RE-INVENTING IDENTITY: ORALITY, TEXTUALITY AND MUSIC IN RALPH ELLISON'S *INVISIBLE MAN*

(ABSTRACT)

BY

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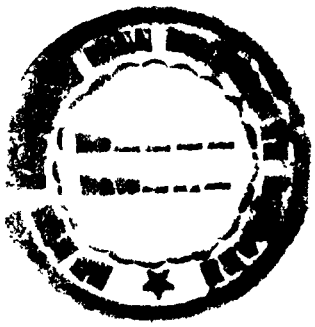

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The decidedly ethnic and cultural configuration of the American literary scene over the past decades has underscored the primacy of the diversity of the American cultural life. Stretching from the late 1920's into the middle years of the ensuing decade, there came a bright, happy time of great promise, in the field of the arts and intellectual affairs because of the arrival of the "New Negro". The sudden emergence of a large number of gifted writers, writing fiction, producing plays and composing poems have carved a niche for themselves and enriched Afro-American literature. Afro-Americans of the 20th century attempted to articulate themselves by using their ancestral memories as well as the strange, bitter exactions of their experiences from slavery to the present that the American reality entailed.

Although the novel in America makes its full acknowledgement of all the bitter social realities that are the consequences of racial animus in general, one gets to know the terrifying capacities for violence and cruelty that are resident in the human heart are subtly articulated in Ellison's work. Ellison's world view, his sense of the relationship of art to life, his merging of narrative with music, and his deconstruction of race in the context of the American civilization must be understood and recognised if his work is viewed in its true perspective. One may rightly question the critical

understanding and foundation of his views. However, the musical criticism of *Invisible Man* reveals that he accepted his duties seriously, injecting into his work all the knowledge and conviction that he had. The novel as a literary artifact is not merely a reflection of the crossing of the ways; it embodies the complexities of those crossings in the context of literary mythologies of modern history. The fictional works become a primary site for the self's emergence as a historical entity and registers its struggle to define its existence, driven on the one hand, by the will to autonomous meaning and on the other, by the recognition of its origin in the fragmentation of social order and community.

Transforming a historical accident which had become an economic necessity into a providential act, the Southerners defended slavery as their "peculiar institution", and Southern men of letters began to construct a historical schema that would incontrovertibly justify its singularity. Henry James says in *The American Scene* (1907), that the Southern literary mind placed itself under the interdiction of a self-interpreted "new criticism" of history. But before anything worthwhile could be created or appreciated, the existing social and economic ills, must be addressed. Ellison brought his political, social and economic understanding of American reality into the writing of *Invisible Man*, and in characteristic fashion, set out to correct evils by going to their very source. He felt that to bring about reforms in existing distasteful and deleterious situations, he must attack those forces which are responsible for the situation.

Readers of the novel, *Invisible Man* may wish to know about the man Ellison because an author's life is always related to his work. The

protagonist of *Invisible Man* bears some resemblance to Ellison himself. Both are light-brown, of medium height and from the south. Both ended up in New York where life was "deceptively free", unlike the frontier life of Oklahoma in the 1920's, where Ellison spent his childhood.

Ralph Waldo Ellison was born on March 1, 1914, in Oklahoma city. His father, Lewis Alfred, was a tradesman and construction worker, and his mother, Ida Millsap, worked as a domestic help. He was musically inclined from childhood and studied classical harmony in the classroom and jazz outside school. In 1933, he went to the Tuskegee Institute and studied there till 1936. He then left for New York city, where he worked for the Federal Writers Project. By 1939, he took to writing seriously.

He received a Rosenwald Fellowship in 1945, which enabled him to write *Invisible Man*. Before the publication of this novel in 1947, he worked on different jobs as a waiter, a musician and also served in the United States Merchant Marine. He edited the *Negro Quarterly* during 1942. In July 1946, he married Fanny McConnell, who is now an executive administrator.

He has received many awards. Apart from the Rosenwald Grant that he received for writing *Invisible Man*, he was also awarded the National Book Award in 1953, for the same work. He has lectured in Austria and Germany, and at the Universities of Yale, California, and has lived and worked in Rome. After lecturing in Rome for two years, he joined the faculty of Bard College in 1958, teaching Russian and American literature until 1961. He has been a Professor at the Universities of Chicago, and

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His other important publication is a book of essays entitled *Shadow and Act* published in 1964. The essays the work embodies are about literature and folklore, Negro music and the place of the Afro-Americans in the larger framework of American culture. In his understanding of individuality in a modern society, Ellison sees American Negro life "not only as a burden ... but also a discipline ... teaching its own insights into the human condition."[1]

Ellison's rise as a writer of stature has its source in his widely read background and more specifically in his own creative genius. The combination of the two helped him to synthesize personal and historical events into meaningful art. He views himself as an artist recording the human condition, and in a sense, becomes an example of the Renaissance man unfolding. To him "the problem of becoming an artist is related to that of becoming a man, of becoming visible."[2]

Concerned as an author with the American problem in general, and not just the black man's problem, Ellison writes that the American reality should be presented as it is, even though the presentation may look surreal, for he maintains that life *is* surreal. He carries this conviction into the writing of *Invisible Man*. This novel depicts the emotional withdrawal of a man overwhelmed by the irrationality of society, with an attempt at self-discovery, emphasizing individuality.

