frenzy of notes filled with the anxiety emblematic of the moment just before one’s footing is lost, a build of pulsating notes as you fall slowly to the earth once firmly under your feet. Then, all becomes calm, the piece evens out with notes that reveal and retreat in a manner somewhat timid. This calming selection suggests a revelation: you are not where you once were, and that knowledge builds a fluttering confidence, which quickly gives way to fear, and then sorrow. The piece ends almost where it began,

but muted: anxiety turned to apathy. Through the use of music, Murakami is inviting the reader to not merely witness the pain of his hero, but to feel it as well.

An additional piece from Liszt's *Years of Pilgrimage* is used in the novel. Though not as prevalent as "Le mal du pays," the use of "Petrarch's Sonnet 47" further displays Murakami's appreciation for music as a multidimensional artform. The piece appears in chapter 13. As Tsukuru prepares for his trip to Finland, he plays the first, and his favorite, record from the Liszt box set left behind by Haida. The B side of the record begins with "Le mal du pays," the piece that has followed Tsukuru from adolescence into a fledgling adulthood and that works as Tsukuru's central motif for the majority of the novel. In contrast, "Petrarch's Sonnet 47" is utilized to foreshadow the end of this particular arc in his journey, as it is the final track on the B side of the record, similar to Egan's use of A and B sides. The work is significant in relation to Tsukuru due to its compositional background. The piece of music was written for Italian poet Francesco Petrarca, one of the earliest humanists (Searle). The inspiration behind the piece is significant in that it points toward a future goal of Tsukuru, to once again become a member of a harmonious community. The doctrine of humanism affirms the need for the individual to take responsibility for their own lives, and contribute to the community in which they live. In this new community Tsukuru can become actively engaged, due to entering with a fuller understanding of self that has begun and will continue on his upcoming trip to Finland. The composition of "Petrarch's Sonnet 47" supports such a notion.

The piece begins with the high pitched notes from the far end of the scale played in succession, before swiftly transitioning to a barrage of notes, colorful in tone, blended seamlessly, with the occasional use of power for emphasis. The piece is steady

throughout until a scale of notes triggers a fall, but unlike in “Le mal du pays,” the listener is lifted up. The bright sounds reemerge, the pitch of the notes increase and we are back on our feet, all the better for having endured it. The piece allows the listener to feel anxiety, even fear, but never allows them to be overcome by it. The piece is a sonic manifestation of the ebb and flow of life, a reminder that no matter how difficult circumstances may become, “this too shall pass.”

While proto-impressionist pieces from the Classical genre were selected to work as the larger motif of the novel, Murakami includes other genres to serve as foils. Despite the similarities that exist between Classical and Jazz music, there is a perception that the two are almost the antithesis to one another, and it is with this perception, that Murakami makes use of Thelonious Monk’s “Round Midnight.” The song appears in a frame story utilized in chapter 5. Haida tells a story about his father and the mysterious stranger, Midorikawa. In the story, Midorikawa spins a fantastical story about a looming death and people, with glowing colors. In the midst of his tale, Midorikawa sits at a piano and plays a single song, Monk’s “Round Midnight.” Not only is the piece said to be about reflection and memories, but the construction of the piece itself stands in stark contrast with the technical nature of Tsukuru’s motif, “Le mal du pays.” Jazz pieces are played and shared in the tradition of oral storytelling. Every performance is different, and often beholden to the whims of the storyteller. Pieces are constructed by working outside of traditional form and technique. In his article “Thelonious Monk’s Pianism,” author Benjamin Givan describes Monk as the “genre’s archetypal nonconformist” (Givan, 404). Givan points out that Monk’s piano skills were historically speaking, incompetent. However, what people failed to realize was that Monk’s pieces were not designed to cater to conventional

standards, but redefine them. This is the reason behind Murakami placing “Round Midnight” in Haida’s story, and at the fingertips of Midorikawa. Those characters are meant to embody Monk’s philosophy. As foils, they challenge Tsukuru to confront his past, and push him to reflect and pursue a truer sense of self.

### **The King**

Jazz is not the only American music genre Murakami makes use of. In fact, Murakami is known for his use of American pop culture. In the article, “Two Murakamis and Their American Influence,” author Glynne Walley discusses Haruki Murakami’s use of American pop culture in his works, as a signifier of his Japanese characters’ outsider status. Despite the ubiquity of American pop culture in Japan, Walley contends that Murakami’s characters will often embrace “Elvis” and “hamburgers,” as a way to distance themselves from the cultural norms of Japan. Walley’s theory holds water when it comes to Murakami’s use of Presley’s “Viva Las Vegas.” The iconic Elvis track appears in chapter 10 in the form of a ringtone. The ringtone belongs to Ao, the Lexus dealer and Tsukuru’s former high school friend. Upon hearing the ringtone Tsukuru thinks to himself, “Elvis Presley’s ‘Viva Las Vegas!’ No matter what sort of spin you put on it, it was not exactly the right ringtone for a shrewd Lexus salesman” (Murakami, 143). Tsukuru’s observation is spot on, and it supports the theory put forth by Glynne Walley.

