



# That Modern Malice: Exploring Representations and Understandings of Bebop Over 50 Years of Jazz Historiography

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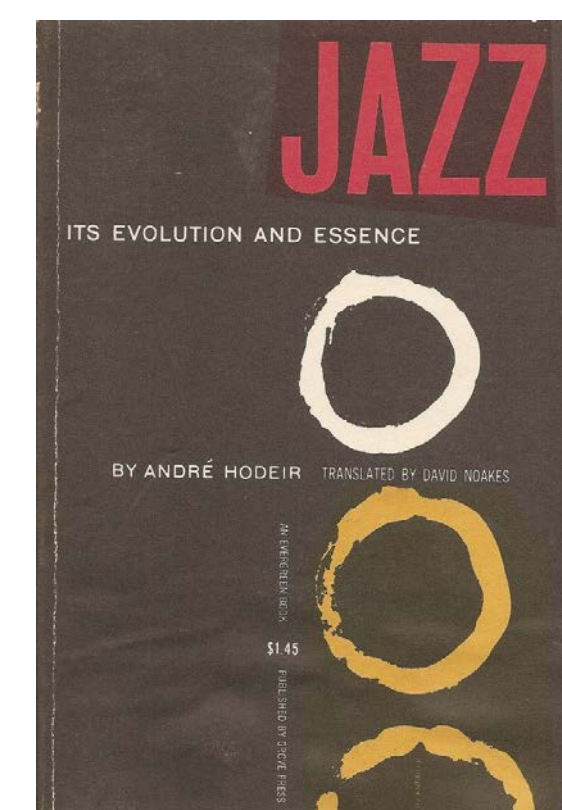
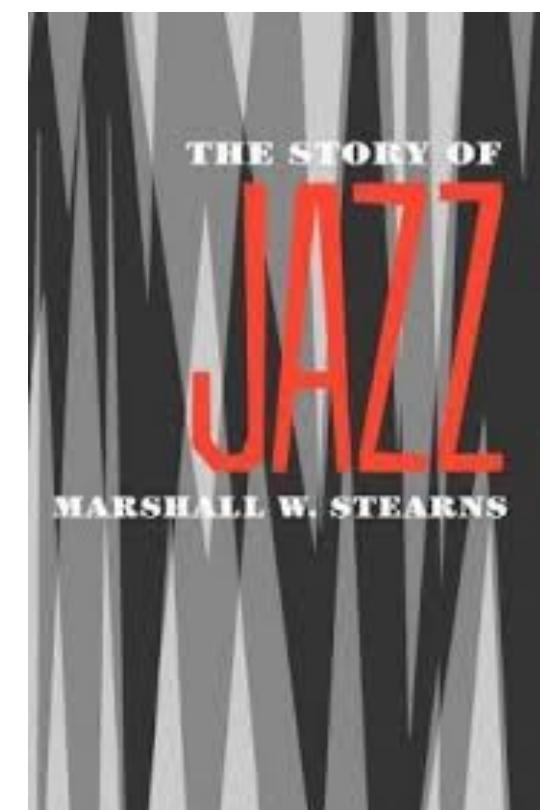
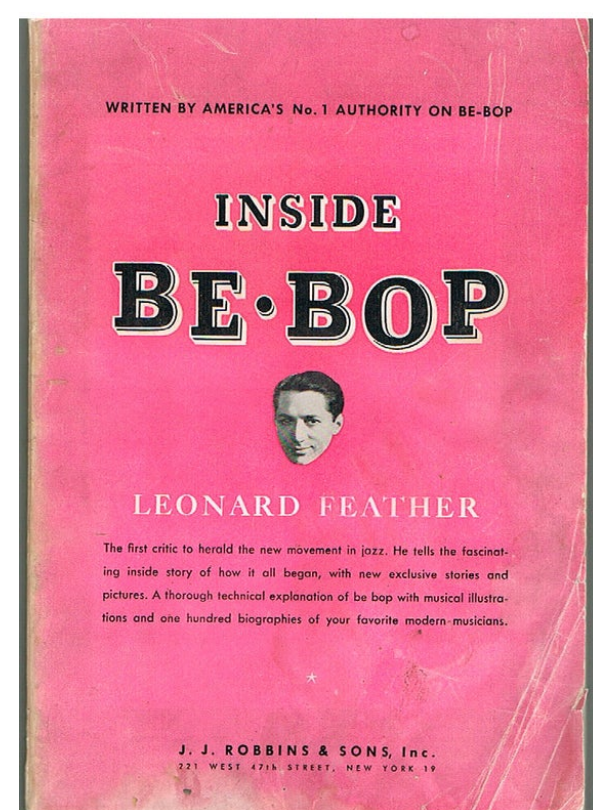


**Bebop, and the modern jazz tradition that followed is arguably the most important development in jazz as it is practiced today.** Historiographical discourse dealing with the origins and influences of bebop is therefore a critical component in understanding the whole of modern jazz from musical, artistic, social, and political perspectives.

