

THE IDENTITY OF ELLISON'S
INVISIBLE MAN

Marianne Bolgar

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ABSTRACT

Marianne Bolgar

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Invisible Man is the expression of Ellison's main concerns. These are the American novel's moralistic attitude, its contribution to the definition of the still forming American identity, and the portrayal of Negro American experience. Part I, which examines the prophetic voice in Invisible Man, finds that this voice is as lyrically tragi-comic as the blues. Part II views the novel as an allegory in the form of the hero's successful struggle toward his self-determined identity. Part III treats Invisible Man as a novel of identity by examining two opposing traditions within Negro American experience, that of the bluesman and that of the hipster. The blues tradition is everywhere defined as enduring and valuable. Reliance upon music is another continuous aspect of Ellison's work. The blues and jazz serve as vehicles for expressing his views. Their use is also the most distinguishing feature of Ellison's novelistic technique.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I. ELLISON'S HERO: THE PROPHETIC VOICE

INTRODUCTION 1
The Prophetic Voice in Invisible Man 3

PART II. ELLISON'S INVISIBLE MAN AS ALLEGORY

INTRODUCTION 21

Chapter

I. ALIENATION 24

- Ellison's Use of Music
- The Journey Motif
- Invisibility And Fatherlessness
- The Hero's False Fathers

II. INTEGRATION 52

- Trueblood
- The Hero's Other True Ancestors
- Louis Armstrong
- The Vision
- The Epilogue

PART III. BLUESMAN AND HIPSTER

INTRODUCTION 84

Chapter

I. BLUESMAN 88

- The Blues
- Trueblood's "Verbal Blues"

Chapter

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| II. HIPSTER | 112 |
| The Hipster And The Sacrificial Hero | |
| Negro Ballads | |
| Clifton's History And Ballad | |
| FOOTNOTES | 150 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 171 |

PART I

ELLISON'S HERO: THE PROPHETIC VOICE.

Ellison's Hero: The Prophetic Voice

INTRODUCTION

Ellison's hero introduces himself as an invisible man and then immediately reassures the reader that he is no ghost but a man of physical substance. He is: he boxes, bleeds, vomits, gets colds and headaches. While not doubting the hero's physical reality, the reader finds it difficult to visualize him. He never stands in front of a mirror or reflecting eye that describes him in detail and makes the reader see him. From here and there in the book one learns that he is ginger-coloured, short, and has "a good distended African nose."¹ That is about all. And yet, one knows him. One knows him because he makes himself heard. Ellison's hero, like the prophets, is known through his voice.²

His prophetic voice is the instrument that gives Invisible Man its unique quality; the novel gains its density and richness from the varied range of the narrator's voice.

The prophetic voice appears in the Prologue, but there it does not belong to the narrator. As Ellison tells us, the Prologue was intended to throw the reader off, through Invisible Man's point of view.³ Here the hero, alienated,

angry and bitter, stands outside his prophetic tradition. Here the sounds of Negro American music intone the entire range of the prophetic voice.

Louis Armstrong's symbolic Gabriel's trumpet, the trumpet of judgment, establishes and stresses one prophetic trait--personal responsibility--with "What did I do to be so black and blue?" Led by the sounds of Armstrong's song and question, the hero descends into the past and to the historic roots of his people's music. He is like a tourist, on the outside, listening in, and the voices he meets down here all send him angrily away. The old spiritual singer tells him to leave her alone, her sons to "Git outa here and stay, and next time you got questions like that, ask yourself!" One of those who take part in the sermon accuses him with treason: "And at that point a voice of trombone timbre screamed at me, 'Git out of here, you fool! Is you ready to commit treason?'"⁴

This painful musical tour of the past leads him to all the dominant themes of the novel: that ambiguous love and hate which the old singer of spirituals feels toward her white master who has failed to grant the promised freedom; her bitter and violent "native sons;" the theme of freedom through identity, the one Invisible Man later names as "When I discover who I am, I'll be free;"⁵ the interwoven nature of the fate and identity of the black and white Americans (as a result of the auction block) in the figure of the ivory

girl pleading with the voice of Invisible Man's black mother; and at the bottom of his descent, at the roots of Negro American music, the prophetic theme sounded by the communal response-answer sermon on "the Blackness of Blackness." In this sermon, the Negro's Jonah-like prophetic identity is announced and joyously accepted by the congregation:

Black will git you...Yes, it will...an' black won't
 ...Naw, it won't! It do, Lawd...an' it don't.
 Halleluiah...It'll put you, glory, glory, Oh my
 Lawd, in the WHALE'S BELLY. 6

This journey through Negro American music from Louis Armstrong's jazz-blues to the prophetic sermon contains in condensed form the range of the mature narrator's voice, as it tells his story from his appearance as an alienated and naive young man in search of himself till the full achievement of his prophetic identity.

The Prophetic Voice in Invisible Man

The first thing one notices about the narrator's rich voice is its personal quality; the "I" addresses the "you" as soon as the book begins. This address establishes the relationship between story-teller and audience, hinting at some common bond. It resembles the relationship between the blues singer and his audience where the person in the song addresses the listeners on the assumption of identical experiences.

The next thing to note is the speaker's didactic attitude toward his audience. In the Prologue it is an arrogant, facetious, chip-on-the-shoulder tone that threatens as it teaches. In the Epilogue it is first a groping, then an overwhelmingly serious tone that quietly assumes the prophet's role of describing, warning, and finally, demanding the reader's involvement.

The personal and didactic tone of the hero is linked to two basic traits: his humanism and his prophecy. The personal address stresses the difference between his humanistic vision and attitude, and those of the impersonal manipulators in the novel. Didacticism is essential for prophecy; the prophet is a moralist and a teacher.

He is, however, not an intellectual, and neither is Ellison's hero. The entire plot hinges on the fact that Invisible Man is above all a man of feeling who acts impetuously. Only towards the end of the Epilogue does his intellect abstract and his voice articulate his insight, an insight gained by forced contemplation and with the aid of a vision.

The vocal quality that reflects his non-intellectual nature is his lyricism. Lyricism is not only a natural quality, but also a value Ellison wants to uphold, as a corrective against violence. He admires Louis Armstrong, the tragi-comic clown in his novel's mythology and Jimmy Rushing, the blues singer for the lyricism they have im-

posed upon jazz and the blues.

The narrator's non-lyrical tone in the Prologue (this latter serving as the 'comic mask' of the novel, in opposition to the 'hidden face' of the Epilogue) corresponds to the latent violence of its persona. The mature narrator of the Epilogue has conquered his violence and speaks his last prophetic statements and questions with firm, quiet and slow lyricism.

The whole novel abounds in lyrical passages, be they expressions of his longing for peace or the universal nature of sexual desire. In harmony with Ellison's musician's temperament and purposeful use of music, the most beautifully lyrical passages are filled with music, like the one that expresses the college student's longing for joy and peace before he enters the Chapel, the scene of the corruption of the American dream:

And my mind rushing for relief away from
 the spring dusk and flower scents, away
 from the time-scene of the crucifixion to
 the time-mood of the birth; from spring-
 dusk and vespers to the high, clear,
 lucid moon of winter and snow glinting
 upon the dwarfed pines where instead of
 the bells, the organ and the trombone
 choir speak carols to the distances
 drifted with snow, making of the night
 air a sea of crystal water lapping the
 slumbering land to the farthest reaches
 of sound, for endless miles, bringing
 the new dispensation even to the Golden
 Day, even unto the house of madness.
 But in the hereness of dusk I am moving
 toward the doomlike bells through the
 flowered air, beneath the rising moon. 7

Visual imagery is used lyrically too, as for instance in the passage where Invisible Man succumbs to the black-haired temptress' attraction:

And in the mirrored instant I saw myself standing between her eager form and a huge white bed, myself caught in a guilty stance, my face taut, tie dangling; and behind the bed another mirror which now like a surge of the sea tossed our images back and forth, back and forth, furiously multiplying the time and the place and the circumstance. My vision seemed to pulse alternately clear and vague, driven by furious bellows, ...[until he goes to her, thinking] Let them break down the door, whosoever will, let them come. 8

This visual expression of a guilty and hesitating but overpowering desire, interwoven with sounds, speaks in its lyrical way of that aspect of humanity that knows no racial or ideological barrier.

The narrator's lyricism is one dominant tone of his Gabriel's trumpet, the instrument introduced with Louis Armstrong's horn, symbolic of the prophet's moral voice. Lyricism in all the various forms it takes in Invisible Man is an integral part of this voice.

Comedy is another one. The narrator's comic tone includes the varieties of humor, satire and parody. Humor is laughter as a healing, saving act, especially when one laughs at one's own folly and pain. Laughter in the midst of pain is one of the symbols of High John de Conquer, the mythological figure of Negro American folklore, representing the

strong Negro spirit; this laughter is part of Jim Trueblood the archetypal bluesman's attitude. And it appears as a saving reaction whenever violence and despair threaten Invisible Man as his illusions are stripped away and he is made to realize his folly. Such is the case at the end of the Emerson episode when he sees that he had been Dr. Bledsoe's, Norton's and Emerson's victim:

I sat on the bed and laughed. They'd sent me to the rookery, all right. I laughed and felt numb and weak, knowing that soon the pain would come and that no matter what happened to me I'd never be the same. I felt numb and I was laughing. 9

After the laughter pain comes and Invisible Man dreams of killing Dr. Bledsoe, but his revenge on the character who resembles Bledsoe among the boarders of Men's House is muted by comedy too. Invisible Man does not kill the preacher, merely "baptizes" him with the contents of a spittoon.¹⁰

The realization of Jack's condescension and exploitation makes him see this enemy as a comical little bantam rooster and then address himself with violence-controlling humor:

So sit still is the way, and learn, never mind the eye, it's dead ... All right now, look at him, see him turning now, right, coming short-legged toward you. See him, hep! hep! the one-eyed beacon. All right, all right ... Hep, hep! The short-legged deacon. All right! Nail him! The short-

changing dialectical deacon ... All
 right. There, so now you're learn-
 ing ... Get it under control ...
 Patience ... Yes ... 11

During the last dramatic scene of the novel, laughter clearly means sudden insight, insight into the problem of identity. This occurs in the Epilogue when Norton fails to recognize Invisible Man, whom he had once called his destiny. In response, Invisible Man laughs:

I laughed, suddenly taken by the idea.
 "Because, Mr. Norton, if you don't
 know where you are, you probably don't
 know who you are ..." 12

The narrator's laughter not only shows his link with his Negro American heritage, but reflects also his acceptance and tolerance of life and human nature. His humor is in harmony with his final reconciliation and with his insistence on diversity as a human and a political principle.

Acceptance and tolerance do not mean that everything is acceptable; that would be nihilism and, as his satire reveals, the narrator has his values. Invisible Man contains much easily recognizable and much veiled satire. The more interesting kind is the latter. Often it is condensed into symbolic images or embedded in dramatic scenes; and yet, on analysis, it reveals an anger, a bitterness and a desire to attack and reform in the conciliatory narrator that surprises the superficial reader.

One such gem of a satire is the symbolic poster designed by Invisible Man during his Brotherhood period. A good half a page is all that is written about the poster and about the reaction it draws:

It was a symbolic poster of a group of heroic figures: An American Indian couple, representing the dispossessed past; a blond brother (in overalls) and a leading Irish sister, representing the dispossessed present; and Brother Tod Clifton and a young white couple (it had been felt unwise simply to show Clifton and the girl) surrounded by a group of children of mixed races, representing the future, a color photograph of bright skin texture and smooth contrast. 13

This is the poster that is greeted with enthusiasm by the members. Without the masterly use of symbolism, much more space would be needed to satirize the Brotherhood and its naive victims. For the poster is an attack on the organization's concept of the Negro's role in American history, on its hypocritical promise of future freedom, and an attack on all who contribute to the success of the poster: the entire Harlem membership.

An example of hidden, minute satire is the way the narrator treats the policeman who shoots Tod Clifton. This attack on the corrupt white law is embedded in the highly dramatic scene of Clifton's death, and its position and hidden nature reveal the narrator's intuitive and constant moral awareness and judgment. The policeman's looks, ac-

tions and speech, if added up, occupy as little space as the poster; yet, the image the policeman presents, his barking voice and his condescension is the caricature of one of the daily racist rituals the black man meets, and of the northern white racist's immature and obscene violence.

The comic air of the prophetic voice in Invisible Man springs from the two most important aspects of the narrator's background: his American tradition, both folk and literary, and the Bible. There is one prophet in the Bible who is comic. And he happens to be the one whose figure and story have been most used in American folklore and fiction. This comic prophet is Jonah.

One may imagine the mature narrator's sad (and perhaps somewhat proud) laughter when he recognizes the analogy between Jonah and his youthful self. Jonah struggles against the curse of prophecy; so far he is like several other prophets. After suffering the hell of the whale's belly, he submits to his fate, goes to sinful Nineveh, and delivers his message. It is from this point in his drama that he becomes the unique prophet. Jonah sitting in the desert, waiting for his prophecy to come true (all the while not comprehending the divine essence: love, mercy and readiness to repent if man repents) and then his sulking when his prophecy is cancelled and he loses face--all this is truly comic. E.M. Forster's dictum that laughing at the prophet has no critical value¹⁴ does not

apply to Jonah, for one does not, cannot appreciate Jonah unless together with pitying him, one laughs at him too. And this laughter is very important, since Jonah the non-comprehending moralist is "one of us." All moralists tend to be Jonahs once in a while; this is what the narrator realizes about himself in retrospect: that like Jonah, he had been cursed with his grandfather's message, had struggled against delivering it, had failed to understand it. He suffers his hell, mostly in Harlem. Finally, he too is forced to deliver the prophecy, in the coal cellar vision. And in the end he even deciphers the meaning of the message he had been set aside to voice. Like Jonah, he had till the final two pages of the novel acted the zealous but non-comprehending moralist. But then he leaves Jonah behind: he becomes fully aware of his guilt and folly. Only through laughter mixed with shame can this past folly be understood and accepted. Satirical laughter is an essential part of insight and of the prophetic tone in Invisible Man.

The parody of the novel stems from the same impulse as its satire, but lends it an added dimension. Ellison uses the term and concept of the absurd. However, it seems that he uses them not in a complicated philosophical but in a more literal sense; he says, for instance, that 'it is absurd (read: ridiculous) to state that the Negro has been emancipated.' Not with words, of course, but with the parody of emancipation that the Golden Day represents. This parody is

unusual. It does not only say that it is ridiculous to state that the Negro has been emancipated; it says also that this failure and misconception is sad, even tragic. Ellison's absurd means ridiculous and then tragi-comic.

The mad tragi-comedy of the Golden Day is at the heart of its main character, the Vet, too. His sound is a blending of laughter and tears, so deceptively like the sound of the blues, but with the added tones of violent but impotent despair. And this sound is the false prophet's sound, intoned at times by the narrator too, in the Prologue and occasionally in the body of the novel; its clearest expression is Invisible Man's decision to "do a Rinehart."

When after the riot he recognizes the error of his Rinehart-methods, he comments on the folly of the men who see in Ras only an amusing parody of the Westerns:

They were laughing outside the hedge and leaving and I lay in a cramp, wanting to laugh and yet knowing that Ras was not funny, or not only funny, but dangerous as well, wrong but justified, crazy and yet coldly sane ... Why did they make it seem funny, only funny? I thought. And yet knowing that it was. It was funny and dangerous and sad. 15

This is still the partially blind young man speaking who thinks that his grandfather was wrong, but he does point to the unique quality of the parody in Invisible Man: unlike typical parody, it is not only funny, but funny and sad.

The comedy of Invisible Man partakes of the tragic:

humor, satire and parody are all tragi-comic. What differentiates parody--the false prophet's form of humor--from the other two is the blindness of violence and despair. What differentiates satire from humor is the anger behind it. The overwhelming humor, the one that leaves the most lasting impression, is the bluesman's, the humanist's and the prophet's form of humor, the tolerant spirit of a man whose laughter at himself helps him to see and also to accept his share of guilt and responsibility.

Guilt and responsibility are motifs lyrically and dramatically woven all through Invisible Man and they form a link between the comic strain of the narrator's voice and its serious and tragic tone. A sense of agony hovers over the story of the young man's education, engendered by his struggle for a sense of self, for, as the narrator tells his reader in the opening paragraph of Chapter 1,

It took me a long time and much painful boomeranging of my expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with: That I am nobody but myself. But first I had to discover that I am an invisible man! 16

The discovery causes pain and this pain, translated into poetry, is hovering over the novel. It is the narrator's achievement that, like Louis Armstrong, who has "made poetry out of being invisible,"¹⁷ he has made poetry out of the pain of discovering that to others he is invisible.

The painful discovery of invisibility leads Tod Clifton, too, to poetry and song. But both his character and song differ from that of the narrator. Clifton's tragic and sacrificial heroism represents that other, non-bluesman's, non-prophetic tradition in Negro American experience and culture, the tradition of the sacrificial victims. Clifton's discovery of his invisibility becomes his end. He fails to see his own beauty and value, and he never achieves freedom from his conflicts and violence. Clifton's song, born of the pain of hate and anger does not help him to mute his destructive feelings or to transcend his pain.

Yet Clifton is celebrated by the narrator. He is celebrated as Samson is in the Bible: as a minor hero. He is portrayed as an isolated figure who is strongly linked to the riot, the event called "A night for Clifton."¹⁸ The life and death of the tragic hero, so intimately linked to the race riot, which is seen as potential civil war and called suicide and murder, is the only unrelieved tragedy in Invisible Man. The purely tragic tone is a clear but occasional one in the narrator's repertoire.

His song of pain over Clifton's death is, like so many aspects of his wide-ranging voice, within folk tradition, that of the ballad. This form suits its subject generally, and also in the sense that it is outside the mainstream of the blues and close to the poetry of protest. The narrator's tone is not lyrical but exhortative; he shouts like a

preacher or political orator and incites to riot. This shouting voice springs from his political motivation--his attempt to please the Brotherhood--and from his Clifton-like anger and despair. Neither the underlying feelings nor their vocal expression are those of the prophet.

The prophetic voice is lyrical, in Invisible Man expressly musical. The narrator often uses musical themes to convey his pain. An outstanding example is the hospital episode. Invisible Man is being treated in the electroshock machine and tells of his pain in terms of the opening motif of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony:

I was pounded between crushing electrical pressures; pumped between live electrodes like an accordion between a player's hands. My lungs were compressed like a bellows and each time my breath returned I yelled, punctuating the rhythmical action of the notes. 19

The feeling this passage conveys corresponds remarkably to the music it invokes. No accordion sounds in the Fifth but shrill tones of violins shriek in pain, wind instruments softly and plaintively question, and a feeble wind instrument speaks between the crushing large and loud sounds of the orchestra. As Ellison writes in "Living with Music," the rhythms of daily living can be heard not only in spirituals, jazz, and blues, but in Beethoven's classical music too.²⁰ Here his narrator translates the sounds and rhythms of the so-called Fate-motif into the poetry of torturing pain: "The

Fifth Symphony rhythm racked me"²¹ says Invisible Man when he is given another shock.

His poetry and music of pain turn from Beethoven to native American music; Invisible Man, fighting to contain his pain sees

...a uniformed military band arrayed decorously in concert, each musician with well-oiled hair, heard a sweet-voiced trumpet rendering "The Holy City" as from an echoing distance, buoyed by a choir of muted horns; and above, the mocking obbligato of a mocking bird. I felt giddy. The air seemed to grow thick with fine white gnats, filling my eyes, boiling so thickly that the dark trumpeter breathed them in and expelled them through the bell of his golden horn, a live white cloud mixing with the tones upon the torpid air. 22

Through spiritual and songbird (the sounds of the South and his past) he hears the golden horn of the dark trumpeter. This figure invokes Louis Armstrong, the one who with his symbolic Gabriel's horn has made poetry out of invisibility. The shock therapy is effective; Invisible Man's personality is being altered, not according to the doctors' plans but in the direction of his self-determined yet traditional identity.

Then the music leads the agonized young man to another archetypal figure, the black mother who sometimes pleads, at other times sings a spiritual or a blues but always expresses her pain in wail and song: "But now the music became a distinct wail of female pain."²³ The sound and rhythm of the Negro woman's voice now begin to be felt as those of his

life and this too signifies Invisible Man's slow re-linking with his past and heritage.

Next he dances. The last shock is "a pulse" that "came swift and staccato, increasing gradually until I fairly danced between the nodes."²⁴ In this scene Invisible Man lives through the main identities and feelings of the Negro entertainer, and whether it is Beethoven, band music, spiritual, jazz, blues, or dance that he experiences as his sound and rhythm, he is in pain. Through the use of music the narrator reveals that one main source of his poetry is pain, the serious face under the comic mask.

The serious face under the comic mask is the image of the clown. And that is how Invisible Man feels after the treatment: "I felt like a clown." This important information is embedded in one of the central passages of the novel, a passage where Invisible Man wonders about his identity. Here he learns two things and announces them in his tortured ecstatic state:

Whoever else I was, I was no Samson. I had no desire to destroy myself even if it destroyed the machine; I wanted freedom, not destruction. It was exhausting, for no matter what the scheme I conceived there was one constant flaw--myself. There was no getting around it. I could no more escape than I could think of my identity. Perhaps, I thought, the two things are involved with each other. When I discover who I am, I'll be free. 25

These issues are not settled here, but one knows that freedom will mean an inner thing--the discovery of identity--that this identity will not be Samson's despairing, destructive one, and one gets a hint that it might be that of the clown.

The clown as serious hero was introduced with Louis Armstrong, whom Ellison regards as an Elizabethan clown who "takes liberties with kings, queens, presidents"²⁶-- who acts as prophet. This role of the clown is reinforced by the grandfather, the archetypal prophetic identity in Invisible Man: he refuses to laugh at the circus clowns in Invisible Man's dream after the "Battle Royal."²⁷ The clown motif is carried on by the archetypal urban bluesman, Blue the blueprint-man (reminding one of Jimmy Rushing) who is presented as a Charlie Chaplin figure.²⁸ His Chaplin pants go with his blues singer's virtuoso voice, a voice soaring with lyricism, aching with loneliness, booming with laughter and leaving the listener with a sense of mystery. His voice resembles that of Armstrong's trumpet; it is lyrically tragicomic and it leads Invisible Man back to his prophetic tradition.

The hero, without Chaplin pants, acts the clown in Invisible Man. The reader laughs at him (and during moments of insight the hero laughs at himself) as he with clown-like but real desperation runs towards his goal, a personally and socially meaningful role and identity. And during one of

his serious moments of insight, in the tragi-comic scene of his last battle with Ras, he defines himself as a clown:

... and I no hero, but short and dark
with only a certain eloquence and
bottomless capacity for being a fool
to mark me from the rest; saw them,
recognized them at last as those whom
I had failed and of whom I was now,
just now, a leader, though leading
them, running ahead of them, only in
the stripping away of my illusionment. 29

Ellison's no-hero is the tragi-comic clown marked by a voice that can utter these poignant words of self-discovery and later, after his prophet's pain-filled vision, voice his paradoxical but deeply moral vision of what it means to be an individual, a Negro and an American.