Ao has accepted his role in Japanese society. He is even working to help Toyota replace the German car companies as the top retailer of high-end luxury automobiles. He only plays sports for business purposes, his cellphone eliminates any reprieve he might otherwise have, and he can barely remember himself as the rugby captain who used to



rally the team, even for losing efforts. His life is the “day in day out” of adult responsibilities, except the ringtone. The ringtone allows Ao to remember the glory days, before the potbelly and kids, when the future held infinite possibilities. “Viva Las Vegas” is the epitome of foolish American idealism: greed and lack of ambition packaged as the courage to pursue one’s dream. The idea that you can arrive in the City of Sin penniless, and leave with a fortune—the idea of a life full of pretty women and opportunity, as long as you have the “strong heart” and “nerve of steel” to go ahead and grab it. It is a preposterous song, fueled by an even more preposterous film, in which Elvis annoys Ann Maragaret into a date that includes a helicopter and waterskiing.

The percussion that kicks off the track makes it not only destined for ringtone infamy, but immediately reaffirms Murakami’s usage of the track. The thump of the bongos creates an almost daydream-like atmosphere, void of any sort of reality. The saxophone riff as Elvis croons about a “thousand pretty women” is the stuff of middle-age fantasy. The guitar riffs in between shouts of “viva Las Vegas” are meant to ratchet up the excitement for the spoils of riches available to those who dream big. After Elvis proclaims that the fun to be had greatly outweighs what might be lost, he is joined by a chorus of men for the outro, one that builds in pomp and circumstance, reaffirming that there are other dreamers out there. Walley points out in his article that Murakami is often criticized for employing American pop culture without ever condemning it for its potentially damaging impact. But a case can be made for Murakami doing just that with his inclusion of “Viva Las Vegas,” given the context in which it appears: in the form of a vapid ringtone, used to remind a once kind young man of one of America’s worst exports: shallow dreams.

Murakami's presentation of Presley's "Don't Be Cruel" is equally unconventional as "Viva Las Vegas," but far more endearing. In chapter 14, Tsukuru dines alone at a restaurant in Finland the night before he plans to see Eri, the high school friend he hopes holds the key to all that went wrong all those years ago. In the restaurant a performer plays the Elvis tune on an accordion, as he sings along in Finnish. The parallels between the circumstances Tsukuru finds himself in and the lyrical content of the song are quite evident. The heart of the track is contained in the following lyrics: "please let's forget the past/ the future looks bright ahead/ don't be cruel/ to a heart that's true." The lyrics capture the feelings Tsukuru is bringing into his meeting with Eri. Tsukuru is hoping to address the past, but not rehash or dwell on it; his sit down with Eri is about closure. His hope is that by securing much needed closure, Tsukuru can begin building a brighter future for himself. Music as a distillation device for a character's trials and triumphs is yet another manner in which Murakami makes use of a powerful art form.

The carefully curated collection of classical and jazz pieces, along with pop songs allows Haruki Murakami the opportunity to build a world that stretches beyond the words of his pages. Murakami's love for music, and his keen sense of how to allow that love to manifest itself in a literary device that enriches his narratives through added characterization and the establishing of mood is breathtaking. As is Murakami's deep appreciation for the transcendent power of music. Consider once again Murakami's use of Presley's "Don't Be Cruel," or specifically, the manner in which the song is presented. Murakami places a song about loss, fear, love, and forgiveness, by the King of Rock n Roll, an American pop culture icon, in the hands of a Finnish accordion player. He does this because Murakami understands that art transcends the intense pull of language and

culture. When a matter of the human condition is being addressed, it doesn't much matter if the message is delivered by a guitar or accordion, in English, Finish, or Japanese, it will resonate. Not because language, religion, history, and geography do not matter, but because what makes us the same, transcends what makes us different.