Jazz historiography addressing the origins of bebop and its impact on modern jazz can be divided **into three general periods**. The specific traits in the types of analysis that develop and unfold over time are relatively consistent within those periods. Each of these periods can be associated with common ideologies and areas of focus that function as identifying features of those periods.

## Bebop as “The New Music” Through Characteristics and Trends: 1947-1959

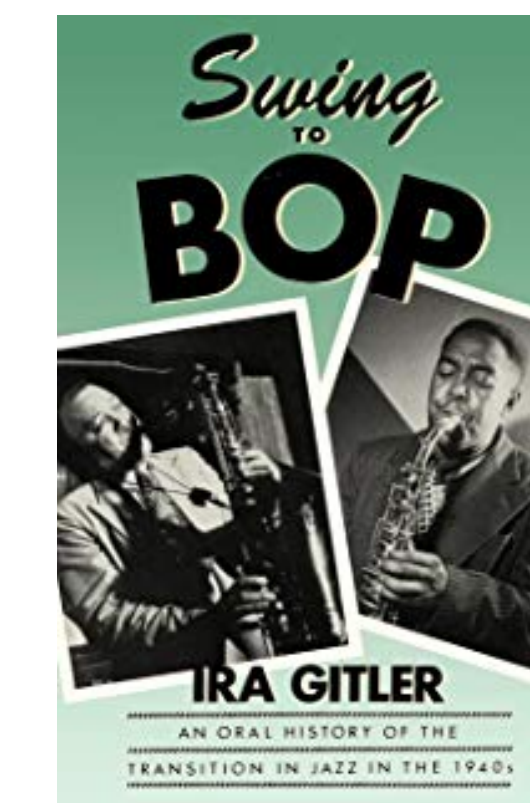
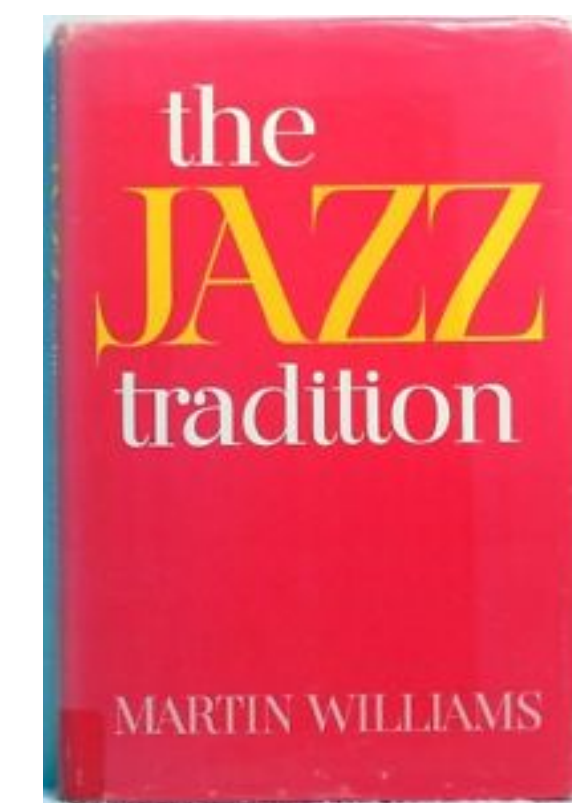
During the first decade and a half of jazz discourse involving bebop, the validity of the new approaches involved and the style itself was a point of contention and defense. Jazz theorists, critics, and even musicians took sides as to whether bebop could be considered as part of the jazz tradition or even a viable, valuable form of musical expression. Louis Armstrong was quoted during this period as describing bebop as “that modern malice.”



During this earliest period of modern jazz historiography, informed critics like Leonard Feather defended the modern jazz trends from a musicological perspective. Some jazz historians, most notably Marshall Stearns and André Hodeir, increased the academic rigor in their analyses, bringing perspectives from the field of sociology and the context of race in America to the study, producing a more nuanced narrative of developments in modern jazz that was to inform subsequent periods of jazz historiography

## New Functions of Jazz and Bebop as Art and Protest Music: 1960-1989

Modern jazz historiography in the 1960s through the 1980s began to focus less on a musical defense of bebop through analysis of musical language, phrasing, and repertoire in favor of socio-economic concerns and the role of bebop in American society. New emphases in jazz history explored more of the causes of the change to a modern style of jazz.