The narrator's message about Negro American experience and the black man's nature is that although both are filled with justified anger, bitterness and hate, they need love to survive. And man, black or white, is never purely good or purely evil, as for example in Billy Budd; man is a mixture of both. Thus he asserts the unavoidable presence of hate and evil and the absolute necessity--not the presence, merely the desirability--of love and good in every person. On the level of politics, he affirms his faith in American democratic principles, strongly stressing the principle of diversity.

The narrator's moral vision applies to all mature men. He makes this clear when he says that his vision is not the result of belonging to a weak minority but of the somewhat

greater maturity the oppressed and pained members of this minority had achieved.³⁰ The form of his final address to his readers extends his insights too. Like the bluesman, the narrator addresses his final questions to those who can 'swing' with him (on others he is lost) who due to some identical experiences can listen and appreciate his last 'speech.'

The voice of Ellison's small, clown-like prophet is anything but small. Like Louis Armstrong's voice and trumpet, it ranges lyrically through the varieties of the sad, serious and tragic, as well as the joyful, chuckling and comic. Along with the jazz-bluesman it keeps asking, "What did I do to be so black and blue?" until it arrives at an answer. At this point it articulates its insight. In harmony with his basically imaginative and lyrical nature, the narrator's final intellectualized message is still spoken without philosophical dryness and clarity. It is spoken with a blending of tears and laughter, that after much contemplation and in accord with the importance of its contents now sounds serious and quiet; yet, the vital humor is there, as a hidden chuckle or invisible smile, an integral part of the hero's achieved freedom--his prophetic voice and identity.

PART II

ELLISON'S INVISIBLE MAN AS ALLEGORY

Introduction

Chapter I Alienation

Chapter II Integration

INTRODUCTION

In a 1946 interview Ellison was asked: "Would you say that the search for identity is primarily an American theme?" "It is the American theme," replied Ellison. "The nature of our society is such that we are prevented from knowing who we are."¹ But one must eventually learn who one is; this imperative holds for individuals as well as for nations: "A people must define itself," writes Ellison in "The Seer And The Seen."²

The necessity of self-definition is Ellison's central thesis. He reiterated it in a speech in 1970, saying that

few Americans know who and what they really are, for they belong to a nation whose identity is still forming and which is a composite of many minorities.³

The pluralistic nature of American Society is another recurring theme in Ellison's thought. In the overall American search for identity, minorities bear the

responsibility of having their ideals and images recognized as part of the composite image which is that of the still forming American people.⁴

The American writer plays a special role in American

self-definition. In Ellison's view, writing is "an ethical instrument," and the great American novel has always been primarily occupied with the search for identity and values. Writers who belong to minorities do their duty by "depicting the experience of their own groups."⁵ The black novelist's task is to convey Negro American humanity and experience.

There are two reasons for Ellison's stress on defining Negro American experience. First, he insists on the black-and-white nature of the American identity; "whatever else the true American is, he is also somehow black," he said in his 1970 speech. And fortunately so, for

without the black American something irrepressibly hopeful and creative would go out of the American spirit, and the nation might well succumb to the moral slobbism that has ever threatened its existence from within.⁶

It was due to their cruel, often tragic experience, beginning with slavery and continuing in a society that still discriminates against them, that the Negro Americans have achieved their valuable role and identity:

They are an American people who are geared to what is and who are yet driven by a sense of what is possible for human life to be in this society. The nation could not survive being deprived of their presence because, by the irony implicit in the dynamics of American democracy, they symbolize both its most stringent testing and the possibility of its greatest human freedom.⁷

Traditional Negroes (or as Ellison says in The Atlantic, "we old-fashioned Negroes")⁸ are characterized by a down-to-earth sense of reality coupled with idealism and hope. It is this realistic-yet-hopeful spirit that Ellison celebrates in all his writings.

CHAPTER I

Alienation

Invisible Man, the great artistic expression of Ellison's concerns, is an allegory⁹ and a unique one among contemporary American novels. One feature that makes it unique is Ellison's extensive use of music, particularly Negro American music.¹⁰

This music suits Ellison's purposes because it exemplifies cultural pluralism and valuable individual qualities, attitudes and sense of life; it also provides a model for the desirable relationship between the individual and his society.

Negro music is deeply rooted in the American past. Ellison's theory is that one cannot fix a time when Negroes were not shaping American music. Already before 1776, American culture was pluralistic; the slaves took their African heritage and European music and blended these into what still is the greatest and most unique American contribution to Western culture. The black man did this by always using whatever music surrounded him and then creating a new music, one that expressed his own sense of life. And

white Americans have since slavery times been walking, talking, dancing, singing in Negro ways. Music (and aspects of life and art that are closely connected with it) is one cultural expression which shows that the black man has always shaped and been shaped by American culture.

The defining spirit of Negro American music is the spirit of the blues. The blues express a profound tragicomic sense of life, and this sensibility is the heritage of a people who survived despite the dehumanizing institution of slavery and learned to laugh at their painful experiences. The blues express also the Negro American's ambiguous attitude towards man and life: an earthy sense of reality and limitations coupled with a sense that one can rise above these. This sense of life corresponds to the optimism of those Negroes who have been searching for a more human way of life. Their optimism is typically American, for it is the attitude of the frontier; but it is also typically Negro, for it imposes the romantic lyricism and mysterious, mystical quality of the blues upon the violence of the frontier.¹¹

Ellison sees the blues generally as a corrective against certain tendencies and aspects of American life. The blues, recognizing the limitations that life and human nature impose on man, work against man's limitless pride. They correct alienation; the classical blues singer functions as a priest, celebrating the values of his group and

man's ability to order chaos. The blues singer is part of a larger whole, of an institution: the public dance where participants achieve a feeling of communion. But the blues do not repress individuality; they demand personal creativity based on traditional techniques. They represent also the balance between extreme individualism and conformity by expressing the sense of being an individual who belongs to a larger whole. And as the consistent Negro American art form which links the beginnings of the Negro American experience with the present, they correct the confusing effects of too-swift change, the enemy of identity: like all good music, the blues give "us an orientation in time ... reminding us of what we were and of that toward which we aspired."¹²

There are even more specific reasons for Ellison's choice of using blues and jazz in his allegorical novel. Both blues and jazz are suitable musical analogues for the theme of self-determined identity, because both have existential aspects. In his essay about Mahalia Jackson, Ellison calls the blues spirit "secular existentialism"¹³ which supports man when religious faith declines.¹⁴ The blues are existential in the sense that they help one to define oneself: "they are not simply a matter of entertainment," writes Ellison in "Remembering Jimmy," "they also tell us who and where we are."¹⁵

The role and identity Ellison's hero achieves are those of the bluesman, a new American hero. The bluesman

is the realistic idealist, a fittingly paradoxical term, for his sense of life is ironical: he knows the limitations human nature, life and society impose on man, yet he continues to live without despair or self-pity. With Louis Armstrong he asserts "the goodness of being alive and part of the community."¹⁶ He affirms his belief in life and man and in the basic principles of American democracy. He is aware of the gap between ideals and reality, yet he believes in slow, painstaking progress toward his ideals.

The bluesman has a triple identity: national, ethnic and personal, this latter being that level where universality and prophecy are possible.

For the bluesman is also a moralist; he judges all those, whatever their color, who transgress against his ideals. As a moralist, he is in the tradition of the great Biblical prophets: the prophet is a man of visions and sharpened perceptions, forced to transmit God's message; his voice is the voice of morality, sounded by an imperfect, even guilty human being addressing his erring and guilty people. His voice describes, warns, foretells. Should he fail to perform the task for which he was chosen, he is guiltier than the greatest sinner among his people. As prophet, the bluesman is both in Negro American folk tradition and in the tradition of those American writers whom Ellison regards as his literary ancestors: the 19th century classics and Faulkner.

As an artist, the bluesman is an anonymous folk artist. He creates as the visionary artist and the blues singer do: his work of art springs from the experience of personal disaster; his first reaction is feeling, translated into the imaginative language of poetry and of music. The mind as the chaos-ordering intellectual faculty enters last, but enter it must before the prophet-artist can articulate and communicate his insights and judgments and thereby define himself.

His uniqueness lies in his non-heroic, clown-like character. In this regard too he is within Negro American folk tradition. Three characters in Invisible Man serve as models for the apprentice bluesman: his grandfather, Louis Armstrong and Jim Trueblood. The grandfather is the archetypal prophet who, because of his circumstances, disguises his moral demand in puzzling Biblical language. Louis Armstrong, who plays jazz and sings blues, is the archetypal clown, clown as creative artist, entertainer and prophet too, because of his irreverent, moralistic attitude. Trueblood, the only fully developed character among the three, is a key figure. He and his story represent the tragi-comic lyricism of the blues. Trueblood the archetypal bluesman is the ancestor of what Hyman calls "the low rhetoric in Negro writing" as opposed to the high rhetoric of Negro sermons and oratory.¹⁷

The type of jazz Ellison values is also low-keyed and

lyrical. Jazz, originally the instrumental imitation of sung blues¹⁸ developed into the complicated art of band music; but it has reserved a place for the lyrical blues voice. In the jazzband, solo instruments may "sing the blues" as they improvise; such a "sung blues" is Louis Armstrong's long trumpet solo in "What did I do to be so black and blue?"

Jazz serves as a model for Invisible Man because it too is existential. Jazz is existential in the sense that "each solo flight, or improvisation, represents ... a definition of his [the jazzman's] identity: as individual, as member of the collectivity, and as a link in the chain of tradition."¹⁹ The jam session is the jazzman's education, his apprenticeship, ordeals, initiation ceremonies, rebirth. Having mastered the traditional techniques of jazz, "he must then 'find himself,' must be reborn, must find, as it were, his soul ... He must achieve, in short, his self-determined identity."²⁰

Jazz helps the individual to determine his relationship to his group and tradition while he is asserting his individuality. That is why the jam session which demands "give and take, subtle rhythmical shaping and blending of idea, tone and imagination" represents an ideal miniature society for Ellison, "a marvel of social organization" with its balance between extreme individualism and being absorbed by the group.²¹

These aspects of Negro American music explain why Ellison has chosen blues and jazz as the main musical themes of Invisible Man; why he has created values in terms of the blues spirit as opposed to the non-blues spirit; and why his hero is a struggling apprentice bluesman who travels toward successful self-definition.

Ellison adjusts the conventional journey motif to his use of Negro American music. The journey in Invisible Man, while it involves geographical and socio-historical travel, is basically an internal journey. It is the hero's education (modeled on the jazz-musician's education in jam sessions) a process that is an apprenticeship in terms of ordeals and initiations, deaths and rebirths; a process where he loses himself in order to find himself. Born in his tradition, he scorns and flees it, only to embrace it again at the pain of spiritual death.

The hero's education occurs from Chapter 1 to the end of the book. The Prologue is not part of this process; it is written from the point of view of alienation. An independent section, it represents isolation and confusion in contrast to commitment and enlightenment.

The episodic structure of the novel is also related to the musician's education. The structure consists of the jazz-like, unevenly-distributed elements of apprenticeship. The first episode introduces the basic situation, which is replayed in variations, the effect accumulating, until the

"his world and his personality are out of key." The artistic counterpart of this limbo-like feeling is bebop, "a further triumph of technology over humanism."²² Invisible Man in his gadget-filled hole represents the Charlie Parker-like post-World War II jazz-man, who, having rejected his rurally-rooted heritage, lives in a state of mind which is the 20th-century variation of the sensibility of Dostoevsky's underground man. The hero of the Prologue is a spiteful, angry and irresponsible mouse among the world's mice and men.

In the body of the novel, he is invisible first as "a walking personification of the Negative;"²³ he unquestioningly accepts the values and identities of admired models like the Founder, Dr. Bledsoe, Mr. Norton or advertisement-projected images of "the man in the grey flannel suit." Next, after the hospital episode, he is plastic and impressionable like a new-born child; invisibility here again means his willingness to act out stereotyped roles, but in contrast to his pre-hospital period, he is becoming aware of his folk heritage. After the Brotherhood's betrayal, wearing Rinehart's disguise, he briefly experiences invisibility as having no identity at all. Finally, invisibility means that he knows who and where he is; his painful experiences lead him to reidentification with his Negro folk heritage and also to the articulation of his full triple, Negro American bluesman's identity. At the end,

invisibility is the peaceful feeling that he is "at home" as a black American, and that as an individual with a self-determined identity, he has a meaningful role to play in society.

The hero's self-identification occurs in terms of two parallel plot lines: the one where he meets and rejects false models and the one where he meets and accepts the true ones.

The hero's identity crisis and the necessity for self-definition spring from his alienation or fatherlessness. He has a father who is briefly mentioned but is practically non-existent. The young man's problem of identity is thus the lack of the most important model, one who has had to face Negro American life in the 20th century and who serves as the link to the past and folk traditions. With this important link missing, the hero's experience begins in fatherlessness and the need to find the link to his past and heritage, and to find an attitude that will allow him to face his problems creatively and out of a sense of belonging.

The Negro American's fatherlessness has two main causes: one is that he cannot identify with the existing national leadership that exploits him; the other is his own ignorance or rejection of his past and traditions. As Invisible Man travels through the novel from the South, naiveté, and conformity toward the North, insight, and authentic identity, he meets father (or false prophet)

figures representing types of leadership that are non-American, divisive, hypocritical and deceptive. They appear in order of importance, from the present point of view. Those close to the end are the most alluring and dangerous false prophets and identities for the young Negro in contemporary America; the least dangerous ones now were the most hideous ones then -- the school superintendent and Dr. Bledsoe.

The school superintendent in the "Battle Royal" episode is the symbolic spokesman of all of Invisible Man's false fathers. He represents plans that aim at depriving the Negro of social equality while burdening him with the "social responsibility" of acting out the white man's violation of American ideals and of fighting his black fellows. The education the superintendent represents intends to produce Bledsoe-type Negro leaders and individuals. But contrary to its intention, this education is also the painful yet necessary experience of a different type of black leader and individual.

Invisible Man's experiences the school superintendent as a father: he expects security from his presence, wants his praise and prize, but is also terrified. The superintendent is, as his name indicates, the archetypal false father, representing the conscience and consciousness of all who manipulate the hero for their own variously motivated ends.

The first fully characterized manipulator is Dr.

Bledsoe, a Booker T. Washington figure, representing the southern Negro administrator. His motto is:

You let the white folks worry about pride and dignity--you learn where you are and get yourself power, influence, contacts with powerful and influential people--then stay in the dark and use it! 24

His idols are wealth, status and power, power being the greatest of all:

Power doesn't have to show off. Power is confident, self-assuring, self-starting and self-stopping, self-warming and self-justifying ... this is a power set-up, son, and I'm at the controls ... When you buck against me, you're bucking against power, rich white folks power, the nation's power--which means government power! 25

For the share of this power he gets by enforcing the post-Civil War idea of freedom within segregation, the cynical Bledsoe would sacrifice his fellow Negroes, for he sees them as tools that help him to keep his powerful position, which is "his life." Dr. Bledsoe will have every black man in the country lynched if that is the price of retaining his power.

Dr. Bledsoe knows that in his power mania he is de-
visive. He is de-
visive by accepting segregation, by destroying Invisible Man's sense of manhood and, most importantly, by denying his folk origins. He knows his origins but in his

arrivé Negro proto-politician's arrogance he looks down on them. For example, he forbids student and trustee to go near the poor quarters and Jim Trueblood.

Bledsoe's power is great but not limitless. While he rules the college, and to a certain extent, the trustees too, he has no power over the southern whites and over Trueblood, the bluesman. Trueblood seems to exert some mysterious, unconscious influence on the hero, drawing the young man to his habitat and forcing their memorable encounter.

Dr. Bledsoe, who is afraid of this visit, symbolizes the pathetic and hideous power of the Negro leader who accepts freedom-within-segregation; he is also a satire on the white American myth of rags-to-riches-success won by ruthless selfishness and exploitation. As the prophet of these two false American dreams, he is a strong influence on the ambitious young man; in the first part of the novel, Invisible Man struggles long and bitterly with Bledsoe's possibility.

Norton, the New England liberal who shares Dr. Bledsoe's vision, is Invisible Man's next false father. His wise, benevolent appearance is only a mask covering his corruption and delusions. His corruption (in the metaphors of his heart disease and attraction to his daughter) consists of his violation of freedom and equality, and of his view of the black man and himself. The freedom Norton en-

visages for the Negro is the limited one of being a skilled worker; political and social equality are excluded. The black man is something to use and manipulate with impersonal coldness and precision, and a savage to be rewarded for acting out the puritanical liberal's incestuous desires. For Norton feels guilty of desiring his daughter and of having killed her. His devotion to her monument, the segregated college, is his ironic attempt to rid himself of the latter guilt.

Norton's attempt is loaded with a number of ironies. One is implicit in his devotion to segregation; with it he is, to use Trueblood's words, "heaping sin on top of sin" while he imagines that he is atoning. Another irony lies in his delusions: he sees Trueblood, who refuses to add the sin of murder and self-castration (dehumanization in the symbolic structure of Invisible Man) to the sin of incest, and who is the human and artistic norm of the novel, as an immoralist and scapegoat; himself he sees as a moralist. Norton is the first Oedipus caricature, as a proud, patronizing tyrant who has symbolically committed both incest and murder, but is not cured of his blindness.

Norton's attitude toward the black man resembles the white Southerner's hate and violence, but the liberal's feelings are hidden; he cannot face them. His insidious prejudice is, in a sense, more dangerous for the hero than the Southerner's open hatred. How dangerous this "liberal" atti-

tude is, Invisible Man learns only when he becomes its victim. But already in the South he is warned by his next false father, the mad Vet.

The Vet, who speaks from the perspective of bitter, dehumanizing experience, gives the hero basically good advice: "Be your own father, young man. And remember, the world is possibility if only you'll discover it. Last of all, leave the Mr. Nortons alone."²⁶ But the man himself is the illustration of the Negro who has not discovered the right possibility in his search for a vital role and identity.

The Vet represents the southern Negro intellectual who is deceived by the Mr. Nortons' false promises of freedom, and who, in addition, is alienated from his folk traditions. His haughty attitude toward his people and heritage is permanent, as his rhetoric reveals; his speech contains no Negro idiom.²⁷

The Vet's rhetoric exposes another, more general aspect of his identity. His education stands for the alienated Negro's "education" from a fatherless, Invisible Man-like identity to the still fatherless, hopeless identity of the prophet of doom. At the core of the Vet's sad fate stand his rejection of his folk heritage and his acceptance of the American myth which says that individual skill, intelligence and education suffice to support a man.

His manic-depressive psychosis symbolizes his inner weakness, the tendency to swing from one extreme to another, without finding a balanced middle-attitude in the face of betrayal. The mad Vet's disease contains the insane extremes of the hipster's personality: high-flying intellectualism, unrealistic expectations and self-esteem or self-hatred and despair. The Vet's barely sketched, tragi-comical figure represents a dangerous possibility and foreshadows the tragic figure and fate of Tod Clifton, the hipster.

The despairing Vet is sexless. His asexuality as the result of self-castration shows the sterility of his identity and the tragedy of the black man who falls victim to the soul-lynching violence of the South, because of his alienation from his folk heritage.²⁸ The Vet as a young man might well have belonged to young Emerson's set at the "continental" club Calamus.

The next false father figure, Emerson, personifies the self-analysing, self-hating and self-castigating young liberal. Under his facade of coolness and fellowship, he burns with violence; eventually he reveals his contempt and prejudice. Like Norton, Emerson understands neither his motives and attitudes nor his role in denying the Negro's freedom.

The connection between him and Invisible Man is the common past, where Emerson's ancestors grew rich and powerful on slavetrade, while the hero's ancestors were the

slaves.²⁹ Emerson, however, sees their connection as the "unspeakable" one between Huckleberry and Jim. Emerson, too, is neurotic and sexually perverted, or metaphorically, blind and corrupt. He is the second Oedipus Rex caricature. Metaphorically, he has killed his father and violated his mother, as Oedipus had physically done; by transgressing against principles of the Constitution and as a colonial power, Emerson has violated America and other countries of the earth. As a homosexual, he is impotent and fruitless as far as the dream of freedom and equality is concerned. The only American principle he is involved with is the one of property; in this regard, too, he resembles Norton.

Emerson's form of brotherhood--the sterile bond between "writers, artists and all kinds of celebrities"³⁰ in the Club Calamus is a calamity for the black man searching for identity. This brotherhood is also Ellison's satire on the sick and fruitless bond between Emerson and his Harlem friends. Basically, Emerson is the phony, the white man who cries mea culpa, while he is looking upon the Negro with condescension and is treating him with prejudice.

The two Brotherhood leaders, Jack and Hambro, do the same, although they represent an organization that promises a classless, raceless society. And one, that behind its concern with human and civil rights, is non-humanistic, non-democratic and foreign.³¹ Judging from the space the Brotherhood is given, one may conclude that it is Ellison's

major example of the gap between illusion and reality.

The hero's disillusioning experience with the organization teaches him the true meaning of dispossession. For the Brotherhood, this word carries only economical, sociological and political meanings. For Invisible Man, dispossession acquires a personal and existential meaning: his being deprived of his individuality and of his ethnic identity. It is in the Brotherhood that he learns to value his experiences as well as his links with his heritage as his most valuable possessions--as the ones that define him. It is this insight that saves him from despair and cynicism, an insight contrary to the ideas of Jack and Hambro.

Two facts are important about Jack: his glass eye and his foreign language. The glass eye represents the death of his ironical self, resulting in his distorted vision of human and American reality. Jack sees man only as a political being; racial and ethnic groups are mere raw materials for the Brotherhood's political goals.³² Jack's dead eye is the symbol of his willingness to sacrifice man's personal and group identity.

The full extent of Jack's devotion to the Brotherhood's program and even more importantly, his foreign nature, surfacing when his sore point is hit, are revealed in the glass eye episode. His foreign language is the metaphor for this foreign nature.³³

Brother Jack is an excellent satire on a certain type

of white radical who, in his pathetic hubris, sets out to teach the Negro American about suffering, sacrifice, discipline and patience. The proud Jack is the continuation of the Oedipus Rex theme. Jack as Oedipus caricature suffers half of the tyrant's pathos and has half of his stature (his pride and temper). He lacks, however, majesty, virility, past achievement as saviour, and the tragic insight that now he is the cause of his country's plague. Jack the tyrant exploits the politically inexperienced Invisible Man's hope for freedom.

The hero recognizes Jack's real attitude only after his last meeting with Hambro:

And now I looked around a corner of my mind and saw Jack and Norton and Emerson merge into one single white figure. They were very much the same, each attempting to force his picture of reality upon me, and neither giving a hoot in hell for how things looked to me. I was simply a material, a natural resource to be used. I had switched from the arrogant absurdity of Norton and Emerson to that of Jack and the Brotherhood, and it all came out the same--except I now recognized my invisibility. 34

Throughout his experience with Jack, Invisible Man senses an intellectual distance between them. This gulf is due to the naive hero's failure to understand Jack's double-talk. Invisible Man the demagogue speaks sincerely, from his emotions; Jack's double-talk reflects training, cynical demagoguery and force of habit in the hypocritical, intrigue-

plagued Brotherhood.