“Music expresses that which cannot be put into words  
and that which cannot remain silent” – Victor Hugo

### **Conclusion: Harbingers**

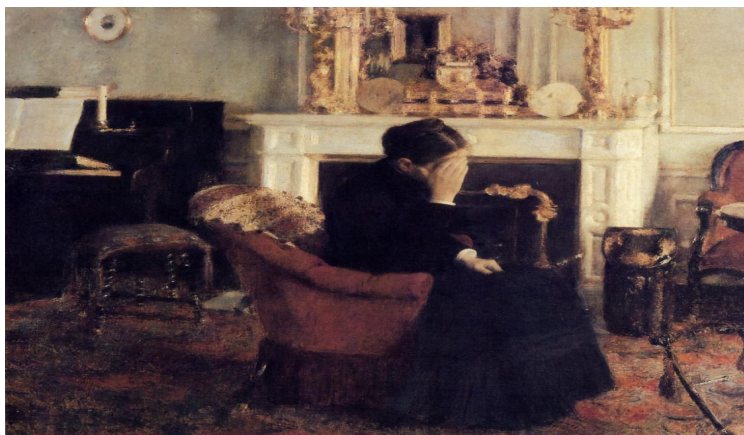
In her essay, “Books With Soundtracks: The Future of Reading?” published by *The Atlantic*, author Betsy Morais explores the idea of reading as a multimodal experience. LNDs will no longer operate simply as pre-auditory cues activated only in the mind of the listener, but actual cues for the incorporation of music at specific moments in a literary work. Morais first points to Booktrack, a company founded by brothers Mark and Paul Cameron. The company produces film style soundtracks/scores for audiobooks, with the hopes of providing readers with "a more cinematic-type experience" (Morais). In addition, author Jeff VanderMeer had each of the novels from his popular Ambergris trilogy soundtracked. Aligning the first book in the cycle with Robert Devereaux’s album, *Fungicide*, before he commissioned the final two installments to be soundtracked by The Church (*Shriek*) and Murder By Death (*Finch*).

More recently (October 2021), the eclectic and interactive literary magazine, McSweeney’s, published “Issue 64: Audio Issue”. The publication’s site describes the issues as “a riotous exploration of audiovisual storytelling... Each piece in the issue establishes its own relationship between audio and print—the contributor’s unique experiment in weaving the mediums" ([www.mcsweeneys.net](http://www.mcsweeneys.net)). A month after McSweeney’s 64th issue comic creators Matthew Rosenberg and Tyler Boss released the first issue of their new creator owned series, *What’s The Furthest Place From Here?*. The first issue, and every subsequent issue included a 7” vinyl with two original songs written specifically for the comic. The 7” for the series’ first issue included tracks from punk

bands Jawbreaker and Joyce Manor. This month (April 2022), Janelle Monáe will release *The Memory Librarian: And Other Stories of Dirty Computer*, a collection of short stories based or influenced by her 2018 Afrofuturist album, *Dirty Computer*. An entire collection of short stories explicitly connected to music—a table of contents made up of LNDs. This is not to say that reading multimodal prose or comics will become the norm, or that copious amounts of albums will get the short story treatment, but it highlights the fact that the LND has arrived, it is an effective tool for the contemporary author, and it is one they are not letting go of anytime soon.

### Coda

The painting, *Listening to Schumann*, by Fernand Khnopff, places the listener, not the player front and center, in an attempt to capture the emotional impact of music. In her essay, “Picturing Listening in the Late Nineteenth Century,” author Anne Leonard states, in regards to Khnopff’s *Schumann*, “Having the single figure cover her face with her hand was... a means to underscore the emotions induced by music as among the profoundest in human experience” (275).



Fernand Khnopff, *Listening to Schumann*, 1883, oil on canvas, 40 x 45 7/8, Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium

Astronomer Carl Sagan said, "Writing is perhaps the greatest of human inventions, binding together people who never knew each other, citizens of distant epochs. Books break the shackles of time. A book is proof that humans are capable of working magic." It is no surprise that the "profoundest" of human experiences and the "greatest of human inventions" found their way to each other, it was inevitable. Because if an author's intent is to engage the reader in a shared existential struggle, to grapple with human existence then there are fewer tools at their disposal that contain the value or versatility of an LND.

An LND is capable of priming the reader, preparing them for how a character may react or a how situation might play out. It is a tool adept at transporting both characters and readers through time-the right song choice or billed band can contextualize a scenario through personal lived experiences or the overwhelming power of adolescent nostalgia. When LNDs are used in rapid succession or part of a larger tapestry weaved throughout a work it can become a sort of cypher; subtext, a code exchanged from character to character and author to reader, with the hope that cracking said code will result in a deeper level of communication. This multifaceted instrument can be both a cultural cudgel and castanet, used to both bludgeon and amplify. An LND is an intimation, one that nudges the reader toward a particular mood in order to activate the appropriate instinct. And at its strongest, when it is being wielded in an attempt to yield its greatest impact, an LND is a world generator. The melody of a song percolates in the mind of the reader following a pre-auditory cue, each note a block of an incipient build, the construction of a dwelling designed for thoughtful reflection and analysis. If the past

indicated that the concept of a literary needle drop was inevitable, the future may point toward ubiquity.

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