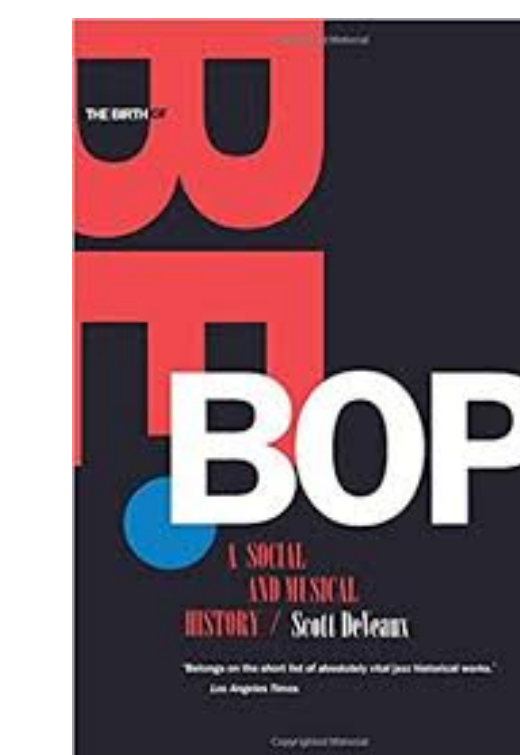


Jazz critics Martin Williams and Ira Gitler were among the most active writers on modern jazz who explored causation, American culture, and art as defining aspects of what and how modern jazz could be considered.

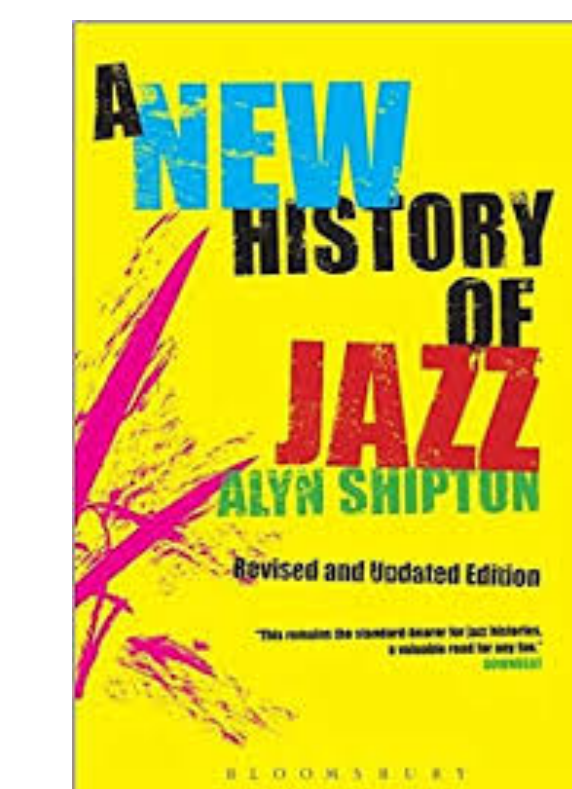
The general trends and ideological changes seen in this second period of bebop historiography, including an increase in the coverage of sociological, economic and other non-musical functions, as well as a deeper exploration of key figures and musical elements, point to the jazz criticism of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Post-Modern Approaches to Modern Music in Bebop: 1990-2015

The third period of bebop historiography, consisting largely of new work in jazz research on the bebop era over the last twenty-five years, combines new assertions in terms of causes and consequences with renewed explorations of familiar tropes surrounding the origins of bebop.



Scott DeVeaux has written what is decidedly the most current exploration of the origins of bebop and the flagship text of what may be referred to as the third period of jazz historiography. Shortly following the publication of DeVeaux's monograph, historian Alyn Shipton produced an extensive “third period” revisionist history of jazz in 2001 that includes several important insights into the origins of bebop.



DeVeaux concludes his analysis by stating that both a revolutionary and evolutionary approach to understanding the origins of bebop are imperative as a starting point for an inclusive social and musical interpretation of bebop. This kind of thinking belongs not only to this third period of bebop historiography, but also to 21<sup>st</sup> century artistic criticism.

## Conclusion: -----

**By investigating the entirety of bebop historiography in detail**, we can gain insight into the music both by understanding how it was likely created, and by how it was received by the critics, historians, and journalists that had been writing about bebop's origins since 1947. As with any historiographical documents, there is a good deal of interpretation involved on the part of the author, as well as on the part of the reader. Armed with this knowledge, **the student and researcher of jazz history, and specifically the origins of bebop, can and should critically assess all of the major documents in jazz history**, understanding that there are many points of interest worthy of further consideration and investigation.

**For a more complete literature review of many more representative sources of modern jazz historiography**, please refer to my article in the inaugural issue of *JAZZ: Jazz Education in Research and Practice*, a collaborative publication from Indiana University Press and the Jazz Education Network.