Between the hero and Hambro there is another kind of distance, due to what Hambro represents. He stands, first of all, for the organization's scientific, atheistic, deterministic ideology. This ideology declares the individual, the people and the black man as inferiors, again things to be used. Next, he stands for intellectual and moral confusion, for despite his theoretician's scientific speech, he talks partly like a Nietzsche and partly like a historical determinist. With his stress on science and with his confusion, he too belongs to the scientist-doctor figures of the novel, the threatening castrators of the hospital episode who represent traditional white attitudes.

The Lincolnesque lawyer is also a satire on the Brotherhood's use of national heroes and traits. In Hambro's case, it is the leftist liberal's naiveté and idealism that leads to his devotion to the organization's foreign program.

The hero experiences Hambro as a charlatan;³⁵ he also feels that there is an unbridgeable emotional gulf between them:

I could feel some deep change. It was as though my discovery of Rinehart had opened a gulf between us over which, though we sat within touching distance, our voices barely carried and then fell flat, without an echo. I tried to shake it away, but still the distance, so great that neither could grasp the emotional tone of the other, remained. 36

This distance is finally the one of experience and culture between the black and white American liberal.³⁷

Hambro, a rather pathetic and shadowy figure, appears only briefly. Jack the foreigner, however, accompanies Invisible Man as a serious threat to the achievement of his final identity.

Rinehart, Invisible Man's next false father, is a "foreigner" too, foreign to the tradition Ellison celebrates. He is the true outsider in Invisible Man, irremediably lost to society and himself. He functions on two levels, as the hustler and as a mythological figure.

In an interview Ellison said that Rinehart

is a kind of opportunist who has learned to live in a world which is swiftly changing and in which society no longer has ways of bringing pressure ... or even identifying him. Thus he can act out many roles. He's a descendant of Melville's 'Confidence Man' to that extent. 38

In another interview, he said that "Rinehart is my name for the personification of chaos,"³⁹ and in "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke" he wrote that Rinehart was mainly a plot device and another possible identity for Invisible Man.⁴⁰

Rinehart embodies, first, Ellison's view of the hustler. In contrast with the view, expounded for example by Charles Kiel in Urban Blues, that the hustler represents the entire lower class and is a value in the black urban com-

munity,⁴¹ Ellison regards him as an exploiter, a criminal and a man without a human core. In Invisible Man certain people admire and love Rinehart--he is their hero-- but all are his victims. Among the many roles of Rinehart the Harlem crime boss, the pimp's role is the most odious one. Here Ellison follows that Faulkner tradition which uses the figure of the procurer to represent evil. Rinehart's most criminal act is the corruption of his girlfriend, the lovely black girl with "a pleasant voice with a slightly husky edge and plenty of sleep in it."⁴² Rinehart is the corrupter of healthy, fruitful sexuality and love, forces that in Invisible Man and in Ellison's thought, represent humanity and democracy too.

Rinehart, apparently vital and oversexed, is the fully desexed, that is, dehumanized character in Invisible Man. He, who plays so many roles and appears in so many shapes, has no identity at all. The man who is confused about his identity (Invisible Man for example) is sick but can be cured; his disease originates in a sick social order, as Ellison explains in "Harlem is Nowhere."⁴³ But the man without identity is incurable. Rinehart's disease, although flourishing within the same social order, originates not in society but in his own lack of morality, intellectuality and identity. Rinehart is invisible in the fullest sense of this word; without any human core at all, he is beyond the cynical, hypocritical and nihilistic characters in the novel. Considering what being

means in Invisible Man, one may say that Rinehart does not exist.

On the mythological level he represents chaos. And chaos stands in opposition to order, civilization, art. The hustler is a parochial character, belonging to the world of the modern city; but "Rinehart, the name for chaos" is one of Ellison's universal types as the trickster. With Rinehart Ellison has contributed to the gallery of tricksters in Western literature and shown that

High Western culture and the Negro folk tradition [thus] do not appear to pull the writer in opposite directions, but to say the same thing in their different vocabularies, to come together and reinforce insight with insight. 44

Western literature has produced trickster figures like Melville's Confidence Man, who represents cosmic trickery, and Mann's Felix Krull, who is an artist figure. Rinehart, however, is no artist. He who represents chaos, amorality and lack of insight is the opposite of the archetypal artist figures in Invisible Man, Trueblood the bluesman and Louis Armstrong, the clown.

Rinehart reveals also Ellison's continuing concern about certain undesirable aspects of American life. He reappears as Reverend B.P. Rinehart in Ellison's unpublished novel, in connection with the Negro preacher's values and rhetoric. In Invisible Man too, "Reverend Bliss Protheus

Rinehart, Spiritual Technologist"⁴⁵ serves the same purpose by satirizing Father Divine. But his role extends further. Reverend Rinehart is another stab at technology and its non-humanistic tendencies as they affect modern life from the rhetoric and imagery of a Father Divine⁴⁶ to the corruption of Negro American music. The music in Reverend Rinehart's church is a satirical comment on the non-lyrical, overamplified, confusing and foreign nature of modern jazz, the antithesis to the blues and traditional jazz:

then the door opened and I looked past their heads into a small crowded room of men and women sitting in folding chairs, to the front where a slender woman in a rusty black robe played passionate boogie-woogie on an upright piano along with a young man wearing a skull cap who struck righteous riffs from an electric guitar which was connected to an amplifier that hung from the ceiling above a gleaming white and gold pulpit. A man in elegant red cardinal's robe and a high lace collar stood resting against an enormous Bible and now began to lead a hard-driving hymn which the congregation shouted in the unknown tongue. And back and high on the wall above him there arched the words in letters of gold: LET THERE BE LIGHT!. The whole scene quivered vague and mysterious in the green light, then the door closed and the sound muted down. 47

From this condensed passage Reverend Rinehart emerges as another proud tyrant assuming a God-like role (Dr. Bledsoe is his counterpart in this respect) performing another 'black rite.'

Rinehart, whose world is infinite possibility, (Invisible Man speaks ironically when he says that his world is one of infinite possibility) is a satire on modern man's pride based on his faith in change and technological progress. B.P. Rinehart is also the name for Pride and thus the personification of traditional Christian and Greek human evil.⁴⁸

Rinehart is Ellison's personification of evil, invisible but complex and significant beyond that of a plot device or another possible identity. He is the antithesis to the novel's bluesmen and artists, and it is no accident that Invisible Man must lose his "Rineharts" before he can see what kind of hero he is: small and clown-like, resembling Louis Armstrong and the other personifications of the native blues tradition.

Another foreigner to this tradition is Ras, the hero's last false father. The proud and violent West Indian represents the white-hating black nationalist whose vision, too, is distorted. He sees only in terms of black and white: all whites are enemies, all blacks are brothers (as long as they agree with him); and he sees only the black beauty and dignity of Tod Clifton, when Clifton's beauty is black-and-white.

But Ras is stronger than Tod, even stronger than the hero until their final meeting, for Ras has self-respect and feels that he is a man. He knows that the freedom of the

North is dangerous for the black man. He knows also that Clifton and Invisible Man as Brotherhood members "are nowhere."

As soon as Invisible Man enters Harlem, he experiences Ras as a violent, riot-inciting, nightmarish father figure to whom he reacts with shock and fear.⁴⁹ During the fight between Ras and Clifton, he sees Ras as a misguided but compassionate man. He sees him also as a runner: Ras, like Invisible Man, is being manipulated. The hero realizes this fact fully during the riot when Ras reappears as Ras the Destroyer.

This apparition brings about Invisible Man's next-to-final self-discovery as to what kind of hero and leader he is:

and I no hero, but short and dark with only a certain eloquence and a bottomless capacity for being a fool to mark me from the rest; saw them, recognized them at last as those whom I had failed and of whom I was now, just now, a leader, though leading them, running ahead of them, only in the stripping away of my illusionment. 50

The African Ras and his armed band also make Invisible Man see and sum up the nature of his experiences and his relationship to his other false fathers.⁵¹

His encounter with Ras teaches him yet another lesson. Ras's vengeful insistence upon hanging Invisible Man makes the latter see the common feature between Dr.

Bledsoe and Ras--Ras, too, is a lyncher:

They came behind me like a draft of flames and I led them through and around to the avenue, and if they'd fired they could have had me, but it was important to them that they hang me, lynch me even, since that was the way they ran, had been taught to run. I should die by hanging alone, as though only hanging would settle things, even the score. 52

But the hero wins and experiences a death and a re-birth: "So when Ras yelled, "Hang him!" I let fly the spear and it was as though for a moment I had surrendered my life and begun to live again."⁵³ Then follows a baptism:

and now moving [Invisible Man] straight into the full, naked force of the water, feeling its power like a blow, wet and thudding and cold, then through it and able partly to see just as another horse dashed up and through, a hunter taking a barrier, the rider slanting backward, the horse rising, then hit and swallowed by the rising spray. I stumbled down the street, the comet tail in my eyes, seeing a little better now and looking back to see the water spraying like a mad geyser in the moonlight. 54

Invisible Man's baptism and new vision consist of sensing, in Invisible Man's typical intuitive and imaginative way, that the fight between Ras and the police is like another absurd Civil War incident.⁵⁵

Ras's full absurdity is brought home to Invisible Man as he overhears the Harlem folk characters' story of

Ras's exploits. Unlike the men, he realizes that Ras is funny and pathetic and dangerous.

With Ras, the hero has experienced all his false fathers, all of them tempting but undesirable possibilities; now he is ready for his final task, the achievement and articulation of a harmonious and fruitful identity. He does not accomplish this task all on his own, but is led and helped by his true ancestors, characters who represent the blues tradition. The hero's meeting and acceptance of these characters forms that parallel plot that remains to be explored.

CHAPTER II

Integration.

Another continuing thread in Ellison's thought is the valuable nature of the black American's full and proper appreciation of his past and southern folk traditions. He played on this old theme when he said, in 1970, that "the movement backwards to get a fuller sense of ourselves, to get a sense of the community and its needs, of the traditions and so on, is good."⁵⁶ The most concentrated expression of this "backward movement" is the short story "Flying Home;"⁵⁷ the same movement appears in Invisible Man in the parallel plot where the hero meets and gradually accepts his true ancestors.

These are all folk characters, some southern and rural, others northern and urban, but all stress the value of southern experience. They are Ellison's personifications of Negro American group wisdom gained by experience (specifically southern experience), a wisdom that aids the individual in his moments of crisis. Folk traditions contain the group's morality too, and their richness gives the individual a healthy sense of self-respect. This feeling, so important, is further enhanced by the knowledge that his

group's traditions enrich the nation's culture too. All of the hero's ancestors are representatives of the blues and of jazz, the most significant American contributions to modern Western culture.

The first and most important ancestor Invisible Man meets is Jim Trueblood, the southern peasant. He is the archetypal bluesman and what Ellison calls "the best of the past" in his essay "Living With Music."⁵⁸ Trueblood is the best of the past, for he is the whole man, supported by his peasant wisdom but also an individual who stands up against his group. He is also the blues singer as visionary artist. Trueblood is the human and artistic norm against which the health of other characters must be measured.

Critics have been undecided about Trueblood's significance. Gene Bluestein is an exception; he writes that what Trueblood learns will take Ellison's hero the rest of the book to learn.⁵⁹

What Trueblood learns is that for the sake of inner peace he must accept himself as he is and face up to his predicament. Trueblood is Ellison's achievement in a tradition he values so highly: in that of southern Negro oral storytelling that creates universal figures as well as stories possessing "the texture of experience and the projection of values, and the distillation of a kind of wisdom."⁶⁰

Trueblood as universal figure resembles Oedipus of the two tragedies: both Oedipus and Trueblood commit incest

and experience it as a great crime; both are wounded; both make peace with themselves without divine help; and both achieve reconciliation as well as fame and recognition. But while Oedipus is the prototype of the tragic existential hero, Trueblood typifies the tragi-comical one. Placed in a potentially tragic situation, Trueblood sins against a universal taboo, experiences utter loneliness and guilt, then emerges with new insight, personal values and new blues. But his situation is also comically existential: it is funny and leads to revelation without the hero's death or mutilation.

Trueblood's existential situation springs from his essential human nature--his potent sexuality. His sexuality is the metaphor for his wholesome humanity and remains the defining human quality in the entire novel. With incest, Trueblood experiences guilt and ostracism. Prayer does not help to resolve his inner conflict. But Trueblood is in an undefined mystical communion with the moral and spiritual base of the universe symbolized by the stars: "Finally, one night, way early in the mornin', I looks up and sees the stars and I starts singin'."⁶¹ This cosmic force is more forgiving and accepting than Trueblood's religious wife, neighbours and the preacher, and Trueblood responds to it intuitively, out of his innate spirituality. His response is that he accepts himself in his paradoxical humanity: guilty-and-not-guilty, physical-and-spiritual. Trueblood is the arche-

type of the non-conforming moralist in Invisible Man, passing through sin, guilt and suffering into the blues, the blues representing the acceptance of his human identity and predicament. But this non-conformist is still rooted in his group's traditions: "I don't mean to, I didn't think 'bout it, just start singin'. I don't know what it was, some kinda church song, I guess. All I know is I end up singin' the blues."⁶²

Unwitting sin, guilt, suffering and the recognition of identity are commonplace themes in modern existential literature. What makes Trueblood an outstanding figure is the way he asserts his manhood.⁶³ He returns home, chases the neighbours out, tells his wife and daughter that he is sorry "but that what done happen is done happen ... I'm still a man."⁶⁴ Neither does he allow the midwife to endanger his women; he asserts himself as the responsible, authoritative pater familias. Trueblood emerges from his ordeal with wisdom and dignity and as the man who is at home in his world and humanity: "I walks out of the house and leaves 'em there to cry it out between 'em. I wanted to go off by myself agin, but it don't do no good tryin' to run off from somethin' like that. It follows you wherever you go."⁶⁵ Trueblood is the bluesman as a man who learns what it means to be fully human and who can live with pain because he can translate it into a deeply meaningful lyrical work of art.

Trueblood is also the artist-as-myth-maker, a Homer

figure in the tradition of oral literature. The telling of his story resembles a ritual, he himself assuming the seer-bard's attitude: "He cleared his throat, his eyes gleaming and his voice taking on a deep, incantatory quality, as though he had told the story many, many times."⁶⁶ His story is like a blues whose lyricism, humor, imagery and language define him and his life.

The essential pattern of his life, character and creativity all spring from his sexuality; he describes his life in the condensed, humorous and sexual imagery of the blues:

But once a man gets hisself in a tight
spot like that there ain't much he can
do. It ain't up to him no longer.
There I was, tryin' to git away with
all my might, yet having to move with-
out movin'. I flew in but I had to
walk out. I had to move without
movin'... That's just about been my
life. ⁶⁷

Trueblood's way of getting out of his tight spot is by rejecting self-castration and murder. Thus he establishes the bluesman's non-dehumanizing, non-violent way of facing up to catastrophe. As tragi-comic hero, Trueblood represents both man's successful struggle for self-definition and the artist's myth-making capacity.

Jim Trueblood as particular southern Negro folk character is Ellison's answer to condescending and false conceptions (be these held by Mark Twain and other white liberals or by contemporary black men) of the southern Negro's

character and role.⁶⁸ The name Jim identifies Trueblood as the black man in American consciousness and literature. Ellison's Jim is black but American: he has a strongly Negro yet typically American consciousness, combined with a conscience which is superior to that of his condescending black and white neighbours.

Jim Trueblood's consciousness is American because it is plagued with the problem of liberty in the symbolic shape of the white woman. The objects of his sexuality are black women, but his nightmarish dream introduces the American or racist taboo: interracial sex. The dream is, on the one hand, Ellison's answer to the white southerner's fear-and-hate-charged image of the Negro as the boogie who wants his women. On the other hand, it shows the strength and wisdom of Jim Trueblood's consciousness: his wish and hope for freedom are so repressed that they frighten him even in a dream. His is the southern Negro's protective consciousness, in harmony with the reality of his society.

For his white neighbours, interracial sex functions as the only taboo. But Jim Trueblood sees bloodshed, murder and self-castration as the greatest crimes and incest as the next greatest. His values clash with those of his society but accord with higher ones. And despite his act of incest, he is, like other southern folk characters in the novel, a loving, responsible family man. Jim Trueblood is Ellison's bluesman as family man, a role possible in the relatively

stable Negro community of the south but lost during the black man's migration toward the north and rootlessness.⁶⁹

For all Jim Trueblood's strength and wisdom, he does not understand the white man's reaction. This intuitive artist and moralist who defines himself and the pattern of his life, does not understand his relationship to his society and history. He represents the black man strengthened by his group identity. But this strength is also his prison; he does not achieve the third step in Negro American self-identification--the conscious articulation of a national role and identity. That will be the hero's achievement after his vision perceived in Trueblood's seer-like state of mind.

The hero meets his other true ancestors (except the grandfather) in Harlem. Mary Rambo, who articulates what is expected of Invisible Man, is the first blues character he meets in the North. Mary is the blueswoman (and outstanding mother-figure in a long line of black mothers) in Invisible Man; her figure shows the continuing and saving function of the blues spirit. She is sustained by it and can then act as a sustaining, life-giving mother figure, in contrast to the image of the smothering Negro mammy in other stories of black experience.

Mary's sustaining role is to inspire the lost young man with her wisdom, strength and expectations and to burden him with her bank, the symbol of the past. Mary as mother or security is not needed for Invisible Man's self identifi-

cation; but Mary Rambo as non-political "Mother Hope" is needed. Her insistence on a positive attitude and action; her insight about where the Negro's strength comes from; her demands, expectations and moral standards are all factors that egg him on.

In her first conversation with Invisible Man, who is discouraged and confused after his hospital experience, she tells him that young people from the South, people like himself "them what knows the fire and ain't forgot how it burns" will have to do more than talk and hope to change the status quo: "No, it's you young ones what has to remember and take the lead." She also warns him about the corrupting influence of the northern city, giving her own strength as example in poetic language that might be a line in a blues: "I'm in New York but New York ain't in me."⁷⁰

Her treasure, the bank, stays with the hero too. He cannot get rid of it. In the drama of the novel, it serves as a weapon which helps him to survive and reach his identity. The bank is a complex symbol. As the image of the Negro entertainer, it is the counterpart of Clifton's doll. But the bank is of iron and full of coins against the empty paper doll. Despite outside stereotyping, the bank stands for the rich, meaningful and indestructible Negro American heritage, as well as for the strength of its owner; Clifton's doll represents only the ugliness of stereotyped images as well as Clifton's deadly despair and self-hatred.

The hero finds the bank not only indestructible but also burdensome. Still, he must learn to live with his heritage as Mary does, for Mary Rambo represents inner strength, and Invisible Man senses her value:

Nor did I think of Mary as a 'friend'; she was something more--a force, a stable, familiar force like something out of my past which kept me from whirling off into some unknown which I dared not face. It was a most painful position, for at the same time, Mary reminded me constantly that something was expected of me, some act of leadership, some newsworthy achievement; and I was torn between resenting her for it and loving her for the nebulous hope she kept alive. 71

Her importance for Invisible Man lies in her down-to-earth wisdom, experience and humor; her affirmative view of life, her insistence on the possibility of progress, her emphasis on "making something of yourself." She is a blueswoman, not as a Bessie Smith but as a plain, poor, superstitious, hard-working, sensible, responsible and dignified woman. And this "Mother Hope" does not destroy her children: she is one stable force that helps the hero to recognize and accept the value of his folk traditions.⁷²

These traditions are also represented by four men, who show the link between northern urban life and the southern past: the blueprint man, the anonymous man on the bus after the Emerson episode, the yam man and Primus Provo. All reveal the hero's alienation; all force him to remember and identify

with the heritage he is trying to reject; all make him recognize that the expressions of Negro American folk art, even if exuberant, are rooted in painful experience; and finally, all force him to ask himself about freedom as it is related to identity.

This self-questioning is an essential part of the process of self-definition; already in the Prologue, the sons of the old spiritual singer had told Invisible Man "ask yourself!" when he plagued their mother with questions about freedom. The mothers do not provide the answers--their function is to expect that the hero find them. The Negro father figures, representing folk traditions, help him to find his own answers by constantly forcing him to ask: "Who and what was I? How did I come to be?"⁷³ until he realizes that he is what he is as the son of his heritage.

The most forceful and important character among the four men is the blueprint man; he represents the urban bluesman in the image of the clown-like entertainer, and his song, a love lyric, strangely paradoxical and mystifying in its earthy imagery, is the expression of his bluesman's spirit. This bluesman (apparently also a tribute to Ellison's friend and idol Jimmy Rushing) has a ribald sense of humor, and the poet's imagination and command of language. He is a virtuoso on his instruments, his voice and whistling.

This urban bluesman uses his talents--folk rhymes, songs and music--to define himself: "In fact, I'maseventh-

son of a seventh son born with a caul over both eyes and raised on black cat-bones high John the Conqueror and greasy greens..." he spied with twinkling eyes, his lips working rapidly."⁷⁴ He names himself also Peter Wheatstraw, and the Devil's son-in-law; these names refer to the urban blues singers' habit to adopt the names of southern singers and folk characters, revealing their identification with them. The blueprint man's most valid name, though, is Blue: this is his true name, expressive of his spirit and song.

Blue the clown-like artist is also a whole man. He not only entertains and survives but knows who he is and accepts himself. His rhyming prefigures and contrasts with Clifton's spiel, a song that is not a blues, but a Charlie Parker-like modern jazz performance; Blue accepts himself while the alienated Clifton hates himself. The urban bluesman, like Trueblood, represents an integrated identity, and his present self and songs are linked to his southern past and to southern folk art.

Blue reminds Invisible Man of the stories, jokes, riddles and puns of his childhood. The alienated hero has trouble "signifying" with the proper answer, but he remembers and laughs despite himself.

Blue's strange song makes the hero ask:

What does it mean...I'd heard it all
my life but suddenly the strangeness
of it came through to me. Was it
about a woman or about some strange,

sphynxlike animal? Certainly his woman, no woman, fitted that description? And why describe anyone in such contradictory terms? Was it a sphynx? 75

The blues, like the grandfather's legacy, function as the riddle of the sphynx: both ask "What kind of man is the Negro American? And what is his role in his society?" Trueblood has already given the answer to the first question. The second question, relating to the hero's problem of identity, is still unsolved. Invisible Man does not know the answer to the double-pronged riddle of the blues at this point.

But for the first time he senses the mystical quality of the blues. He also identifies emotionally with the song that expresses his state of mind, the lonely traveler's sadness. And he is forced to admire Blue's virtuosity: "God damn, I thought, they're a hell of a people! And I didn't know whether it was pride or disgust that suddenly flashed over me."⁷⁶ The hero, still wanting to become another Booker T. Washington, consciously dissociates himself from his people but identifies on the deeper, emotional level and reluctantly admits that "There was no escaping such reminders."⁷⁷ Thanks to the urban bluesman, the hero's alienated identity is beginning to melt.

The thaw continues after the crucial Emerson episode, Invisible Man's first realization that he had been run. Pained, he reverts to southern behaviour--he goes to the rear of the bus. There he hears a man whistle an old, familiar

tune. This tune, the poor Robin jingle, represents southern folk jazz. The hero as an aspiring Booker T. Washington has been alienated from jazz; as soon as he is forced to reject his white-washed ambitions, he contacts his past heritage by remembering the jingle about poor Robin.

The jingle is a song about a victimized Negro. As a child, Invisible Man had not understood it. But now, after his painful experience, he identifies with the subject of the jingle; for the first time he knows one source of Negro American folk art--the victim's feelings.⁷⁸

Next, Invisible Man remembers the tuba player, who had rendered the jingle in the tragi-comical spirit of the blues and played his solo as if it were a ritualistic song commemorating an American ritual:

and the droll tuba player of the old
Elk's band had rendered it solo on
his helical horn; with comical
flourishes and doleful phrasing.
'Boo boo boo booooo, Poor Robin
clean'--a mock funeral dirge...⁷⁹

This tuba player is a jazzman; his solo shows the connection between Negro American experience and its 20th century expression, jazz. Jazz, too, is imbued with the blues-spirit. And Ellison's use of this anonymous tuba player is a tribute to Walter Page.

The jingle and its musical variation make Invisible Man ask questions about his identity:

What was the who-what-when-why-where
of poor old Robin? What had he done
and who had tied him and why had they
plucked him and why had we sung his
fate?...Who was I anyway? 80

This self-questioning leads to knowing that he too is a victimized Robin, a black man manipulated by black and white exploiters. And this realization leads to the hero's bluesman-like reaction, his laughter because of pain. He realizes also that he has changed and that he owes something to the race. The meeting with the second representative of the past has lead Invisible Man not only to a better understanding of the source and role of Negro American art, but also to identification with his group. This identification is an angry one, but anger is needed here--it helps to melt more of his alienated identity.

Black anger glows and melts his emotion-frozen personality when he meets the yam man. The continuing thaw leaves Invisible Man in a state of angry nihilism; he feels the conflict other alienated and non-bluesman-like Negroes (the mad Vet and Clifton) feel: "I was wild with resentment but too much under 'self control', that frozen virtue, that freezing vice."⁸¹ He feels also lost; his experiences with Emerson and in the hospital had shattered his former self, leaving him painfully aware of his inner emptiness. In this state he is ready for the yam man with his sweet yams.

The yam man is a relic but has survived without

qualms about his southern behavior. His yams the hero recognizes as the sweet food of childhood; they represent the simplicity and sweetness of the time when he was still part of his traditions. Then yams and food in general had no racial significance--he ate what he liked. Now, like other eaters of "soul food," he decides to eat or not to eat certain foods as a sign of racial allegiance. "Soul food"-eating is a symptom of confusion about one's identity; this is what Invisible Man sees at the end of his meeting with the yam man:

What and how much had I lost by trying to do only what was expected of me instead of what I myself wished to do?...But what of those things which you actually didn't like, not because you were not supposed to like them, not because to dislike them was considered a mark of refinement and education--but because you actually found them distasteful? 82

These questions make Invisible Man see that as an alienated Negro he had been a happy conformist, but now "newborn," struggling for a harmonious sense of self, he would have to make painful troublesome choices.

The young man who reaches this insight is different from the one who met Blue. Now he would not reject the breakfast of chops and grits, for now he feels part of his people. No longer are the Harlem Negroes they, but, including him, we: "What a group of people we were, I thought."⁸³

The hero's insight about identification "on the yam level" and a more meaningful one is the insight of one who is beginning to accept his past, even though he rejects superficial solutions of his twin problems of freedom and identity.

As soon as he turns from the yam man, he stumbles upon the symbols of the black man's freedom and identity in Primus Provo and his possessions. Primus Provo represents the wise and gentle humanity of the Negro since emancipation behind the humiliating, obscuring image of the darky entertainer. His possessions on the sidewalk and his dominating wife stand for the black man's frustrating experiences since slavery, including the one of being freed. The essence of this experience is the feeling of not being the man of the house, coupled with a frantic groping for a socially meaningful identity.

The gentle, pathetic ex-slave represents that part of the past Invisible Man would gladly forget. But on his way toward self-identification he is not allowed to ignore it. Despite his nausea he experiences the old man as a parent and senses that Primus Provo's symbolic possessions, while useless and painful to him, have a deeply personal meaning:

And it was as though I myself was
being dispossessed of some painful
yet precious thing which I could
not bear to lose; something con-
founding, like a rotted tooth that
one would rather suffer indefinitely

than endure the short, violent eruption of pain that would mark its removal. And with this sense of dis-possession came a pang of vague recognition: this junk, these shabby chairs, these heavy, old-fashioned pressing irons, zinc wash tubs with dented bottoms--all throbbed within me with more meaning than there should have been.

This recognition leads to Invisible Man's questions:

And why did I, standing in the crowd, see like a vision my mother ... why were they causing me discomfort so far beyond their intrinsic meaning as objects? And why did I see them now as behind a veil that threatened to lift, stirred by the cold wind in the narrow street? 84

The discomfort Invisible Man experiences consists of his sense that like Primus Provo, he, too, might be the black man whose humanity and groping for identity are obscured by hateful, stereotyped images. He resists identification with the gentle old man who, despite his appearance as a woman-ridden, black-faced minstrel, represents the prophetic identity. For as the name Primus Provo ("the first judge") implies, the old ex-slave symbolizes the Negro's continuous role as the gauge of the nation's moral performance. His first and main value is to demonstrate the lack of freedom and equality--the gap between American ideals and reality.

This role is the painful yet precious thing Invisible Man does not want to lose. An instinctive, visionary aware-

ness is all he achieves at the eviction. But the eviction scene takes him one step further toward self-definition than the yam man: it forces him to make a choice. Witnessing Primus Provo's humiliation, Invisible Man feels compelled to choose between remaining an outsider and becoming involved in Primus Provo's eighty-seven-year-old struggle for freedom. Now Invisible Man experiences the pain of choosing:

I saw them start up the steps and felt suddenly as though my head would split. I knew that they were about to attack the man and I was both afraid and angry, repelled and fascinated. I both wanted it and feared the consequences... I seemed to totter on the edge of a great dark hole. 85

He chooses to participate, not thoughtfully but passionately. Yet, when he yells "Black men! Brothers! Black Brothers!" he has accepted his past and folk traditions on the deep decisive emotional level. This acceptance marks the end of the hero's fatherlessness on the ethnic level. Now he is ready to fight for his people as an orator and politician. What remains of his education is to learn to fight for freedom and identity with the valuable, traditional attitudes and techniques of the bluesman.

These attitudes and techniques are personified by two symbolic figures in Clifton's funeral march: the old man who intones the spiritual, and the euphonium player who

picks up and carries the tune. Their blues duet is the living link between slavery-time spirituals (as artistic expressions of the determination and longing for freedom) and 20th century jazz; and the spirit of their duet represents that aspect of Negro American folk tradition which, motivated by the desire and ability to endure life at its harshest and most unjust, masters and contains pain and then transcends it by expressing it in art. The two men's spirit transcends death as the symbols of their song, two black pigeons, transcend the image of death:

then somewhere in the procession an old, plaintive, masculine voice arose in a song, wavering, stumbling in the silence at first alone, until in the band a euphonium horn fumbled for the key and took up the air, one catching and rising above the other and the other pursuing, two black pigeons rising above a skull-white barn to tumble and rise through still, blue air. 86

Both men sing with faces upturned toward the sun. The men who sing in the face of the sun during Clifton's funeral stand for the attitude Invisible Man calls "Life is to be lived, not controlled; and humanity is won by continuing to play in face of certain defeat."⁸⁷

The two men's triumphant song is a ritual in which all mourners participate. The spirit of the blues expresses the human emotions that are linked with Clifton's death: longing for freedom and dignity, love and grief. Clifton's

funeral song (and Invisible Man's speech too) are the most unifying group experiences in Invisible Man. What is significant about this experience is that this ethnically rooted song unites people as the political actions and aims of the Brotherhood never do.

The hero realizes this fact intuitively; he wonders about what had brought so many mourners to his political demonstration of a funeral and his feelings answer him, saying that the old man and the horn player "had touched upon something deeper than protest, or religion" arousing "us all," and "it was as though he'd changed the emotion beneath the words while yet the old longing, resigned, transcendent emotion still sounded above now deepened by that something for which the theory of the Brotherhood had given me no name."⁸⁸ And he too is forced to experience the song as the expression of his deep emotion as well as a uniting force.

The two men who arouse the uniting song resemble Jim Trueblood, the folk artist. Each performs a solo, the old man's stance expressing the spirit of the blues:

It was a worn, old yellow face and
his eyes were closed and I could
see a knife welt around his up-
turned neck as his throat threw out
the song. He sang with his whole
body, phrasing each verse as
naturally as he walked, his voice
rising above all others, blending
with that of the lucid horn. 89

His image represents a blend of the spiritual as a result of

pain and the naturally physical--a blend that foreshadows Louis Armstrong's conscious stance. The horn player is even closer to Louis Armstrong, as horn player in a band. The two musicians represent the anonymous creators of Negro American folk music and their duet the contradictory nature of jazz, for true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group.

The two men's solos represent their self-identification according to Ellison's formula: "each solo flight, or improvisation, represents ... a definition of his identity: as individual, as member of the collectivity and as a link in the chain of tradition."⁹⁰ The identity they achieve through their art is that of the whole, integrated person, the man who is a link in the chain of tradition and a member of a collectivity. These two figures are anonymous models of the meaningful role and identity the hero intuitively desires and strives for: that of the self-determined person and myth-making artist both within and against his group.

Louis Armstrong, the living example of this whole human and Negro American identity, is a mythological figure. He is Rinehart's opposite, the trickster as clown, who through his music and performance orders chaos and creates his full identity: as individual, as member of the group, and as a link in the chain of tradition.

Armstrong is in the tragi-comical blues tradition.

His performance, including the non-musical features of minstrel shows--his donning of the comic mask--is his unique feature and also his self-definition as a continuing link in Negro American entertainment. At the same time, he has been creating his own values: he plays romantic, lyrical music on the military trumpet; Armstrong, like Ellison, values romantic lyricism above militancy. And the timbre and spirit of his music is the blues' sad but affirmative spirit. Louis Armstrong's music defines him as Jim Trueblood's urban, artistic counterpart.

For Armstrong is an outstanding creative musician, whom Ellison regards as T. S. Eliot's equal, both as aesthetician and poet; aesthetician by having created a new jazz technique through conscious, artful juxtapositioning of earlier jazz styles, poet in terms of his mixed and varied range of allusions. And the task Ellison as writer had set himself was to strive "for the broadest range, the discovery and articulation of the most exalted values" by adding to the American novel "the wonderful resources of Negro American speech and idiom" and "the complex reality of the American experience as it shaped and was shaped by the lives of my own people."⁹¹ Louis Armstrong has been doing this with his lyrical, romantic and sad but also rowdy, ecstatic, exuberant and outgoing music--qualities that describe Invisible Man too. Both Louis Armstrong and Invisible Man express the triumphant, earthy, tragi-comical optimism

of the blues.

Thus it is natural that Ellison chose Louis Armstrong's rendering of a blues as the theme song of his novel. Armstrong's trumpet solo and voice represent further values Ellison accepts: technical excellence and originality which enable the artist to express the emotion beneath the words. And the lyrics, too, play a part in conveying the intended mood and themes of Invisible Man:

Cold empty bed,
Springs hard as lead,
Feel like old Ned,
Wish'd I was dead.
What did I do to be so black and blue?

Even the mouse
Ran from my house,
They laugh at you
And scorn you too.
What did I do to be so black and blue?

I'm white inside,
But that don't help my case.
Girls, I can't hide
What is in my face.

How would it end?
Ain't got a friend.
My only sin
Is in my skin.
What did I do to be so black and blue?

How would it end?
Ain't got a friend.
My only sin
Is in my skin.
What did I do to be so black and blue?⁹²

The mood of the song represents the alienated, confused Negro's sense of life, combined with anxious respon-

sibility. The poem's persona is alienated; on the one hand, he insists that he is innocent, trapped by his skin. On the other, he keeps asking "how would it end?" and "what did I do to be so black and so blue?" Not Louis Armstrong but the persona speaks for the hero;⁹³ the lyrics are the condensed story of Invisible Man's alienation, consistent sense of personal concern and responsibility, and his painful self-questioning leading to his prophetic identity.

The Prologue's angry, spiteful Invisible Man fails, like the persona of the song, to see the evil of his "white inside": his alienation and his irresponsible attitude. In the body of the novel, he struggles to answer the irrespressible questions "how would it end?" and "what did I do to be so black and blue?" On the last two pages of the Epilogue, when he knows the answers to these questions, he understands and accepts the source of Louis Armstrong's music and clown-like role and identity.

Here Invisible Man (with Armstrong) accepts old Bad Air who represents the paradoxical spirit of the blues, which affirms and loves, even if it springs from painful experiences. These include the "bad air" of urban tenements symbolized by Clifton's coffin; and the "foul air" represented by Invisible Man's pain when he rejects the offer of the prophetic identity.⁹⁴ In brief, they include the urban Negro's feeling of "being nowhere" as the most recent pain the Negro American must contain and master. Louis Armstrong masters it

in his skillful musician's way which differs from Invisible Man's way only in kind: the hero masters his pain finally through the moralistic writer's dedicated intentions and techniques.

While Louis Armstrong's medium of artistic expression differs from that of Invisible Man, Armstrong is one of the hero's three most important male models; and the jazz-bluesman's music and song and Invisible Man's prophetic voice have many affinities.

The coal cellar vision is the hero's birth into prophecy. The prophetic role, as sudden as it seems, is the one for which he had been chosen by his grandfather's legacy and prepared by the ordeals, initiations, deaths and rebirths he had experienced.

The hero's prophetic identity has several specific Biblical models. The most important one is Jonah;⁹⁵ but Ezekiel's role and identity give further insight into the prophet's task: He is chosen as moral watchman over his nation and made responsible for their transgressions against their given and accepted laws. Thus, the prophetic identity implies personal moral responsibility for his nation's adherence to the basic laws of their national life. Ellison accepts this view: society is man's creation and the significance of Invisible Man lies, to a great extent, in its mood of personal responsibility for democracy.⁹⁶ This mood is established with the line "What did I do to be so black and

blue?" and the hero feels responsible all through the novel. His actions, too, are such that his guilt is justified. In Harlem he clearly hears the call to prophecy in terms of Ezekiel imagery,⁹⁷ but is not ready to accept it until he has witnessed the riot and again seen it as another Civil War, now as one he had helped to bring on by yessing the Brotherhood.

The riot drives him into the coal cellar, the symbolic source of his light and heat and warmth, and the setting of his vision. The vision is one of his great solos, identifying him as the incipient prophet. In the vision he physically is what he had figuratively called himself after the Hambro scene,⁹⁸ both sacrificer and victim. And this represents his prophetic reality, painful destiny and higher conscience-- through suffering, he sees and then must warn or else he is as guilty as the guiltiest of his nation.

The vision expresses, basically, Invisible Man's perception of his responsibility for American history and society. At first, he is victim, pitted against his symbolic false fathers, the violators of the equalitarian and pluralistic principles of American democracy and its humanistic spirit. Symbolically, this is expressed by castration. Sexuality had been established in the normative Trueblood episode as the defining human quality; it represents man's ability to both love and hate, to destroy and build, and within the limitations of life, to define himself and the

quality of his life and society. Castration represents soul-lynching, depriving man of his paradoxical human identity.

Invisible Man's castrators, the scientists, deny man's complex but creative humanity in favor of some non-human interest or idea. All are fanatics who want man to conform to their views. All are blind to the true American identity and to the interwoven nature of the black and white American's destiny. And all are elitists who deny man's, and specifically the black man's political, social and intellectual maturity. They want to describe and define his reality; they are deterministic and presumptuously paternalizing. That is why Jack is their spokesman; the Brotherhood is the fullest and most recent expression of this attitude.⁹⁹

As a result of his greatest pain, Invisible Man's vision grows prophetic. He now sees the link between his suffering and his prophetic identity, in the double image of the "glittering butterfly" that circles his "blood-red parts." The butterfly appears in the first chapter of the novel, in the "Battle Royal;" there it is the symbol of the hero's passion that contrasts with the violent and corrupt world of southern white society and with that of conformity.¹⁰⁰ Now the butterfly symbolizes his mature prophet's vision, a vision that, in contrast with his manipulators' blindness, sees the result of their history-making: a world

wasted by racial war. And when he has articulated his vision, he finds the strength to act as prophet, to get up and shout, "No, no, we [*Italics mine*] must stop him!"¹⁰¹ With the we the hero has involved himself and become the full-fledged prophet, and his final action represents his spiritual, moral and intellectual triumph over his paternalizing manipulators.

Awaking from his prophet's vision, Invisible Man returns to his spiteful, alienated stance: "They were all up there somewhere, making a mess of the world. Well, let them." But Invisible Man is whole, not castrated, and possesses the capacity to find a fruitful solution. He sees two possibilities now: "I could only move ahead or stay here, underground."¹⁰² Because he is whole, he will move ahead to his fully articulated, conscious prophetic identity in the Epilogue.

The Epilogue is the hero's final solo where he moves ahead from irresponsible invisibility towards the assertion of his own prophetic vision and identity. Commentators on Invisible Man have been undecided and dissatisfied with the nature of the Epilogue. The pattern of this section is like the euphonium player's interaction with his tradition during Clifton's funeral march:

"Then somewhere in the procession an old plaintive voice arose in a song, wavering, stumbling in the silence at first alone, until in the band a euphonium player fumbled for the key and took up the air, 103

the first six pages of the Epilogue representing Invisible Man's fumbling for the key.

The fumbling part of the Epilogue consists of tortured self-analysis, correct statements and of many, many questions. The questions have an important function: they represent the hero's self-questioning as the prerequisite for his authentic identity, and the cure for his earlier conformist's attitude. The Prologue had established self-questioning as the road to freedom in terms of identity: "Old woman, what is this freedom you love so well?" asked Invisible Man and was told to ask himself.¹⁰⁴ The beginning of the Epilogue represents his mental confusion, when he knows what he does not want but is not clear about what he does want; when his criticisms are valid but his personal view has not chrySTALLIZED yet. As he puts it, "I can't figure it out; it escapes me. But what do I really want, I've asked myself."¹⁰⁵

Invisible Man, who is whole, breaks out of his confusion. This break occurs where he asks himself "So why do I write, torturing myself to put it down?"¹⁰⁶ The last two pages of the Epilogue represent the final meaning of invisibility as the prophet's role.

Invisible Man's insight occurs, first, in terms of understanding and re-interpreting his grandfather's legacy:

Son, after I'm gone, I want you to
keep up the good fight. I never
told you, but our life is a war and
I have been a traitor all my born

days, a spy in the enemy's country
 ever since I gave up my gun back
 in the Reconstruction. Live with
 your head in the lion's mouth. I
 want you to overcome 'em with
 yeses, undermine 'em with grins,
 agree 'em to death and destruc-
 tion, let 'em swoller you till they
 vomit or bust wide open. 107

The grandfather, who had been a slave and saw the frustration of his dream of freedom after the Civil War, is also a mythological figure. He represents the prophetic view of life and identity of the Negro American since slavery times. He defines himself as a fighter against those who violate the Constitution he had learned by heart. He tells his son to live Daniel-like and Jonah-like, fighting against those who violate democracy and humanism, and to hand this prophetic way of life down to future generations.

Invisible Man's appreciation of his grandfather's wisdom and prophetic attitude marks his identification with his ancestors, who even as slaves, had accepted the prophet's role and identity. And this linking with his ethnic tradition enables Invisible Man, the young twentieth century Negro, to re-interpret and re-enact his grandfather's role in his own historical circumstances. While the Southern slave and "freed" man could only live it by protective meekness and speak about it on his deathbed, his grandson in Harlem can assume the prophet's artistically and intellectually active social role of speaking out in a book.

Next, Invisible Man understands and re-interprets the tragi-comical and self-determining quality of the blues by stressing the mind: "In going underground, I whipped it all except the mind, the mind. And the mind that has conceived a plan of living must never lose sight of the chaos against which the pattern was conceived."¹⁰⁸ The mind is that human part which orders and defines experience. Now Invisible Man understands his past mistake of having been the victim of his Dionysian impulses, represented by that

area in which a man's feelings are more rational than his mind [according to the still confused Invisible Man] and it is precisely in that area that his will is pulled in several directions at the same time. 109

Understanding that this impulsiveness had caused his willingness "to go in everyone's way but my own," now Invisible Man uses his mind and resolves his last conflict by accepting Louis Armstrong the clown.

By re-interpreting his grandfather's prophetic message and accepting Louis Armstrong's art, Invisible Man defines himself as a link in the blues tradition, voicing his affirmation of life, America and his own Negro American's identity. And together with his self-definition as bluesman, he also defines himself as a link in a wider, national tradition: the tradition of the American novel of black experience which stresses not only the writer's but also other

individual's prophetic role--the individual's moral responsibility for democracy, humanism and diversity. For Invisible Man closes by asking his readers and, of course, expecting them to meditate and answer his question: "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?"

With Invisible Man, a novel that ranges widely over Negro American experience but stresses the value of the bluesman's prophetic role, Ellison has helped to define the identity of his group. This is his "social" contribution. A more specifically artistic contribution, still tied to the theme of American identity, is that he has combined two native prophetic traditions and created a unique, new blend. He has brought together the tradition of the blues and the moralistic attitude of previous American novelists. Invisible Man itself, the allegory of the achievement of a new type of American prophetic identity, is the proof of Ellison's thesis about the pluralistic nature of the American identity.

PART III

BLUESMAN AND HIPSTER

Introduction

Chapter I - Bluesman

Chapter II- Hipster

INTRODUCTION

Ellison's Invisible Man is not only a novel of identity but also a novel that has its own unique identity. Allegory, symbolism, the use of folklore and Negro American speech patterns go into the creation of its special quality. The outstanding feature of Invisible Man, however, is its reliance on music.

Among critics who have noted Ellison's use of music, Stanley E. Hyman points to the close relationship between the novel and the blues when he calls Invisible Man "the fictional image of a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism,"¹ a lyricism Ellison ascribes to the blues. Robert Bone writes that Ellison's controlling metaphors are all musical.²

A close examination of Invisible Man proves both Hyman and Bone right; Ellison's hero, who is hardly seen but is known through his voice, speaks with tragi-comic lyricism; and the poetry he makes out of his painful experiences is controlled by musical metaphors to the extent that many passages of the novel may be treated as verbal music.

"Verbal music" is a concept employed by Steven Paul Scher in his studies of German literature. Scher developed useful distinctions for texts that contain musical elements.

"Verbal music" refers to any text that has a piece of music, existing or fictional, as its theme. Because of the essential affinities between literature and music such texts can be fruitfully analysed in terms of their controlling metaphors, their similes and the peculiarities of their vocabulary. The examination of these poetic elements throws light on the author's use of symbolism and on his extra-musical ideas, for writers of verbal music rely on the abstract and almost unlimited connotative qualities of music to suggest concepts and relationships, complex thought sequences and a broad range of feelings.³

Ellison uses Louis Armstrong's jazz-blues as his novel's main musical theme for reasons already explored in Part II.⁴ To repeat the essence of what has already been said, Ellison employs Negro American music, with the blues as its central spirit, because it is the artistic counterpart of his subject matter: Negro American experience and identity.

The task Ellison had set himself was to convey as broad a range of his group's experience as possible and to define what is of enduring value within that experience. The sense of life and the mode of facing social reality that is valued and celebrated by Ellison is one that made him write the following to Irving Howe:

American Negro life ... is, for the
Negro who must live it, not only a

burden (and not always that) but also a discipline--just as any human life which has endured so long is a discipline teaching its own insights into the human condition, its own strategies of survival. There is a fullness, even a richness here; and here despite the realities of politics perhaps, but nevertheless here and real."

This fullness and richness are reflected in Invisible Man and so is that mode of facing the realities of politics and social life that Ellison called a tradition,

an American Negro tradition which teaches one to deflect racial provocation and to master and contain pain ... a tradition which abhors as obscene any trading of one's anguish for gain and sympathy; which springs not from the desire to deny the harshness of existence but from a will to deal with it as men at their best have always done. 5

This is the tradition of a group who, in Ellison's view, are an American people with a remarkable sense of realism and yet filled with a sense of possible improvement despite the oppression they have been suffering since at least 1620. For oppression and injustice, and their social and individual consequences have been the consistent experience of the Negro American.

The one consistent Negro American art form is the blues. It is hardly accidental that the consistent aspect of Negro American experience and the consistent Negro American art form are so much alike. For the blues, too,

combine an earthy sense of reality and of limitations with the feeling that one can rise above them; the blues are sad yet basically hopeful and life-affirming. The same ambiguous attitude of the black man and of the blues allows Ellison to choose the bluesman as the personification of that tradition that he wishes to uphold as a value. He does so by devoting the most beautifully, most lyrically written part of his novel to Jim Trueblood, the archetypal bluesman.

In contrast to the blues spirit, there is another, minor tradition and mode of facing reality within Negro American experience. This is the tradition of the sacrificial victim. It finds its fullest expression in the figure of the hipster, personified by the tragic character and fate of Tod Clifton.

Both Trueblood and Clifton are treated in terms of music: the former in terms of the blues, the latter in terms of the ballad and of a type of song that passes for blues. The chapters that deal with them exhibit Ellison's use of music as well as his view of the bluesman and of the hipster.

CHAPTER I

Bluesman

In his critical essay on Richard Wright's Black Boy, Ellison wrote that

The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically.

Black Boy represents also "the flowering ... of the humble blues lyric."⁶

Ellison was here linking Wright's attitude and the quality and tone of his autobiography to the Negro blues. As Hyman observes, Ellison was the first to connect Negro American literature with the blues. Hyman notes also that with Invisible Man Ellison himself succeeded in producing the fictional image of the blues.⁷

But an even more analogous, more condensed fictional image of the blues than either Black Boy or Invisible Man is

one chronicle within Invisible Man--Jim Trueblood's story. Its spirit, tone, themes and language strongly resemble those of southern peasant blues and thus it may be regarded as a verbal blues.

A blues is a dominantly lyrical folk song; it is neither a narrative nor a protest song. While worded in the first person, a blues is not the performer's autobiography. The "I" of the song is not the singer but a persona.⁸ Yet, in its origin a blues is autobiographical: as Bone writes, it springs from personal catastrophe. What counts, though, is not the initiating disaster but the human response to it.⁹

Since it is not the disaster but the response to it that counts, a blues is a way of working one's way through a moral or spiritual problem. Hyman writes that "the blues anatomize neurosis and psychosis in order to resolve them cathartically; [that] they are, in short, not the disease but the doctor."¹⁰ Ellison compares this function to transcendence through artistic expression. This function is clearly shown by Trueblood's story where the hero, who must face up to sin, guilt and pain without super-human help, is healed as he creates new blues.

The major blues response is sadness. Anger, frustration, passive acceptance appear too, but disappointment is not typical.¹¹ Laughter, on the other hand, is frequent. As expressions of these emotions, the blues are high art, circumscribed by their characteristic music and lyrics.

Some blues lyrics are poetry without their music; here the stanza is the artistic unit, and while there is a variety of stanza forms, the chosen form is highly regular.¹² This formality separates the blues from unstructured songs like Clifton's composition.

Certain prevalent themes, the use of metaphors and vivid imagery are also part of the blues tradition. The themes of travel and sex have been noted by Hyman and Oliver.¹³ The theme of travel is linked to the urban Negro's feeling of uprootedness. The theme of sex expresses the southern peasant's sense of being at home in his world, when the attitude towards sex is natural, unsentimental and humorous like Trueblood's.

Oliver links this healthy attitude to the vitality of a good blues. In the lyrics this attitude appears in vivid imagery and mystifying metaphors. Blues metaphors can be extended to "surreal associations which imply the sexual virtuosity of the singer."¹⁴ Ellison uses this built-in possibility to convey not the bluesman's sexual virtuosity (or lack of it) but his vital and earthy humanity.

The function of the blues is as vital as the man who sings it, for blues-singing is a ritual according to Ellison. The ritual function of blues-singing appears as healing self-defining and value-creating power in Jim Trueblood's story. This southern folk character creates blues while he defines and accepts his paradoxical humanity. He does so as a res-

ponse to personal disaster. The spirit of his response is realistic and affirmative. He is a creative artist, a strong personality with his individual voice and techniques yet he creates by borrowing and using already traditional material. His vitality is reflected in the beauty of his performance. His story, speaking of his dilemma, a dilemma that springs both from his being a southern Negro and a modern secular man, is a colorful, lyrical piece of "verbal music."

The first and perhaps the most striking thing to note about Trueblood's story is its sense of beauty and richness. This impoverished, brutally treated southern peasant possesses an imagination so sensitive to beauty and a story-telling capacity so poetic that certain passages sing with lyricism.

Such a passage--perhaps the single most lyrical and colorful one in the entire book--is Trueblood's memory of a youthful love affair. Its setting is the tragi-comic, ambiguous and incest-fraught situation of lying beside his beautiful daughter on a cold night. The Mobile memory is called up by Matty Lou's soft breathing and word "Daddy," a typical blues word whose usage for both father and lover intones the incest theme.

The passage immediately preceding the memory of love past is even fuller of music. As Matty Lou says "Daddy," Trueblood seems to hear a whippoorwill calling, and is not

sure whether he had heard Matty Lou--it seemed like a whip-poorwill was calling: the impression is that of interior music as a composer hears it in his mind. Trueblood's musical imagination is introduced.

His natural image and gently, sadly humorous folk rhyming intone the "poor Robin" theme--that of the sacrificial victim upon whose back are unloaded the sufferings of others--in "whippoorwill" personified and punished.¹⁵ The sound of the passage is wistful and lulling.

The natural bird image is followed by the contrasting mechanical clock image. What Trueblood definitely heard was "the school clock strikin' four times, lonesome like."¹⁶ The clock music imparts a lonely, doomful mood and introduces the connection between clock-sound and being ostracized. The sound of the clock is ominous, striking four times--evoking the dong-dong-dong-dooong motif of the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth; this is the electroshock music linked to the themes of pain and violence leading to freedom through identity. The passage works in terms of contrasting images, sounds and moods: bird-clock, natural-mechanical; imagined-heard or inner-outer music; humour-doom. The result is an ambiguous passage and mood.

In this mood Trueblood remembers his "Mobile" days--young, virile, unmarried. The following two paragraphs are what Oliver terms "flights of sexual fantasy extending to surreal associations," "verbal music" conveying beautiful

love-making by colorful imagery and musical metaphors.

This "verbal music" turns on one word, "Mobile," whose form "movin'" is the key word here and later when Trueblood describes the pattern of his life. Movement is musical movement, representing sexual desire, drive and pleasure.

Trueblood is listening "to the sounds of the boats movin' along." He conveys the idea-emotion of this sound by the quail metaphor:

Like when you quail huntin' and it's getting dark and you can hear the boss bird whistlin' tryin' to get the covey together again, and he's coming toward you slow and whistlin' soft, cause he knows you somewhere around with your gun. Still he got to round them up, so he keeps on comin'. Them boss quails is like a good man, what he got to do he do. 17

Trueblood is both hunter and hunted but as the feeling and the last sentence reveal, he identifies with the bird, and the birdman image is concrete. This identification fits, for he "had been well-liked as a hard worker who took good care of his family's needs, and as one who told the old stories with a sense of humor and a magic that made them come alive."¹⁸ Trueblood's character and bardic talent, put into prosaic words by Invisible Man, are embedded in the vivid verbal music of the quail metaphor. The dominant mood of this music is imparted by the bird's soft whistling, a sound that

springs from his awareness of the hunter coupled with his determination to protect his family. Responsibility, determination and a sense of fatality are in this soft call that combines strength, lyricism and the idea of acceptance. Trueblood's definition of the good man contains three ideas: action, inevitability and acceptance.

The sound of the riverboats then blossoms into the colorful metaphors of desire fulfilled and desire waning. Desire increases as "first one would be comin' to you when you almost sleep and it sounds like somebody hittin' at you slow with a big shiny pick."¹⁹ Tools are common phallic symbols in the blues;²⁰ Ellison uses the movements of tools repeatedly and in variations in this story. Here the movement of the pick plays on the feelings of inevitability, carried on from the quail metaphor.

The increase of the sexual drive and motion is in the repeated "comin' close," "comin' straight at you," "comin' slow too;" the feeling is conveyed by a musical metaphor again: "only when it goes to hit you it ain't no pick a'tall but somebody far away breakin' little bottles of all kindsa colored glass."²¹ The sound is like a tinkling piano, guitar or mandolin, very rich because of the visual image which introduces richness of color and the meaning of "colored." This meaning is important in the story's and the novel's overall color symbolism. "Colored" as all kinds of color is not only the color of Trueblood's

imagination and nature, but also that of Emerson's repressed and sick sexuality in the tropical bird aviary image, another musical metaphor:

a large bird began a song, drawing
my eyes to the throbbing of its
bright blue, red and yellow throat.
It was startling and I watched the
surge and flutter of the birds as
their colors flared for an instant
like an unfurled oriental fan."

The idea is that man's essential nature is sexual and colored, Emerson's hidden and perverted, Trueblood's open and healthy. Still another variation is Mary Rambo--"rainbow"--the personification of hope, with the very black Tod Clifton, "our hope of the future," as its ironic counterpart. Finally, "colored" refers to Ellison's politics and idea of diversity: "America is woven of many strands."²²

The colored music keeps moving, for the sounds of the boats is "still comin' at you though. Still comin'." Then Trueblood hears it close up in the climactic watermelon metaphor:

Then you hear it close up, like when
you up in the second story window and
look down on a wagonful of watermelons,
and you see one of them young juicy
melons split wide open a-layin' all
spread out and cool and sweet on top of
all the striped green ones like it's
just waitin' for you, so you can see
how red and ripe and juicy it is and
all the shiny black seeds it's got and
all. 23

The young and juicy, sweet and cool, red and ripe watermelon is the poetic image of sex fulfilled.

This image goes back to the source of the blues. The watermelon as sexual image is older than the blues; it comes from the sales cries of southern vendors who too alluded to sex in their sales talk. Harriette Kershaw Leiding, in her patronizing yet musically perceptive story "Street Cries Of An Old Southern City," calls the hucksters' cries "familiar music" and describes them as one would the blues:

All the folksongs have a queer minor catch in them and even the street cries have an echo of sadness in their closing cadence...[Yet] all is not sadness, for here and there a quaint bit of human nature or glint of humor shows...even in the Street cry parlance, 'The Sex' holds its wonted superiority and you will find that 'She Crabs', (the better food) called through the nose of the vendor 'She Craib, She Craib,' bring more money than just ordinary male or Raw Crabs.

She quotes an old watermelon vendor's song as well:

Load my Gun
Wid Sweet Sugar Plum
An Shoot dem nung gal
One by one
Barder lingo
Water-millon. 24

Sexual allusions and imagery are in this "Watermelon Vendor's Cry" too:

Watermelon! Watermelon! Red to the rind,
 If you don't believe me jest pull down your blind!
 I sell to the rich,
 I sell to the po';
 I'm gonna sell the lady
 Standin' in that do'.
 Watermelon, Lady!
 Come and git your nice red watermelon, Lady!
 Red to the rind, Lady!
 Come on, Lady, and get 'em!
 Gotta make the picnic fo' two o'clock
 No flat tires today.
 Come on, Lady!
 I got water with the melon, red to the rind!
 If you don't believe it jest pull down your blind.
 You eat the watermelon and preee-serve the rind! 25

Ellison uses this material as the blues would: the imagery is traditional, from the persona's--here Trueblood's--experience and is arranged to express his feelings.

Fulfillment, too, is conveyed by a musical metaphor:

And you could hear the sidewheels
 splashin' like they don't want to
 wake nobody up, and us, me and the
 gal, would lay there feelin' like
 we was rich folks and them boys on
 the boats would be playin' sweet
 as good peach brandy wine. 26

Again, the sound of the boats is the music, now as a lullaby. The lovers's feeling resembles, due to the music-played-on-a-riverboat imagery, those of an Anthony and Cleopatra but the language is that of the blues and of Negro folklore; "sweet as good peach brandy wine" is Ellison's condensation of expressions like "keen and peachy," "fine and mellow," "sweet sugar plum," all from the blues, folklore and Negro American life.²⁷

The waning of desire and the accompanying emotion continue in terms of musical and visual movement: "Then the boats would be past and the lights would be gone from the window and the music would be goin' too." Rhythm and meaning are conveyed by the thrice-repeated phrase pattern "would be past," "would be gone," "would be goin'." Trueblood's feeling is shown also through his sunset metaphor:

Kinda like when you watch a gal in
a red dress and a wide straw hat
goin' past you down a lane with the
trees on both sides, and she's plump
and juicy and kinda switchin' her
tail 'cause she knows you watchin'
and you know she know, and you just
stands there and watches 'til you
can't see nothin' but the top of her
red hat and then that goes and you
know she done dropped behind a hill--
I seen me a gal like that once. 28

Again, Ellison is within blues tradition but is using its imagery for his own purposes. In a song where the singer complains about the unceasing sexual demands of his woman, she "got somethin' just like the risin' sun, you can't never tell when that work is done."²⁹ But Trueblood's work is done and the pleasurable feeling is in the visual "tail switchin'" movements of the metaphor, a wordless courting dance between him and the gal who, like the watermelon, is plump, juicy and red. This metaphor shows Ellison's use of imagery: "the boats would be past" and "a gal in a red dress and a wide straw hat goin' past you"--boats, watermelon and

young gal are all the same, finally culminating in the setting sun image, "'til you can't see nothin' but the top of her red hat and then that goes and you know she done dropped behind a hill."

The connecting color is red. Red here is the color of sexual love as something beautiful and fulfilling beyond words, both love as fulfilled pleasure and love as longing in wordless flirtation, with sexual desire as the inner music by which girl and boy communicate, to which they dance.

The red sun image emerges from Trueblood's memory as the image of the desirable, innocent but physical sexuality of the Negro girl. This use of red for female sexuality is both traditional and paradoxical. In blues that sing of unpleasant love and lovers (often using the phrase "tight like that") there is the image of the little red hen.³⁰

"Tight like that" appears in Trueblood's story rephrased to "tight spot" as the image of his incestuous situation and, in another variation, in the image of his life's pattern. While red represents good love in watermelon, red-dressed girl and setting sun, in the overall sexual theme it is also the color of suffering. Thus red emerges as the color of passion--love and suffering--with man's essential sexual nature causing both.

Man's original sin in Invisible Man and in Ellison's thought in general is not sex but pride, personified by Bliss Protheus Rinehart who has only rind but no red heart,

or identity and love. In his as yet unpublished novel where the figure of Rinehart returns, Ellison expresses this idea clearly:

And when they ask me, 'Where shall man look for God, the Father?' I say, let him who seeks look into his own bed. I say let him look into his own heart. I say, let him search his own loins. And I say that each man's bed-mate is likely to be a mary even though she be a magdalene. That's another form of the mystery, Bliss, and it challenges our ability to think. There's always a mystery of the one in the many and the many in the one, the you in them and the them in you--Ha! And it mocks your pride...Yes, Bliss, but it's always present and it's a rebuke to the universe of man's terrible pride and it's the shape and substance of all human truth...31

Dressed in the preacher's rhetoric, "the mystery of the one in the many and the many in the one" refers to the human and political concept of diversity, stemming from the American motto "De pluribus unum." Ellison uses it to insist on diversity, democracy and freedom as opposed to conformity, tyranny and oppression.

Trueblood's comment at the end of the setting sun metaphor is typical of his attitude and of the blues: "I seen me a gal like that once" is his matter-of-fact summary; he remembers the beauty, conveys the longing but expresses neither complaint nor disappointment.

The Mobile memory ends as it had begun, with the

sound of a girl's breathing and calling Trueblood "Daddy," only this time it is "Mobile gal Margaret" who addresses him. These sounds play partly on alliteration in Mobile, Margaret and Matty Lou, and partly on the ambiguous word "Daddy," providing the link between the beautiful past and the frightful present.

Trueblood's nightmarish dream is another link. It is also the necessary counterpart of his beautiful memories, for it is his hell, in feeling and in imagery. It is a hell from which he will wake into another hell or testing. From this he will emerge wounded but at peace, providing Invisible Man with a lesson.

Trueblood's dream, too, is filled with music, but this music is not lyrical; it is jarring and discordant. Its analysis, done as was the Mobile memory, leads to the following summary of extra-musical ideas, themes and lines of symbolism.

The use of a dream has several valid reasons. One is the connection between the blues and Trueblood's story. Among blues on sexual themes there is a subgroup dealing with perverse or unusual aspects of sex. These songs, whose attraction lies in the uncomfortable suggestiveness of their lyrics, employ symbolism and censor their content as dreams do. "Kitchen Man," about a potent black man who acts as a stud for a wealthy woman, is such a blues. Its imagery and atmosphere resemble those of Trueblood's dark

cottage and dream.³² Ellison combines the way dreams and the way suggestive blues deal with taboo subjects to convey Trueblood's feelings about the taboos of his society.

Another reason Ellison uses a dream is his own view of the role dreams play in the creative process. In 1956, when southern Congressmen drew up a manifesto against the Supreme Court, he tried to write an essay on events in the United States. Instead of an essay he wrote a "dream;" this is how he explained the form of "Tell It Like It Is, Baby:"

For a writer who depends upon the imagination for his insights and his judgments, perhaps this is usually the way. Current events and events from the past, both personal and historical, ever collide within his interior life-- either to be jumbled in the chaos of dream, or brought to ordered significance through the forms of his art. 33

Trueblood's dream has, of course, been ordered by Ellison. It contains white and black color symbolism, the racist taboo and a satire on the American dream of freedom.

Ellison's ingenious satire consists of making Trueblood experience a nightmare of interracial sex while he is getting into the incest situation. Through the feeling and the time element the racist social taboo is equated with the universal human taboo. This equation seems to say that according to the values of a racist society interracial sex is the same as incest. This society allows the man caught

in either of these "sinful" acts the choice between two evils: like Trueblood, to be seen by his wife, which is "worse than sin" because she is the image of merciless retribution, or to castrate, i.e. dehumanize himself, which is "too much to keep from sinnin'."³⁴ This choice puts the onus partly on the individual--will he cut off that which defines him as human or not?--and partly on society--will it go beyond the racist taboo toward higher values? In the scheme of Invisible Man, Ellison's choice is obvious: the hero as bluesman-prophet emerges pained but whole like Trueblood, while society stands indicted.

The color symbolism is significant too. In contrast to the many-colored nature of the Mobile memory, the color rhythm of the dream is white and black; the white part represents Trueblood's emotional experience of being a "kitchen man," the black that of committing incest.

The white-and-black color combination is a symbol of confusion and of corrupt power, represented by the southern white man's slave owner's attitude, by Mr. Norton's and Dr. Bledsoe's combined power and vision of the Negro's "freedom," and by their ideal creation, Lucius Brockway.

The white and black parts of the dream are connected by Trueblood's nightmarish feeling of "I knows it's wrong but I can't help it."³⁵ Sex here is felt as ghostly, dangerous temptation and compulsion that will be punished.

The music that accompanies the dream is the silence

of sound, i.e. the music of alienation, showing that this sense of life and self springs from the experience of slavery and oppression. Ellison's idea put explicitly is that to achieve the right kind of "black awareness," the awareness of where one fits into the total American scheme, is the prerequisite of a healthy group pride; this in turn can only be achieved by knowing the traditions going all the way back.³⁶ And this means the South and its oppression.

The sense of nightmare is conveyed through the pattern of opposites that works throughout the dream: white against black in the dream's large rhythm; in seeing the lady scream against not hearing her ("the silence of sound;") in the sensation of flying over town while being in the tunnel; in hot against cold.

The black and white pattern is also the imaginative expression of Ellison's idea that "the white American's Manichean fascination with the symbolism of blackness and whiteness" is but the symptom of the gap between his ideals and his practice.³⁷ To see man and life in terms of black and white is incorrect too, for man is a "sensitively focused process of opposites, of good and evil, of instinct and intellect, of passion and spirituality,"³⁸ and the world is "concrete, ornery, vile and sublimely wonderful."³⁹ To see things as either good or bad, non-guilty or guilty is equivalent with blindness.

Trueblood's story next establishes Ellison's image

of the seer and of insight. Ellison's visionary perceives with his senses but above all sees. Trueblood is not blind. Invisible Man the spiritually corrupt men--Barbee, Jack, Ras, and Rinehart--are blind or have contorted vision. This symbolism follows Biblical tradition where the prophet is not blind, in contrast to the artificiality of the Greek blind seer convention.

While Ellison's visionary is not blind, his knowledge is inner knowledge or literally in-sight. Trueblood is established as visionary through the wonderfully concrete windbreak simile: "It made me seem go way back a distance in my head, behind my eyes like I was standin' behind a wind-break durin' a storm. I looks out and sees..."⁴⁰ The "I" here is not in the eyes but behind them. The image that shows Trueblood's eyes as protective screen springs from Negro experience; the oppressed black man had to hide his feelings. Elijah Green in Voices from Slavery says it this way: "One song I used to sing when Master went away, but I wouldn't be so fool as to let him hear me;" his song was about freedom.⁴¹ Trueblood the visionary is within that tradition that has been "a discipline...teaching its own insights into the human condition, its own strategies of survival."

Elijah Green's and Jim Trueblood's tradition coincides also with the concept of inner power represented by High John de Conquer. This mythological figure of

Negro folklore embodied once the tough and hopeful spirit of the Negro slaves. High John de Conquer wins on the inside. His power consists of love and laughter that helps the weak and helpless, give hope to the hopeless when their lot is the cruellest. He is announced by his sign and singing symbol: his laugh and his non-military drumbeat, an inner sound and rhythm like a heartbeat. To the white oppressor High John de Conquer appears in Brer Rabbit's disguise, but his people know his true identity.⁴²

High John de Conquer's spirit has apparently not vanished with the institution of slavery. His power belongs to Ellison's visionary, to the blues and to all men who respond to disaster with paradoxical laughter and music. The blues tradition, envisaged as a discipline teaching its own insight and survival techniques, extends thus, as Ellison wrote to Howe, to any human life that endures despite brutal and tragic conditions.

Trueblood's pathos and triumph are told in terms of sound too. Divine music--thunder as the sound of divine wrath--is silent; only the music of birds is heard under the sun. The wounded Trueblood appears as stark and horrible as Oedipus after his pathos, frightened because a bolt of lightning does not strike him and he realizes that he shall have to resolve his conflict on his own.

He resolves it without exile, right at home, and his resolution shows his triumph. Pray he cannot and thinking

does not help. He fasts and wakes as any good prophet in the desert. Finally, he starts to sing, although "I don't mean to, I didn't think about it, just start singin'."⁴³ This is not an intellectual process but the result of suffering and feeling.

Trueblood begins with a church song and ends up singing new blues. This is the metaphor for Ellison's idea that the blues are secular existentialism, for as Trueblood creates blues, he learns who he is and accepts what he is.

His act of self-definition occurs in the imaginative artist's mode: out of feeling at first, but then involving the mind:

... while I'm singin' them blues I
 makes up my mind that I ain't no-
 body but myself and ain't nothin'
 I can do but let whatever is gonna
 happen, happen. I made up my mind
 that I was goin' back home and face
 Kate; yeah, and face Matty Lou too. ⁴⁴

In Trueblood, who thus defines and accepts himself and his lot, Ellison has created the archetypal bluesman: the man who responds to personal disaster by partaking in the determination of his self and his life and who expresses his triumph by creating music.

One quality that allows Trueblood to respond without bitterness and self-pity is his High John de Conquer-like laughter. It appears in the story as his ironic awareness and as a laugh in the midst of suffering.

The best example of this unexpected laughter is Trueblood's description of the ax that threatens to kill him: "It's fallin' fast as flops from a six-foot ox;" this humor interrupts a pathetic scene and shows Trueblood's ability to laugh at his own pain. The simile itself is ironical; there is a contradiction between music and meaning: the sound of the sentence is sharp while the sound of ox flops falling is dull. The simile shows Trueblood's sense as ironical and paradoxical, dead-serious and humorous.

Another example of Trueblood's humour is his aside: ("She musta learned them words from the preacher,") when Kate is telling him that both she and Matty Lou are pregnant. She words this news as "When yo black 'bomination is birthed to bawl yo wicked sin befo the eyes of God!"⁴⁵ Trueblood is right, for this kind of rhetoric is the preacher's, not Kate's. In her mouth the speech is ridiculous and Trueblood sees and hears the incongruity in the midst of his pathos. His awareness is attuned to the ironies and paradoxes of man and life; in this respect, too, his story resembles the blues whose language is rich in irony.⁴⁶

Vivid images are characteristic of good blues too, and Trueblood's story is full of them. As he waits for the ax to fall, he conveys his sense of eternity: "ten million back-breakin' years, it seems to me like I waits."⁴⁷ "Back-

breakin'" is a highly fitting and connotative phrase. It comes from his farmer's and laborer's experience; it reminds one of work, whippings and intercourse; it is within the experience of all poor laborers but is especially meaningful for the slave-state Negro. Trueblood's hell is here on earth as was that of his ancestors. Trueblood's simile sums up this suffering with the characteristic succinctness and relevance of the blues. The almost one-page long imagery of hell and eternity in the sermon of Joyce's Portrait of The Artist plays on a similar theme: eternal hell as the result of mortal sin. Trueblood's concise image shows how expressive the language of Negro folklore is and how well Ellison uses it. Joyce's Jesuit, with his abstract and long image of eternal damnation represents the absolutist's otherworldly and intolerant vision, while Trueblood stands for the humanist's down-to-earth, tolerant vision.

Another vivid and thematic image comes when the ax had wounded Trueblood;

I'm layin' there on the floor, but
 inside me I'm runnin' round in
 circles like a dog with his back
 broke, and back into that numbness
 with my tail tucked between my legs. 48

It expresses his agony in an earthy image from farm life, playing on the broken back phrase reinforced with the sexual imagery in "with my tail tucked between my legs," referring to his being whipped sexually, i.e., humanly because of

guilty shame and fear. This image establishes one meaning of "running" as the metaphor for inner conflict: Invisible Man, too, runs within himself "blindly, boiling with outrage, despair and harsh laughter."⁴⁹

Trueblood thoughtfully defines the pattern of his life in this thematic image: "I flew in but I had to walk out."⁵⁰ He is, in other words, a man who acts on impulse and gets into trouble. Invisible Man is like this too (he is basically no intellectual but feeler) and his impulsive actions shape the drama of the novel.

Finally, Trueblood intones the theme of identity and conveys the meaning of the phrase "I was lost" in this metaphor:

I guess I felt then, at that time--
and although I been sorry since--
just 'bout like that fellow did down
in Birmingham. That one what locked
hissself in his house and shot at them
police until they set fire to the
house and burned him up. I was lost.
The more wringlin' and twistin' we
done tryin' to git away, the more we
wanted to stay. So like that fellow,
I stayed, I had to fight it out to
the end. He mighta died, but I sus-
pects now that he got a heapa satis-
faction before he went. 51

In his incest situation, Trueblood experiences the "Samson-eyeless-in-Gaza" feeling; Ellison writes about Invisible Man, his grandfather and their spirit:

Samson, eyeless in Gaza, pulls the building down when his strength returns; politically weak, the grandfather has learned that conformity leads to a similar end, and so advises his children...Here, too is a rejection of a current code and a denial become metaphysical. 52

"I was lost" means Samson's despair, hate and violence, willing to destroy himself with the enemy.

Samson's self-destructive and sacrificial violence belongs to the hipster; both Trueblood and Invisible Man experience it but reject it in favor of the bluesman's disciplined way of fighting for freedom.

CHAPTER II

Hipster

Ellison's essays clearly explain what values and attitudes the blues represent; about the hipster and sacrificial heroes he has written and spoken only indirectly. Yet they appear in his thought and in Invisible Man, representing a tradition as old as that of the blues but lacking its discipline, tough tragi-comic spirit and clown's grace. The hipster's figure celebrates the sacrificial heroes of Negro American history: those who have been physically or spiritually destroyed by social injustice and white supremacy⁵³ and who did not achieve Ellison's ideal of resistance to provocation, coolness under pressure, a sense of timing and a tenacious hold on the ideal of ultimate freedom.⁵⁴

Ellison thinks that it is a southern upbringing that helps the black man to develop this needed toughness. Living within the brutal social order of the South teaches him those survival techniques Faulkner had called "endurance" and Ellison calls "an ease of movement within explosive situations which makes Hemingway's definition of courage, 'grace under pressure', appear mere swagger."⁵⁵

Negroes born in the North or, like Tod Clifton, alienated or ignorant of their southern folk traditions, reject the clown's grace celebrated by tales of Negro experience, by folklore⁵⁶ and by the bluesmen in Invisible Man. Instead, they move with the hipster's desperate grace.

Andrew Geller asked Ellison whether his term "passing for white" coincided with Mailer's hipsterism. (Ellison's "passing for white" corresponds to what here is referred to as ethnic alienation. It is a form of rejecting one's own background in order to become that of some prestige group or try to imitate the group which has prestige at a particular moment). Ellison answered that, although Mailer does not understand this, the hipster does not simply live in the present, but

is living a very stylized life which implies a background because it takes a good while, a lot of living to stylize a pattern of conduct and an attitude. This goes back very deep into certain levels of Negro life. 57

The sense of self and life symbolized by the hipster's style belongs to those Negro Americans who cannot consciously accept what Ellison calls

the harsh realities of the human condition, [of] the ambiguities and the hypocrisies of human history as they have played themselves out in the United States. 58

Impatient, idealistic freedom fighters like these have existed among the slaves, are celebrated by folklore in the figure of John Henry and are numerous among contemporary black artists and musicians.

Both John Henry and Charlie Parker are sacrificial heroes in Ellison's view. The ballad hero is mentioned but briefly: he dies to affirm something about human life.⁵⁹ Parker is analysed in depth in Ellison's article "On Bird, Bird-Watching and Jazz."⁶⁰

Parker was a sacrificial hero, "poor robin come to New York and here to be sacrificed to the need for entertainment and for the creation of a new jazz style." He was the victim of his own character too: a talented but conflict-torn young man, essentially devoid of a human center whose only integrating trait was his art; a jazzman who considered Louis Armstrong an Uncle Tom and like many younger jazzmen tried to escape the entertainer's comic role. He did not succeed, though, but became something far more "primitive" than the professional clown; he became a conflict-torn

sacrificial figure whose struggles against personal chaos, on stage and off, served as entertainment for a ravenous, sensation-starved, culturally disoriented public which had but the slightest notion of its real significance. 62

His public consisted of white beatniks. For them,

Parker became the "supreme hipster."

Invisible Man contains symbolic figures who are, due to their image, their characters and the language that describes them, hipsters. They do not coincide with the beatniks' or Mailer's concept of the hipster, but throw light on the tragically alienated urban Negro's character and sensibility. These figures are, in an increasingly stylized fashion, Clifton, the three boys in zoot suits and Clifton's doll. All are alike in appearance and motions, but it is the three boys who best show the hipster's facetious and morbidly depressed attitude. They are the adolescent versions of Harlem men and women whose feeling of "being nowhere," a psychological condition, springs partly from a sick social order and partly from their own ethnic alienation. The zoot-suiters are the stylized images of the hipster whose survival depends upon the recognition and ability to control his inner chaos. Clifton is the tragic hipster who dies at the symbolic age of twenty-one because he fails to achieve the needed discipline which in his social reality is equivalent to coming-of-age.

Clifton, like Charlie Parker, is essentially devoid of a human center with the important exception of his integrating trait, his impatient and angry desire to lead his people to freedom. This desire differentiates between him and Rinehart, who is completely devoid of a human center. Still, within the context of Invisible Man and of Ellison's

thought, Clifton is a minor hero, even the anti-hero, since he lacks High John de Conquer's spirit and laughter, the hero's, the grandfather's, Trueblood's and Louis Armstrong's tragi-comic attitude and fluid clown-like response, and the bluesman's ability to pass through and emerge strong and self-assured on the other side of pain. In the novel and for Ellison's hero, Tod Clifton, the hipster represents an alter ego, an immature and dangerous phase that must die before the bluesman's mature identity can be reached.

In Invisible Man, Ellison draws on many forms of Negro American folk expression. Trueblood's story is a verbal blues. The hero's oration at Tod Clifton's funeral is, with its affinities to the spirit, themes, language and rhythm of the Negro ballad, the fictional image of this minor but beautiful branch of Negro folk music.

Hyman regards the Negro ballads as the only genuine ones created in America, for only they are tragic poetry like the old English and Scottish ballads.⁶³

Negro ballads differ from the blues not only because of their tragic sensibility. Unlike the blues, the ballad is a dramatic narrative about the fate of a hero (or heroes) other than the singer. The hero may be "heroic" i.e. a man of outstanding qualities and fighting against superhuman odds like John Henry. In this case he triumphs even in his pathos. He triumphs but pays too, as Hyman writes, either "immediately with Samson or later with Prometheus."⁶⁴

Ellison's tragic hero Clifton is a Samson-figure who pays immediately, at the moment of his triumph over alienation and inner chaos.

The ballad hero may also be the passive victim of injustice like Poor Lazarus, the victim of character and circumstance like Frankie Baker and Dupree, or clearly a "bad man" like Stackalee.

The themes of Negro ballads are within the universal ballad tradition: heroic struggle, love, betrayal, violence, death. Certain ballads, like "Poor Lazarus" and "John Henry," contain a note of protest. Others, like "Sinking of The Titanic" and "Roosevelt And Hitler," lend themselves to the celebration of legendary or national and political figures and events.

The emotional responses are mourning, sadness and a sense of injustice or even vengeful joy, mixed with didacticism as in one version of "Stackalee," "Frankie Baker" and "Sinking of The Titanic," or with admiration and pride as in "John Henry." Humour is, of course, lacking in the tragic ballad.⁶⁵

Points of similarity between the blues and the ballad are that both belong to a tradition and both are rigidly formal. While there is no set ballad structure, while stanza form and line length vary not only from ballad to ballad but sometimes within one ballad, the lyrics are regular in terms of their tunes⁶⁶ in order to express the singer's attitude

and feeling.

The singer's style and performance are as important for the success of the ballad as for that of the blues. Sincerity and a dramatic sense that appears in the musical rendering of the lyrics are required. Ellison in his article on Jimmy Rushing praises this singer's ability as ballad singer; Rushing sang these songs with sincerity and dramatic feeling.⁶⁷ Rushing's style is also marked by the clarity of his pronunciation, a trait that is present in Invisible Man's funeral oration, too, linked to the chant-like quality of his language.

The archetypal Negro American ballad is "John Henry." It exhibits the function of the ballad: it, too, is ritualistic. Ballad-singing was originally a community ritual; Negro ballad-singing, where the singer tells of the adventures of a hero, whom the audience can admire or can in some way identify with, is still a ritual. It is a unifying group experience through the celebration of a well-known and meaningful figure or event. Clifton's funeral clearly shows this function of the ballad.

Ballads resemble the blues in so far as they, too, "tell us who and where we are;" they, too, further self-definition and affirm values. But while the blues are self-definitive in a personal way, ballads help the singer and his audience to relate to their group and history and to the values gained from the group's experiences. Ballads are

music and poetry that link the individual to his tradition.

Tod Clifton's ballad proper consists of Invisible Man's funeral oration. Clifton's character and role in the novel are, however, important enough to warrant the analysis of additional passages that contain verbal music. Such passages are the one that introduces him, his song, his death scene and Invisible Man's subway ride and walk in Harlem after Clifton's death.

Invisible Man becomes Clifton's historian and ballad singer because only he is qualified to render Clifton's tragic experience truthfully. He is qualified because in the narrative he is made to watch the most dramatic events of Clifton's life from a distance and can thus record them clearly. But he is also sufficiently close to Clifton's inner experience to identify with him; he is as "jam-full of contradictions"⁶⁸ as his friend. He describes his own confused and desperate hipster's state of mind in the following metaphor of dissonance:

If only all the contradictory voices
shouting in my head would calm down
and sing a song in unison, whatever
it was I wouldn't care as long as
they sang without dissonance; yes,
and avoided the uncertain extremes
of the scale. ⁶⁹

He achieves the wished-for integration in the end. Clifton, who reacts with non-bluesman-like despair, hatred and violence to his personal disaster, dies.

His character and fate are established as soon as he is introduced. The long paragraph that portrays him on his entrance into the novel shows him as a John Henry-like sacrificial figure and reveals how deeply rooted in the American past Clifton is; it also intones his musical themes of passion and violence.

John Henry, a physically powerful man, adored by women, becomes the victim of his ambitions and of the steam drill, the machine he fights. Clifton, tall and muscular, is greeted by the pleasurable sight of a woman and is marked as a sacrificial victim by the wound received in the fight against Ras.

Clifton has no name here--he is a symbolic figure. His features or identity are shown as American, southern and originating in the social relationships between blacks and whites as this relationship has been determined by slavery. Clifton is the symbolic native son as sacrificial hero whose identity is intimately linked with American history: he represents those Negroes whose characters and lives are indelibly stamped with the tragic consequences of oppression.

It is the main musical metaphor of the passage that establishes Clifton's identity in terms of violence:

he possessed the chiseled, black-marble features sometimes found on statues in northern museums and alive in southern towns in which

the white offspring of house children and the black offspring of yard children bear names, features and character traits as identical as the rifling of bullets fired from a common barrel. 70.

Clifton's music is the sound of rifling, bullets and guns.

The first part of his violent character is his name. The identical names of the masters' and the slaves' offspring refer to slavery practices and their consequences. In Clifton's case the consequences are tragic in terms of identity, for he is the Negro who cannot accept his name.

In "Hidden Name And Complex Fate" Ellison discusses the significance of names. A person places himself in the world by identifying with his given name. It must become his strength and the symbol of the values and traditions that are handed down to him by his past.⁷¹

Ellison fully understands the reaction of those who reject their "white" names, but regards it as weakness. Keeping one's given name and making something of it is the sign of the bluesman's strength. It is the spiritual triumph of those "who rallied, reassembled and transformed themselves and who under dismembering pressures refused to die." This phrase is like the nutshell that contains the dramatic structure of Invisible Man; Invisible Man is the hero who rallies, reassembles, transforms and under "dismembering pressures" (symbolized by castration and inner

disintegration) refuses to die. He emerges as one of Ellison's heroes who feels neither easy forgiveness nor fawning insensibility toward the white man's sins, yet affirms the common identity and cultural heritage of all Americans by seeing himself as Ellison's heroes do, "as bearers of many of the qualities which were admirable in the original sources of their common line."⁷² Clifton, on the other hand, affirms only his hatred toward the white man and himself, toward his heritage and his past. His tragedy is not so much the social fact of inequality as his failure to see himself as a bearer of something valuable and thus as a being of value. Tod Clifton, the heroic freedom fighter who renames himself as Sambo, is Ellison's anti-hero.

Clifton's very black features repeat the theme of the white master-father (introduced in the Prologue) who denies his black sons the freedom promised by the fathers of America. With this theme Ellison again points to the gap between ideals and reality, and to its tragic consequences. Clifton's fathering in terms of violence refers to the slavery practice of fathering and then not acknowledging children born of slave women.⁷³ This is what Baldwin called

the savage paradox of the American Negro's situation...not simply the relationship of oppressed to oppressor, of master to slave... motivated merely by hatred; it is also, literally and morally, a blood relationship, perhaps the most profound reality of the

American experience, and we cannot begin to unlock it until we accept how very much it contains of the force and anguish and terror of love. 74

This blood and love-hate relationship is conveyed in the slave narratives too, where John White articulates the anguished and angry judgment of those slaves who were fathered then sold by their masters: "When the child got old enough for chore work the master would sell him--or her. No difference was it his own flesh and blood--if the price was right!"⁷⁵ In the Negroes whose fathers sold them and who never recovered from their anger and sadness over their father's betrayal, one sees the prototype of the hipster.

The hipster's character traits form the third aspect of Clifton's Afro-Anglo-Saxon features. The identical character traits of the black and white native sons whose music is the music of violence are Clifton's traits. His stylized life and character spring from slavery and all its evil, dehumanizing aspects. He is one of the old spiritual singer's bitter sons as the outraged freedom fighter who fights on two fronts: on the outside against social injustice, and on the inside against his inner conflicts. He loses; placing his emphasis on the first of these two fronts, he fails to rally, reassemble, transform and survive--to become strong on the inside with a sense of self-respect. The music of violence as it conveys the hipster's sense of life is the music of the unresolved turbulence of the mind.

Clifton's effect on women is the second sound intoned: his appearance elicits "the quick intake of a woman's pleasurable sigh." This is the music of love as it refers to Clifton. He is the attractive male and is repeatedly shown as such. As he explains the cross of adhesive, there is a "gasp from one of the women who gazed at him with shining, compassionate eyes."⁷⁶ This music of love accompanies him too, adding to his conflicts: because of his success with women, Ras calls him a traitor and he accepts this verdict.⁷⁷ The final, tragic manifestation of his guilt feeling is his sense of being nothing but a stud.

Clifton senses his inner weakness--his lack of self-respect--and knows his tendency to violence in the form of murder or madness.⁷⁸ This tendency is his deepest inner reality, and it springs from his obsession with injustice and oppression.

His secret dream is to become the leader who will move his people to freedom. He dreams of being as successful as Garvey had been only his program is the Brotherhood's "scientific plan" according to which he can "gather them [the people of Harlem] in."⁷⁹ Clifton is an elitist who "passes for white" by accepting the organization's non-democratic view of the people.

His elitism is symbolized by his name Clifton. Clifton too is a bird-man; his emblem, though, is not a song bird but the eagle.

Ellison uses the eagle explicitly in "Flying Home," a story that prefigures Invisible Man and whose hero, Todd, prefigures both Invisible Man and Tod Clifton. He is an alienated young Negro, who desperately wants to wear the Air Force's eagle insignia. But a buzzard, the symbol of his southern heritage, makes him lose control of his plane. He lands in the field of the southern peasant Jefferson, a character much like the grandfather and Trueblood. Jefferson flies, too, on the wings of his imagination and laughter. He can also move with ease in the explosive racial situation of the story. Todd, the proud, impatient young man, cannot even walk out; he is carried out by Jefferson. And as he lies flat on the stretcher, he is symbolically joined to his southern heritage by perceiving a buzzard golden against the sun. Tod Clifton is the over-idealistic, romantically lonely and tormented eagle figure who fails to achieve this integration.

Clifton's song expresses this failure too. It springs from Clifton's realization of the Brotherhood's betrayal. His response to this personal disaster is bitterness mixed with mockery, despair and self-hatred.

Ellison regards blues lyrics as poetry⁸⁰ and makes deliberate use of them in Invisible Man. Among the several inserted poems, Clifton's song, composed by Ellison, serves to convey Clifton's view of himself, of jazz and of the Negro's role in American society.

The song is, due to its form, language and feeling, in sharp contrast with Trueblood's blues. It, too, is on a sexual theme but its treatment of sex is leering, obscene and insinuating. Among blues on sexual themes, it belongs to the subgroup that deals with perverse or unusual sex acts. Its opening line and repeated phrase "Shake him, stretch him" as well as the line "Shake him, shake him, you cannot break him" and "Sambo Boogie Woogie paper doll" closely link it with a number of blues that parody jazz-blues on love themes and with songs of professional entertainers who use innuendo for effect.⁸¹

Its structure, too, differentiates it from traditional blues lyrics like the following inserted song:

Don't come early in the morning
Neither in the heat of the day
But come in the sweet cool of the
Evening and wash my sins away...⁸²

This song is a love lyric, with a regular eight-bar rhythm, easy to sing. The voice that sings it is the blues singer's throaty voice (typical for Ellison's blues singers) and the feeling the ambiguous mixture of laughter and solemnity--the characteristic blues attitude. The attitude toward sex resembles Trueblood's.

Clifton's blues is not a romantic love lyric but self-mockery and has no regular song beat. Clifton's voice is insinuating and clipped, and the feeling behind it a mixture of bitterness and mockery. There is no sense of

continuity; content and language reveal Clifton's alienation, his ignorance of the past and traditions and of the roots of contemporary Negro American music and dance, for Clifton's subject is Sambo "the twentieth century miracle." And sex is seen as the defining but degrading characteristic of Clifton's self-image in the shape of "Sambo Boogie Woogie paper doll."⁸³ Both song and doll reflect the alienated and bitterly disillusioned native son's sense of life and self.

In Sambo Clifton defines himself. One aspect of this act is naming. Tod Clifton, who publicly exhibits his pain and self-hatred, renames himself as Sambo and thus reveals himself as one of those who do not achieve the spiritual triumph that coming to terms with one's given name represents.

With Sambo, Clifton also touches on the stereotype whites carry in their minds. Invisible Man experiences being seen as a stud in his affairs with the two white women. Sybil, in whose sick fantasies the black man possesses the combined powers of Joe Louis and Paul Robeson, calls him "Anonymous brute'n boo'ful buck" and she "Don't know his name,"⁸⁴ --she does not see his human identity. The bitter, angry Clifton, who renames himself as Sambo, fails to see his own beautiful humanity.

Through Sambo, Clifton exhibits his immaturity too. He insinuates that the onlookers are emasculated, i.e., inferior: "Take him to your girlfriend and she'll love you, loove you!"⁸⁵ This is sexual bragging, usual in his type of

blues, but often regarded as an immature trait, as for example in Louis Armstrong's performance of "Back O'Town Blues."⁸⁶

Clifton's treatment of the stereotype extends also to his view of the entertainer and then metaphorically to the Negro's role in the total American scheme. His doll is on one level the black entertainer's image, and Clifton asks: "What makes him happy, what makes him dance?" As Invisible Man later discovers, it is the black thread, the symbol of Clifton's anger that makes him dance.⁸⁷

Clifton's feeling and motivation resemble those of Charlie Parker, Howling Wolf and other jazzmen who reject the performing artist's role. This role, says Ellison, demands that the artist be an entertainer; its image is "the grinning visage of the traditional delight-maker" and it has nothing to do with the jazzman's identity as private individual. Certain older jazzmen, like Louis Armstrong, understand this division and thus keep, despite their comic acts, their personal dignity. The younger jazzmen insist on being artists instead of entertainers and play for white audiences with calculated surliness and rudeness. And ironically, their dignity is diminished, for the audience, treated thus in the name of racial identity, comes to expect this manner as part of the entertainment. A surly mien and rude manners become the younger jazzman's trademark,⁸⁸ and the musicians who display them may become not only Charlie Parker-like sacrificial victims of death but also of self-degradation.

Oliver tells of Howling Wolf's performance in front of a white audience:

He did a savage show--putting the hand microphone between his legs while making masturbating motions; rolling on the floor screaming; playing two harps at the same time, one with his nose, and sweating profusely. 89

This hostile and self-degrading act resembles that of Sambo and Clifton. And both Howling Wolf's and Clifton's acts reveal their inability to come to terms with the entertainer's role.

This failure stems from their more serious inability to come to terms with their role and identity in American society. Clifton visualizes the relationship between himself and the audience still as the slave-master relationship: "he lives upon the sunshine of your lordly smile."⁹⁰ Clifton's self-mockery is linked to his failure to adjust to freedom; he is the free and alienated offspring, who, like Invisible Man, struggles with the problem of perceiving his own humanity and value; unlike Invisible Man, he is the tragic hero who cannot solve this problem.

Certain lines of his song further reveal his inability to see the treasure--the High John de Conquer spirit--behind the stereotype:

Look at that rumba, that suzy-q, he's Sambo-Boogie,
Sambo-Woogie, you don't have to feed him, he sleeps
collapsed, he'll kill your depression

And your dispossession, he lives upon the sunshine of your
 lordly smile
 And only twenty-five cents, the brotherly two bits of a
 dollar because he wants me to eat. 91

Sambo is comparable to Mary's coin-eating bank that offends the alienated Invisible Man but is accepted by Mary, the blueswoman.

The iron bank and the paper doll are both images of the Negro entertainer and of Negro American identity. Outwardly the Brer Rabbit stereotype, Mary's grinning cast-iron figure is the symbol of the clown who, together with his entertainer's grin, exhibits his insistence on freedom. Clifton's doll symbolizes the hipster's and the alienated urban Negro's identity, the identity of those whom Invisible Man calls "birds of passage"⁹² and about whom Ellison writes in "Harlem Is Nowhere." Ellison's thesis there is that "Harlem is the scene and symbol of the Negroes perpetual alienation in the land of his birth."⁹³ By alienation he means the feeling of "being nowhere," a feeling of having no stable, recognized place in American society and an out-of-key sense of the world and one's self.

This feeling is not only Clifton's but potentially that of all urban Negroes who are alienated from their southern heritage. The connection between them and Clifton is made through Invisible Man's treatment of the three boys in zoot suits, of the men and women of Harlem and of himself.

On the level of identity, boys, doll, Clifton and

Invisible Man as hipster represent a transitional and disordered sense of the world and self that must be understood or else the person will not survive in his hostile world; this is what Ellison writes in "Harlem Is Nowhere"⁹⁴ and also in Invisible Man, where Tod Clifton who embodies this identity, dies.

Clifton's death is his second act of self-definition; with it he joins the "Many Thousand Gone." Invisible Man as his historian witnesses the death scene and hears its music; his mind records it as a nightmare:

I saw a flight of pigeons whirl out of the trees and it all happened in the swift interval of their circling, very abruptly and in the noise of the traffic--yet seeming to unfold in my mind like a slow-motion movie run off with the sound track dead. 95

The noise of the traffic serves as background music, sounding the themes of emasculation, danger and technology as the opposites of identity and humanism. The circling pigeons announce Clifton's death. Pigeons are important symbols in this section; they represent the possibility of peace between the races and peace as an inner and outer condition. The one pigeon that swings "down into the street and up again, leaving a feather floating white in the dazzling backlight of the sun"⁹⁶ symbolizes Clifton's spirit taking its final plunge and then floating free. The overall nightmarish feeling is conveyed by the slow-motion movie simile; this imagery is the good

urban counterpart of the one in Trueblood's dream where he sees the white woman scream but does not hear her. This sound of silence, reappearing after Clifton's death, is the music of terror.⁹⁷

In this terrified yet open-eyed state of mind, Invisible Man observes the ritual he calls "a kind of march."⁹⁸ It is one of the many racist rituals in the novel, describing a daily scene from the life of a society where the police, instead of enforcing the law, pervert and violate it.

The march ends with Clifton's sudden dance of death:

suddenly Clifton spun on his toes like a dancer and swung his right arm over and around in a short, jolting arc, his torso carrying forward and to the left that sent the box strap free as his right foot traveled forward and his left arm followed through in a floating uppercut that sent the cop's cap sailing into the street and his feet flying, to drop him hard, rocking from left to right on the walk as Clifton kicked the box thudding aside and crouched, his left foot forward, his hands high, waiting. 99

Clifton's dance is that of the boxer; here he dances with the movements of a Joe Louis, not with Sambo's self-degrading ones, even though the motivation is the same.

In this passage an important transformation takes place. The motions that become Clifton's death sentence also free him from the box of dolls, the symbol of his mental prison, his self-image as Sambo. This box is Clifton's

burden which he carries until his fateful decision to fight the cop. The moment he frees himself from the box signifies the moment when Clifton's self-image changes from the Sambo stereotype to that of the desperate freedom fighter who declares "No more driver's lash for me." At this moment Clifton wills to be a Negro American who "rejects all possibilities of escape that do not involve a basic resuscitation of the original American ideals of social and political justice"¹⁰⁰ in his tragic, self-destructive way.

This transformation and the act that reveals it, constitute Clifton's final self-assertion as the tragic native son who fulfills Baldwin's demands in "Many Thousands Gone." There Baldwin wrote that the creator of Bigger Thomas did not penetrate the alienation of a character like Bigger. First, Bigger's life is based on the premise that black is the color of damnation; next, Bigger does not love his people or redeem their pains. Since the distance between him and "the auction-block and all that the auction-block implies" is great, he dies only because of hatred and self-hatred. Had Wright understood the hipster's tragedy, or as Baldwin wrote,

To have penetrated this phenomenon, this inward contention of love and hatred, blackness and whiteness, would have given him a stature more nearly human and an end more nearly tragic. 101.

In Tod Clifton, Ellison succeeded to create a fully human,

understandably bitter and truly tragic hero whose death signifies not only hate but love too, love of his people and of the original American ideals of justice.

After Clifton's tragic death, Invisible Man descends into the underground world of "being nowhere" symbolized by the subway. Here he meets the three zoot-suiters, sees the connection between them and Clifton, and speculates about the true history of the times. The dominant mood is his sense of impotence whose music consists of the sounds he hears down here. The roar of traffic, the background music to his many questions about Clifton's fateful decision, remains the music of bewilderment.

His questions lead him to speculating about history and to the idea that history as it is written is a lie. Thus he realizes that Clifton needs another, more understanding historian than the cop; at the same time he feels that he, "the only brother...the only witness for the defense, knew neither the extent of his [Clifton's] guilt nor the nature of his crime."¹⁰²

Ellison treats Invisible Man's lack of understanding with fine irony. The hero who had designed the symbolic poster ought to know Clifton's and his own guilt and the nature of their crimes. But he is still blind and can only ask, "Where were the historians today? And how would they put it down?"¹⁰³

In this blind impotence, he defines himself and other

Negroes who are not Brotherhood members as

birds of passage...too obscure for
learned classification, too silent
for the most sensitive recorders of
sound; of natures too ambiguous for
the most ambiguous words, and too
distant from the centre of historical
decisions to sign or even applaud
the signers of historical documents?
We who write no novels, histories or
other books. 104

Invisible Man here conveys the sensibility of those who live with the feeling of "being nowhere." Their feeling is blind to their value and role in American history, to their own nature and to the blues. In Ellison's thought, the Negro has since before the existence of America as a nation been a shaping, defining force in American culture and identity; human nature and history are ambiguous and too richly complex to be recorded by sociological, scientific methods. Invisible Man, who thinks that Negroes are "transitory" like "birds of passage" and who yearns for "learned classifications," understands neither man nor history nor the idea that only ambiguous art like the blues can write true history.

The irony is perhaps clearest in the musical metaphor that defines Negroes as "birds of passage...too silent for the most sensitive recorders of sound," for it is exactly through sound, through music that the Negro best voices his identity and has contributed most to American and Western

culture. And in the contemporary world it is through re-
corded music that this influence spreads.

The irony continues in Invisible Man's statement of the Negro being too powerless to sign or applaud the signing of historical documents, and of his writing "no novels, histories or other books." The names of many Negroes are implicit applause of the signers of historical documents; folk songs are explicit in their praise; but the hero is as unaware of them as he is of Negro literature.

His sense of impotence is shared by those whom he
sees

still and silent on the platform, so
still and silent that they clash with
the crowd in their very immobility;
standing noisy in their very silence;
harsh as a cry of terror in their
quietness. 105

The music of "being nowhere" is silence, expressing a sense of terror.

The music and dance of "being nowhere" is continued by the three hipster figures, the three boys. Their voice is silence, their music the rhythmic tapping of their heavy heel-plated shoes that click "remote cryptic messages in the brief silence of the train's stop."¹⁰⁶ These are the archetypal hipsters and young urban entertainers whose identity is as uncomfortable as their "too-hot-for-summer suits;" whose adolescent language is "a jived-up transitional lan-

guage full of country glamour;" whose thoughts are transitional, and who are dreamers, not visionaries, even if they dream the same old dream of freedom. The dreamer, as it was established in Trueblood's blues, is not the mature visionary. Neither are the boys who, like Invisible Man and Clifton, feel their identities as "something uncomfortable, burdensome, which they hated" because in their alienation they feel, as Invisible Man does, that "there was no one to applaud their value and they themselves failed to understand it."¹⁰⁷ This is the clearest statement of the tragedy of alienation; its song and dance are the hipster's silence, jived-up language and stylized, shoulder-shaking, hip-swinging, stiff and unnatural movements.

The hero connects the boys with Clifton: Clifton's inner torment is theirs. This is the main lesson Invisible Man learns underground and this belated insight leaves him with a sense of guilt, for after emerging he feels the weight of a mountain on his shoulders, and his new, black-and-white shoes, the symbols of his alienation, hurt his feet.¹⁰⁸

This new sense of guilt opens his eyes to the fact that other men and girls of Harlem, too, live with the three boys' sense of self and the world, "their costumes surreal variations of downtown styles."¹⁰⁹ Surreal style, here in dress and in Invisible Man as literary style, is Ellison's way of conveying the feeling of "being nowhere," in keeping with what he writes in "Harlem Is Nowhere:"

Harlem is a ruin--many of its ordinary aspects...are indistinguishable from the distorted images that appear in dreams [leading to] the most surreal fantasies...acted out upon the streets of Harlem. 110

During his walk on this hot Harlem street, Invisible Man hears dream-like music, relating to his past, and a blues, relating to the function of the blues. The people here remind him of those he had known in the South, and "Forgotten names sang through my head like forgotten scenes in dreams." This song of the past expresses his yearning for the lost stability of his southern life. Walking isolated with the familiar-yet-strange crowd, he is listening to the music of the present, "the grinding roar of traffic, the growing sound of a record shop loudspeaker blaring a languid blues." This blues makes him stop and ask one of the most important musical questions of the novel's Harlem section:

Was this all that would be recorded?
Was this the only true history of
the times, a mood blared by trumpets,
trombones, saxophones and drums, a
song with turgid, inadequate words? 111

He does not know the answer, but the question refers to Ellison's thesis that the blues are the true history and that the budding historian ought to perceive the mood of the times.

The sound and mood of this blues, transmitted by the

mechanical loudspeaker, represent the urban Negro's music, his sense of life and, in this chapter of the novel, the growing tension of Harlem. Invisible Man does not hear the warning, although he hears the difference between the blaring sound and morbidly inflated poetry of this jazz-blues and the rich lyrical quality of southern and southwestern jazz and blues. Examples of the latter are quoted and described in the novel¹¹² while the lyrics of Clifton's song are like the former. Ellison stresses the difference when discussing the changes urban living brings about in the black man:

Yet even his art is transformed;
the lyrical ritual elements of
folk jazz...have given way to the
near-themeless technical virtuosity
of bebop, a further triumph
of technology over humanism. 113

Invisible Man does not yet understand the connection between this music and history. Here he merely poses the question; at the end of his apprenticeship he will be able to evaluate and answer it. In the meantime, he continues to run in painful, angry isolation almost till the end. His isolation is occasionally and with increasing frequency relieved when memories of the past well up and link him to his traditions and to his community. One such occasion is Clifton's funeral which serves to modify the hero's vision and to place Clifton within his tradition.

Invisible Man's oration at Clifton's funeral is the culmination of Clifton's story. The speech over Clifton's coffin is the ritual retelling of the sacrificial hero's tragic death, resulting in an unparalleled experience of brotherhood among the mourners. Together they experience Clifton's agony as their own, thus making his sacrifice meaningful and worthwhile.¹¹⁴

The speaker's voice is exhortatory, at times riot-inciting. In the form of a protest ballad, the oration is analogous to Native Son or any other protest work.

The emotions that give rise to it are similar to those that had driven Clifton: anger, desperation, a sense of futility, hopeless bitterness.

Its themes of heroic struggle, betrayal, violence and death are in the classical ballad tradition. So are its formal aspects. The repeated use of the hero's name echoes all Negro ballads, and Invisible Man's chant-like language resembles that of old English and Scottish ballads which present "the language of purest incantation."¹¹⁴ Invisible Man's clear language is, on the surface, stark and simple, with a few strong images; underneath its classic simplicity, it performs its ritual function also through the use of symbolism.

The ritualistic nature of Clifton's ballad is linked to the song intoned during the funeral, a song that is his theme song. Called "There's Many a Thousand Gone" by Ellison,

it is listed among spirituals by Hughes and Bontemps under the title "No More Auction Block."¹¹⁶ Unlike many other spirituals, it is not a disguised but an open protest against slavery:

No more auction block for me,
No more, no more,
No more auction block for me,
Many thousand gone.

No more peck of corn for me,
No more, no more,
No more peck of corn for me,
Many thousand gone.

No more pint of salt for me,
No more, no more,
No more pint of salt for me,
Many thousand gone.

No more driver's lash for me,
No more, no more,
No more driver's lash for me,
Many thousand gone.

These lyrics record a firm but also desperate determination to be free, probably conveying the feelings of those Negroes who died in their search for freedom. By being celebrated as one of the defeated heroes, the alienated Clifton is after his death joined to his tradition, the tradition of the angry and impatient ones who did not endure to tell their own tales.

"No More Auction Block" shows that this tradition is as old as that of the disciplined bluesmen. Mingo White's narrative in Voices from Slavery records the Tod Clifton-

reaction during slavery, calling it "desperate."¹¹⁷ Given their different historical circumstances, the desperate slaves and Clifton react similarly; they gamble on two possibilities: on their luck or strength to get away now, or on death. In Invisible Man, Brother Tarp is the man who gambles thus and gets away, Clifton the man who dies.

Clifton's ballad serves also to articulate the meaning of his death. He dies in order to affirm his manhood and his belief in the brotherhood of man as it is reflected in social and political justice. Clifton could not articulate these beliefs outside the political framework of the Brotherhood. It is Invisible Man who speaks John Henry's words for him: "I ain't none but a natural man."

The ritual serves Invisible Man too. It brings him closer to his heritage and final identity. Because of Clifton's death, his anger temporarily thaws into sorrow and tears; the funeral makes him perceive Negro American music as the beat of his heart; after the funeral he sees the crowd with the humanist's vision and the situation as potential civil war. For a brief time, his vision clears, until his own still-raging anger again blinds him.

The funeral scene contains three kinds of music. One is the music of sad military marches played by the band, the drums and the black iron bell. Theirs is the sound of death and dead silence, expressive of the meaningless, inauthentic nature of the ceremony as it begins. This para-military

funeral march is unlike Negro funerals described by Ellison where there would be a parade and jazz,¹¹⁸ unlike funerals where Louis Armstrong would blow his horn.

The second type of music--the duet sung and played by the old man and the young euphonium player--represents Negro American music. Spanning centuries of experience, it transcends the image of death as isolation and alienation, and conveys the mourners' longing for freedom and dignity.

The effectiveness of this music is shown also by the return of the pigeons. The symbolic, cross-like figure of the peanut-vendor--an anonymous blues figure--covered with "fluttering feasting birds"¹¹⁹ again expresses the idea that the blues are the spirit of transcendence and peace.

The ritual is, however, not complete without the third strain of music. This is Clifton's ballad spoken by Invisible Man. It is Ellison's version of literary protest, revealing the emotional sources and the patterns of such a piece.

The main emotional sources that shape it are Invisible Man's confused hipster's state of mind and his feelings of futility, anger and despair. First, he doubts and denies the ritual, redemptive nature of the funeral. Speaking as a devoted Brotherhood member, he voices the organization's philosophy of history when he tells the crowd that Clifton is "as dead as he'll ever die." His next statement about Clifton's death, "That's the end in the beginning and there's no en-

core,"¹²⁰ by critics taken at face value and interpreted as the hero's definitive statement that shapes the structure of the novel, is nothing but his hopelessness at this stage of his development. But he is not consistent; later, when he realizes that he cannot speak as a politician, he tells Clifton's true story, transforming it into a collective racial history under the guidance of the earlier intoned Negro American music.

He does so in his characteristic emotional way. Affected by Clifton's theme song, he has no other words than Clifton's name, no idea of a ritual and no microphone. This setting turns him into the ballad singer. The lack of a microphone stresses the humanistic nature of his speech, the last one he makes as a politician. His first Brotherhood speech, in the organized setting of the arena, was given in the prison of the spotlight and in front of a confounding microphone.¹²¹ For Ellison these electric gadgets are symbols of the triumph of technology and of non-humanism over humanism, just as bebop stands in opposition to the lyrical ritualistic spirit of folk jazz. The funeral oration, under the sun, without microphone, becomes the sound of human protest.

The rhythm of Invisible Man's voice is strongly chant-like in those passages where he tries to speak as a politician. With chanting language he first defines Clifton as the universal symbol of futile human sacrifice:

Here are the facts. He was standing and he fell. He fell and he kneeled. He kneeled and he bled. He bled and he died. He fell in a heap like any man, and his blood spilled out like any blood, red as any blood, wet as any blood... 122

The chanting, hypnotic rhythm diminishes somewhat and the language becomes symbolic and ironical where, playing on Clifton's name, Invisible Man tells Clifton's true story:

His name was Clifton and he was full of illusions. He thought he was a man when he was only Tod Clifton. He was shot for a simple mistake of judgment...It was a normal mistake of which many are guilty: He thought he was a man and that men were not meant to be pushed around. But it was hot downtown and he forgot his history, he forgot the time and the place. He lost his hold on reality. 123

"Reality" is expressed in the strong sentence "The blood ran like blood in a comic-book killing, on a comic-book street in a comic book town on a comic-book day in a comic-book world."¹²⁴ The comic-book is Ellison's symbol for the hipster's interior landscape of desperate anger and for the sick social order that gives rise to this feeling, the violent landscape and way of life of America.

Clifton's story continues in the next heavily symbolic paragraph where Invisible Man intones Clifton's music as he tells of the three symbolic bullets that killed Clifton.

The first bullet wounds the heart, or the intellect and emotions. The second wounds the spine and pelvis; this is a sarcastically scientific paraphrase of Trueblood's simile "like a dog with his back broke, and back into that numbness with my tail tucked between my legs"¹²⁵ to express the feeling of emasculation. The third bullet repeats the theme of back-breaking, and since this bullet is "traveling God knows where,"¹²⁶ the idea is that the cycle of violence has not ended, that Clifton is not the last of "The Many Thousand Gone."

This third bullet is the symbolic essence of Clifton's story and character: his origin is told in terms of rifled bullets, his life is filled with violence, and his death is but the symbol of the continuing and growing violence of American race relations. Clifton is the sacrificial hero-victim of the American situation, and his music is the music of inner and outer violence. It extends back to the South and grows in magnitude until it explodes in the riot; but it is telescoped into the moment of Clifton's death.

In death "Tod Clifton is one with the ages... he's part of history and he has received his true freedom;"¹²⁷ these words articulate the meaning of Clifton's death: freed from his degrading self-image he has joined the continuing tradition of the John Henry-like sacrificial heroes.

This condensed passage is also an ironical thrust at the Brotherhood's conception of history and at a certain hero

and style in 20th century American literature. As for history, Clifton is alive as a legendary figure. As for literature, his death represents the death of the alienated hero and of naturalism.

The phrase "in the heat of the afternoon" reappears as the time and scene of Clifton's death.¹²⁸ (It is also the time and scene of his funeral).¹²⁹ Echoing Hemingway's Death In The Afternoon, it continues the bullfight theme. Bullfight images were used in the scene where Invisible Man was appointed Harlem spokesman in the Spanish bar. The first picture, seen as "pure grace" by the hero, served as a mirror for him and Jack; the second one showed a matador being gored by a bull.¹³⁰ These images foreshadowed the fate of Ellison's matador figure.

Ellison uses the boxer as the lonely athlete hero to characterize the alienated black man. The boxer is a realistic image and serves Ellison's desire to show the tragedy of violence. Ellison wishes to celebrate the mind above the body. His idea that the mature person uses his mind is articulated in the Epilogue:

And the mind that has conceived a plan of living must never lose sight of the chaos against which that pattern was conceived. That goes for societies as well as for individuals. 131

It is repeated in The Atlantic where Ellison talks about the anti-intellectual attitude of black youth that prevents them

from possible achievement and ironically leaves them still as the symbols of instinctual man--the stereotype Clifton mocked and so desperately struggled against. Cast into the image of the graceful boxer who, like the matador, fights the symbols of violence, Clifton does not represent the mature Negro American hero. On the level of identity, his death marks the death of the immature hipster; in the American novel, it marks the death of the alienated hero and of naturalism as the suitable expression of the Negro American's creative identity and experience.¹³²

In the next section of the speech, Clifton becomes the symbol of his people and of their experience: "He's in the box and we're in there with him."¹³³ It is here that the mourners' identification with the hero-victim occurs, a happening that is necessary for the effectiveness of his sacrifice. This identification is needed for the ritual of ballad-singing too. Here the two functions coincide: the identification the crowd had stubbornly been waiting for takes place and Clifton as the tragic hero of a meaningful, living legend has been created.

Invisible Man's still-continuing confusion is next revealed by his artistic and also intellectual and moral error. Like the singer of "Frankie Baker" in its traditional version,¹³⁴ he deviates from the classical ballad form and becomes didactic; assuming Clifton's voice, he incites to riot.

In the last part of the speech he changes his tone again, reverting to his initial hopelessness: "In a few hours Tod Clifton will be cold bones in the ground."¹³⁵ "Cold bones" is a paraphrase on the famous poem-sermon "Dry Bones." This sermon is based on Ezekiel's vision of resurrection and it expresses faith and hope¹³⁶ in contrast to Invisible Man's hopelessness. Protest and the angry, bitter protest ballad are not in the prophetic blues tradition; neither are Tod Clifton and Invisible Man as ballad singer and as a confused, alienated young man.

Ellison's essays demonstrate his reliance upon music. Parts of Invisible Man reveal that he employs music consciously. His use of music is a significant aspect of the style and technique that helped him to achieve what he regards as the Negro writer's task: to convey the varied range of Negro American experience truthfully and to define what is of lasting value within that experience.

FOOTNOTES

FOOTNOTES FOR PART I

"Ellison's Hero: The Prophetic Voice"

- ¹ Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man, Signet Books, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1952), p. 86.
- ² For the definition of the Prophet, See Part II, Ellison's Invisible Man as Allegory, p. 26.
- ³ Ralph Ellison, Shadow And Act, Signet Books, Toronto: The New American Library of Canada Limited, 1964), p. 178.
- ⁴ Ellison, Invisible Man, pp. 13-14.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 212.
- ⁶ Ibid., pp. 12-13.
- ⁷ Ibid., p. 100.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 360.
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 171.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 224-225.
- ¹¹ Ibid., p. 411.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 500.
- ¹³ Ibid., pp. 333-334.
- ¹⁴ E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1927), p. 130.
- ¹⁵ Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 488.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

- 17 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 11.
- 18 Ibid., p. 467.
- 19 Ibid., p. 203.
- 20 Ellison, Shadow And Act, p. 196.
- 21 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 204.
- 22 Ibid., p. 204.
- 23 Ibid., p. 205.
- 24 Ibid., p. 207.
- 25 Ibid., p. 212.
- 26 Ellison, Shadow And Act, p. 67.
- 27 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 34.
- 28 Ibid., pp. 154-155.
- 29 Ibid., p. 483.
- 30 Ibid., p. 497.

FOOTNOTES FOR PART II

"Ellison's Invisible Man As Allegory"

¹ Ellison, Shadow And Act, pp. 177-178.

² Ibid., p. 60.

³ Ralph Ellison, "What America Would Be Like Without Blacks," Time, April 6, 1970, p. 54. Ralph Ellison and James Alan McPherson, "Indivisible Man," The Atlantic, December 1970, p. 52.

⁴ Ellison, Shadow And Act, p. 60.

⁵ Ibid., p. 60.

⁶ Ellison, "What America Would Be Like Without Blacks," pp. 54-55.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 54-55.

⁸ Ellison and McPherson, "Indivisible Man," p. 48.

⁹ The following critics have also referred to Invisible Man as an allegory: J. Baumbach, J.Z. Bennett, E. Horowitz, R. Kostelanetz, W.J. Schafer, T. Vogler. I also acknowledge other points of similarity between their interpretation and mine.

¹⁰ The following critics have also noted Ellison's reliance on music: R. Bone, G. Bluestein, S.E. Hyman, E. Margolies, R.A. Olderman.

¹¹ Ellison, Shadow And Act, p. 238.

¹² Ibid., p. 197.

¹³ Ibid., p. 215.

14 Ellison uses the words existential and existentialism and commentators too have linked him with existential philosophers, especially the French ones. (M.J. Long. "Sartrean Themes in Contemporary American Literature;" S.H. Hux. "American Myth and Existential Vision"). I prefer to connect him with twentieth century Existenz philosophers like Buber and Niebuhr, for despite the difference of opinion about religion, Ellison shares their view that the individual finds life meaningful only as a link in the chain of tradition. I shall, however, use the term existential but it must be remembered that Ellison's existentialism does not imply alienation.

15 Ellison, Shadow and Act, p. 240.

16 Ibid., p. 192.

17 Stanley Edgar Hyman, The Promised End. (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1963), p. 310.

18 Stanley Edgar Hyman, "Really The Blues," The Sunday Boston Herald Traveler Book Guide, April 19, 1970, p. 3.

19 Ellison, Shadow and Act, p. 229.

20 Ibid., p. 206.

21 Ibid., p. 189.

22 Ibid., p. 287.

23 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 86.

24 Ibid., p. 129.

25 Ibid., p. 127.

26 Ibid., p. 139.

27 Ibid., pp. 80-82, 135-139.

28 The Vet's self-destructive blindness--his nostalgia for the South--resembles the blindness of two white Faulkner characters, Quentin in Absalom, Absalom! and Benbow in Sanctuary.

29 Emerson's view of the relationship between black and white echoes Melville's in Benito Cereno, where the white slave-trader aristocrat is the suffering hero and the Negro the personification of evil. Ellison's relationship to his 19th century American mentor seems to be part rejection, part acceptance: acceptance as far as the moralistic view of literature is concerned, re-evaluation as far as the Negro's character and role in shaping American consciousness is concerned.

The Emerson episode would seem to satirize Leslie Fiedler's analysis of Huckleberry Finn and Edmund Wilson's self-castigation and criticism of everything American, including Lincoln. Ellison satirizes Wilson in "Tell It Like It Is, Baby."

30 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 163.

31 Ellison's Brotherhood represents the American Communist Party, ruled from Stalin's Moscow.

32 Ellison, Invisible Man, pp. 402, 408.

33 Ellison's use of a character lapsing into an unintelligible foreign language echoes Conrad's technique in revealing the true, bestial nature of Vladimir in The Secret Agent. Vladimir's several languages are his disguises, Jack's habitual English rhetoric is his.

34 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 439.

35 Hambro the charlatan echoes Melville's Confidence-Man. Melville saw Providence and religion as charlatans. As Hambro's figure shows, Ellison sees Marxist ideology as a charlatan. Melville's confidence man reveals a much more pessimistic view of man's ability to live a meaningful life than do Ellison's con men.

36 Ibid., p. 433.

- 37 Ellison's description of this emotional gulf and his calling their conversation an "unreal antiphonal game" prefigures the conception of Ellison's as yet unpublished novel And Hickman Returns. Ellison writes about this work that "the communication between them [the Senator and Hickman] is difficult. Sometimes they actually converse, sometimes the dialogue is illusory and occurs in the isolation of their individual minds, but through it all it is antiphonal in form." Ellison, "Night-Talk," Quarterly Review of Literature, XVI, Nos. 3-4, (1970), p. 317. Judging from this excerpt, one may guess that Ellison's use of music is not a passing phenomenon. This musical or vocal conception is also in Faulkner tradition; the conception and structure of As I Lay Dying is antiphony; the characters of the novel speak as if separate records turned at the same time.
- 38 Allen Geller, "An Interview with Ralph Ellison," Tamarack Review, No. 32, 11.
- 39 Ellison, Shadow and Act, p. 181.
- 40 Ibid., p. 71.
- 41 Charles Kiel, Urban Blues (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 20.
- 42 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 426.
- 43 Ellison, Shadow and Act, pp. 282-289.
- 44 Hyman, The Promised End, pp. 300-301.
- 45 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 428.
- 46 Father Divine's title, "Rev. M.J. Divine, Ms.D., D.D." resembles that of Rinehart. The following excerpt from a sermon shows his pride: "I AM guiding the destiny of this nation, yea, of all humanity and I AM speaking through the officials, even as I spoke through the president, to bring this Nation home to God, where there is Peace and Security, as a sample and an example for all man-kind." Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, Ed. The Book of Negro Folklore, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1958), pp. 273-274.

47 Ellison, Invisible Man, pp. 429-430.

48 This is made clear in the following excerpt from "Night-Talk" where Rev. Rinehart returns:

"And so," Hickman was saying, "When you started asking me that," I said, "Bliss, thy likeness is in the likeness of God, the Father. Because Reverend Bliss, God's likeness is that of all babes. Now for some folks this fact is like a dose of castor oil as bitter as the world, but it's the truth. It's hard and bitter and a compound cathartic to man's pride--which is big and violent as the whole world. But it gives the faint of heart a pattern and a faith to grow by ... And when they ask me, 'Where shall man look for God, the Father?' I say, let them who seeks look into his own bed. I say let him look into his own heart. I say, let him search his own loins. And I say that each man's bed-mate is likely to be a mary even though she be a magdalene. That's another form of the mystery, Bliss, and it challenges our ability to think. There's always a mystery of the one in the many and the many in the one, the you in them and the them in you--Ha! And it mocks your pride, mocks it to the billionth, trillionth power. Yes, Bliss, but it's always present and it's a rebuke to the universe of man's terrible pride and it's the shape and substance of all human truth ..."

Ellison, "Night-Talk," pp. 318-319.

49 Ellison, Invisible Man, pp. 142-143.

50 Ibid., p. 483.

51 Ibid., p. 483.

52 Ibid., p. 484.

- 53 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 484.
- 54 Ibid., p. 485.
- 55 Ellison's concern, style and imagery on p. 485. resemble Faulkner's in Light in August, specifically Hightower's story about his grandfather's 'heroic' exploits and death while stealing a chicken. (Light in August, pp. 423-425). Ras is Ellison's variation on Hightower's grandfather, seen by the grandson as "that fine shape of eternal youth and virginal desire which makes heroes. That makes the doings of heroes border so close upon the unbelievable that it is no wonder that their doings must emerge now and then like gunflashes in the smoke." Light in August, p. 423.
- 56 Ellison and McPherson, "Indivisible Man," p. 53.
- 57 Ralph Ellison, "Flying Home," The Best Short Stories by Negro Writers, ed. Langston Hughes (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), pp. 151-170.
- 58 Ellison, Shadow and Act, p. 189.
- 59 Gene Bluestein, "The Blues as a Literary Theme," Massachusetts Review, 8 (1967) 608.
- 60 Ellison and McPherson, "Indivisible Man," p. 59.
- 61 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 63.
- 62 Ibid., p. 63.
- 63 Bluestein, too, stresses Trueblood's reaction after his sin. "The Blues as A Literary Theme," p. 607.
- 64 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 64.
- 65 Ibid., p. 64.
- 66 Ibid., p. 53.

67 Ibid., p. 58.

68 Ellison, who insists on the necessity of knowing the past as far as it can be traced, thinks that those Negroes who are ignorant of the past and its traditions show white attitudes:

"I had a friend in New Jersey telling me that Southern Negroes didn't know how to box. I said: 'Where the hell do you think Jack Johnson came from?' But they had built up that notion of Northern Black Superiority. I remember serving on a ship during the war where one of messmen referred to Southern Negroes as 'boogies.' I said: 'Well, I'm from the South.' And he said: 'But you're not one of them.' He was just as prejudiced against Southern blacks as whites were. But you get that sense of a loss of continuity which has to be regained. Part of the tragedy--one of the pathetic and ironic things--about Stokely Carmichael's activities is that he went down South and condescended. No one has pointed this out, but there was a hell of a lot of condescension from this West Indian boy toward blacks. And he did a lot of damage."

Ellison and McPherson, "Indivisible Man," p. 53.

69 See "Harlem Is Nowhere" (Shadow and Act, pp. 285-286) and C. Kiel, Urban Blues, pp. 187-88 where both Ellison and Kiel note the difference between the relatively stable family structure of Southern Negro life and the unstable one of the Northern urban situation.

70 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 222.

71 Ibid., p. 225.

72 This interpretation is evident not only from the text but also from Ellison's remarks about Mary Rambo, made in connection with the publishing of the first Hospital Episode he had written and then replaced with the one in Invisible Man. Ellison writes that "I am pleased for Mary's sake to see this version in print. She deserved more space in the novel and would, I think, have made it a better book ..." As for interpretation, she represents hope and is very important: "For those who desire more than the sheer narrative ride, who hunger and thirst for 'meaning', let them imagine what this country would be without its Marys. Let them imagine, indeed, what the American Negro would be without the Marys of our everexpanding Harlems." Ralph Ellison, "Out of the Hospital And Under the Bar." "Authors Note," Herbert Hill, editor, Soon, One Morning, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), pp. 243-244.

73 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 170.

74 Ibid., p. 155.

75 Ibid., p. 156.

76 Ibid., p. 156.

77 Ibid., p. 152.

78 Ellison reveals the origin of the Robin jingle, as well as his basic use of it in his essay on Charlie Parker. The tune was "a jazz community joke, musically an extended 'signifying riff' or melodic naming of a recurring human situation, and was played to satirize some betrayal of faith or loss of love observed from the bandstand." Walter Page, the tuba player, wrote the lyrics, and each of the players recognized that poor robin's fate was somehow their own: "Our defeats and failures--even our final defeat by death--were loaded upon his back and given ironic significance and thus made bearable." The 'robin' of Ellison's article is the 'white hipster'-like Charlie Parker. Shadow and Act, pp. 218-227.

79 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 170.

80 Ibid., p. 170.

- 81 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 226.
- 82 Ibid., p. 231.
- 83 Ibid., p. 230.
- 84 Ibid., p. 237.
- 85 Ibid., p. 239.
- 86 Ibid., p. 391.
- 87 Ibid., p. 499.
- 88 Ibid., p. 392.
- 89 Ibid., pp. 391-392.
- 90 Ellison, Shadow and Act, p. 229.
- 91 Ibid., pp. 166, 167.
- 92 Andy Razaf, "What Did I Do to Be So Black And Blue?" On the record "Louis Armstrong's Greatest Hits," Columbia.
- 93 As Bluestein, too, points out in "The Blues As A Literary Theme," p. 611.
- 94 Ellison, Invisible Man, pp. 396, 461.
- 95 See Part I, pp. 10-11.
- 96 Ellison, Shadow And Act, p. 111.
- 97 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 461.
- 98 Ibid., p. 437.

99 Another reason lies in Ellison's personal experience: "As for those charges of white paternalism, part of this business is a way of relating. My experience with that kind of conversation came around the left, from the Communist Party. They had their theories straight from where they came from, and they interpreted everything. That was one of the problems with Wright: they were always trying to tell Wright that he wasn't following the line. This was so because they thought they had the complexity of his behavior down on paper."

Ellison and McPherson, "Indivisible Man," p. 53.

100 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 28.

101 Ibid., pp. 493-494.

102 Ibid., p. 494.

103 Ibid., p. 319.

104 Ibid., p. 14.

105 Ibid., p. 497.

106 Ibid., p. 501.

107 Ibid., pp. 19-20.

108 Ibid., p. 502.

109 Ibid., p. 496.

FOOTNOTES FOR PART III

"Bluesman And Hipster"

- ¹ Hyman, The Promised End, p. 309.
- ² Robert Bone, "Ralph Ellison And The Uses of Imagination," Tri-Quarterly, No. 6 (1966), 41.
- ³ Steven Paul Scher, "Verbal Music: Devices And Techniques. Evocations of Music in Modern German Literature." Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1966.
- ⁴ See Part II, above, pp. 27, 72-76.
- ⁵ Ellison, Shadow And Act, p. 119.
- ⁶ Ibid., p. 91.
- ⁷ Hyman, The Promised End, p. 309.
- ⁸ Hyman, too, points this out in "Really The Blues," pp. 11-12.
- ⁹ Bone, "Ralph Ellison And The Uses of Imagination," p. 42.
- ¹⁰ Hyman, "Really The Blues," p. 5.
- ¹¹ Paul Oliver, Screening The Blues (London: Cassell And Company Limited, 1968), p. 91.
- ¹² Hyman, "Really The Blues," p. 5; Oliver, Screening The Blues, p. 15.
- ¹³ Hyman, The Promised End, p. 302; Oliver, Screening The Blues, p. 186.

- 14 Oliver, Screening The Blues, p. 199.
- 15 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 54.
- 16 Ibid., p. 54.
- 17 Ibid., p. 54.
- 18 Ibid., p. 47.
- 19 Ibid., p. 54.
- 20 Oliver, Screening The Blues, p. 211.
- 21 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 54.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 159, 397, 499.
- 23 Ibid., p. 54.
- 24 Hughes and Bontemps, The Book of Negro Folklore, pp. 411-416.
- 25 Ibid., p. 416.
- 26 Ellison, Invisible Man, pp. 54-55.
- 27 During slavery, home-stilled peach brandy was the master's wine at a wedding; sometimes it was given to the slaves as a treat. Norman R. Yetman, ed., Voices From Slavery (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), pp. 161, 169.
- 28 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 55.
- 29 Oliver, Screening The Blues, pp. 186-187.
- 30 Ibid., p. 193.
- 31 Ellison, "Night Talk," pp. 318-319.

- 32 Oliver, Screening The Blues, pp. 177-179.
- 33 Theodore Solotaroff, ed., Writers and Issues
(Toronto: The New American Library of Canada Limited,
1969), p. 200.
- 34 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 58.
- 35 Ibid., p. 56.
- 36 Ellison and McPherson, "Indivisible Man,"
pp. 52-53.
- 37 Ellison, Shadow And Act, p. 63.
- 38 Ibid., p. 43.
- 39 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 498.
- 40 Ibid., p. 61.
- 41 Yetman, Voices From Slavery, p. 149.
- 42 Hughes and Bontemps, The Book of Negro Folk-
lore, pp. 93-102.
- 43 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 63.
- 44 Ibid., p. 63.
- 45 Ibid., p. 64.
- 46 Hyman, The Promised End, p. 307.
- 47 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 61.
- 48 Ibid., p. 62.
- 49 Ibid., p. 462.

- 50 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 58.
- 51 Ibid., pp. 58-59.
- 52 Ellison, Shadow And Act, p. 70.
- 53 James Thompson, Raphael Lennox and Steve Cannon, "A Very Stern Discipline: An Interview with Ralph Ellison." Harper's, March, 1968, pp. 83-84.
- 54 Ellison, Shadow And Act, p. 121.
- 55 Ibid., pp. 285-286.
- 56 The old ex-slave Lizzie Williams tells the following about her father:

"I mind a tale my pappy tell about one time he see de patterrollers comin'. He scared to death 'cause he didn't have no pass. He know if dey finds him what dey do. So Pappy he gets down in de ditch and throw sand and grunts like a hog. Sure 'nough, dey thinks he a hog and dey pass on, 'cept one who was behind de others. He say, 'Dat am de grunniest old hog I ever hear. I think I go see him.' But de others dey say: 'Just let dat old hog alone and mind you own business.' So dey pass on. Pappy he laugh about dat for long time."

Yetman, Voices From Slavery, p. 316. Lizzie William's father could move with the clown's grace and the preacher in the folktale "Reverend Carter's Twelfth Anniversary Sermon" could dance with it. Hughes and Bontemps, The Book Of Negro Folklore, pp. 144-146.

- 57 Geller, "An Interview With Ralph Ellison," p. 10.
- 58 Ellison, Shadow And Act, p. 152.
- 59 Ellison and McPherson, "Indivisible Man," p. 59.

- 60 Ellison, Shadow And Act, pp. 218-227.
- 61 Ibid., p. 227.
- 62 Ibid., p. 223.
- 63 Hyman, The Promised End, p. 259.
- 64 Ibid., p. 272.
- 65 All these ballads are listed in The Book of Negro Folklore, pp. 345-370.
- 66 Hyman, The Promised End, p. 256.
- 67 Ellison, Shadow And Act, p. 238.
- 68 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 403.
- 69 Ibid., p. 226.
- 70 Ibid., p. 315.
- 71 Ellison, Shadow And Act, p. 151.
- 72 Ibid., p. 152.
- 73 Faulkner, too, makes much of this in Absalom, Absalom! in Charles Bon's longing to be acknowledged by Thomas Sutpeh.
- 74 James Baldwin, Notes of A Native Son, Bantam Books (Toronto: Bantam Books Inc., 1955), p. 33.
- 75 Yetman, Voices From Slavery, p. 308.
- 76 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 315.
- 77 Ibid., pp. 322-326.

- 78 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 327.
- 79 Ibid., pp. 318-319.
- 80 Ellison, Shadow And Act, p. 242.
- 81 Oliver, Screening The Blues, pp. 199-206.
- 82 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 338.
- 83 Ibid., pp. 374, 373.
- 84 Ibid., p. 457.
- 85 Ibid., p. 373.
- 86 "Back O'Town Blues," Record: "Louis Armstrong's Greatest Hits," Columbia.
- 87 Ellison, Invisible Man, pp. 374, 386.
- 88 Ellison, Shadow And Act, pp. 221-223.
- 89 Oliver, Screening The Blues, p. 256.
- 90 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 374.
- 91 Ibid., p. 374.
- 92 Ibid., p. 380.
- 93 Ellison, Shadow And Act, p. 283.
- 94 Ibid., p. 289.
- 95 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 376.
- 96 Ibid., p. 376.

- 97 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 380.
- 98 Ibid., p. 376.
- 99 Ibid., p. 377.
- 100 Ellison, Shadow And Act, p. 137.
- 101 Baldwin, Notes Of A Native Son, pp. 31-32.
- 102 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 379.
- 103 Ibid., pp. 379-380.
- 104 Ibid., p. 380.
- 105 Ibid., p. 380.
- 106 Ibid., p. 383.
- 107 Ibid., p. 381.
- 108 Ibid., p. 383.
- 109 Ibid., p. 383.
- 110 Ellison, Shadow And Act, pp. 283-284.
- 111 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 383.
- 112 Ibid., pp. 130, 156, 258, 338.
- 113 Ellison, Shadow And Act, p. 287.
- 114 Ibid., p. 227.
- 115 Hyman, The Promised End, p. 261.

- 116 Hughes and Bontemps, The Book of Negro Folklore, p. 291.
- 117 Yetman, Voices From Slavery, p. 313.
- 118 Ellison, Shadow And Act, p. 226.
- 119 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 392.
- 120 Ibid., p. 393.
- 121 Ibid., p. 296.
- 122 Ibid., p. 394.
- 123 Ibid., p. 395.
- 124 Ibid., p. 396.
- 125 Ibid., p. 62.
- 126 Ibid., p. 396.
- 127 Ibid., p. 396.
- 128 Ibid., p. 396.
- 129 Ibid., p. 389.
- 130 Ibid., pp. 310-311.
- 131 Ibid., p. 502.
- 132 Ellison and McPherson, "Indivisible Man", pp. 50-51.
- 133 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 396.

134 Hughes and Bontemps, The Book of Negro Folk-
lore, pp. 350-353.

135 Ellison, Invisible Man, p. 396.

136 Hughes and Bontemps, The Book of Negro Folk-
lore, pp. 253-255.

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