The Afro-American slave narratives developed into its classic form and tone between 1840 and 1860, when the romantic movement in American literature was in its most influential phase. Transcendentalists like Theodore Parker welcomed antebellum slave narratives, insisting that "all the original of the Americans is in them, not in the white man's novel."[3] Ellison's celebration of selfhood in *Invisible Man* might easily be read as a contribution to the literature of romantic individualism that is characterized by anti-institutionalism. The antebellum slave narrative was the product of fugitive bondmen, who rejected the authority of their masters and broke away, often violently, from slavery. Since the slave's right to rebel was a hotly debated issue in the 1840s and 1850s, the classic antebellum slave narrative highlights the brutalizing horrors of slavery in order to justify forcible resistance and escape as the only way a black could preserve his or her humanity. Under slavery, civilization reverts to a Hobbesian state of nature. Left to its own devices slavery perverts the master into a monster of cupidity and cruelty, reducing the servant to a helpless object of exploitation and subjugation. Against the process of dehumanization, the antebellum slave narratives raised its voice eloquently, by demonstrating the evolution of a liberating subjectivity in the slave's life.

The world which takes shape in the novels of the 20th century black writers, particularly of the South, is part of Southern history. For thirty years before the Civil War and as many more years following it, the South's obsessed self-interpretation of modern history repressed the participation of the Southern literary mind in the civilizational drama representing the past in the present, and the self in history. After World War I this drama broke out

of its imprisonment in the narrowly historicist cast of the Southern literary mind. A larger vision of Southern history was slowly opening to writers in the South even before World War I. But in the illumination of this cataclysm, the War for Southern Independence and the South's defeat, the darkness of Reconstruction and the ironic rise of a materialistic New South, appeared as vivid symbols of the Southern participation in the final act of the dramatic transit in Western civilization from the traditional to the modern society.

When the second phase of World War II terminated in 1945, the modern literary subject, the myth of the past in the present, was abandoned and thrown into oblivion and lay in the cultural debris. The atomic explosions over Hiroshima and Nagasaki had blown the past out of the present, rendering obsolete the vision of the crossing of the ways. Novelists must now define the drama of the world and the self beyond the crossing. The common theme of the American novel, Southern or not, became a quest to define a vision of the self's being in a posthumanist, post-Christian society, in short, in a post-modern world. In this world, the Southern novelist has to struggle to confront the meaning of the vision of existence no longer assured historically.

To Ellison, the so-called rupture between the self and history was not acceptable, for in his understanding, the continuity between the past as it was before and the present as it has been after World War II, are important to a black writer. To put it in other words, in a somewhat paradoxical yet more definite way, Ellison has resisted the effort of the post-modern self to close history on the self by denying its own historical character. This is a

profound embodiment of Ellison's imagination of history and myth as modes of human representation. Like Ellison, his protagonist is in possession of his own history, myths, along with his contemporary reality. Ellison's understanding of history embraces the visionary powers of such literary giants like Proust, Mann and Joyce. Ellison realised the possibilities of the Afro-American individual as a representation of the crossing of the ways, and thus created in *Invisible Man*, a compelling drama of *self* and *history*.

One way that Ellison bridges the gap between the uniqueness and the universality of black experience is by using black folklore. *Invisible Man* is filled with folk elements: tales, trinkets, toasts, songs, sermons, jives, and jokes. In his essays and interviews, Ellison has repeatedly singled out black folklore as the source of genuine black self-definition: "In the folklore we tell what Negro experience really is. We back away from the chaos of experience and from ourselves and we depict the humour as well as the horror of our living. We project Negro life in a metaphysical perspective and we have seen it with a complexity of vision that seldom gets into our writing."[4]

Negro folklore, evolving within a larger cultural domain is regarded as the black man's own core, and is more than the literal. It announces the Negro's willingness to trust his own experience, his own sensibilities in defining reality, instead of allowing his masters to define these crucial matters for him. This understanding is implied throughout *Shadow and Act*, that behind "John Henry is Hercules, behind specific folk expression is the long tradition of story-telling...of myth."[5] So when Ellison uses black

folklore in his fiction, he consciously integrates it with the myths of the larger American and Western cultures.

Music is in many ways central to the slave experience and among Afro-Americans many types of musical expressions are derived from the polyrhythmic subtleties of African drum-language. Music and dancing continued to form an essential part of Afro-American life in the American plantations, where the slaves assimilated the religious songs and hymns of the white man. Afro-American folklore and music evolved within a larger culture and gradually bore its own identity. The evolving cultural identity through music and dance, announces the Negro's willingness to trust his own experience, his own sensibility in defining his reality.

Ellison's world view, his understanding of the relationship of art to life, his merging of cultural history with music, criticism with propaganda, and art with civilization must be understood and recognized in viewing the true perspective of his work. One may rightly question the critical understanding of such views. If one takes Ellison's music as a form of criticism, it reveals that he accepted his duties as a critic seriously, injecting into his work all the knowledge and conviction that he had. But before any "artistic craving" could be satisfied, before anything worthwhile could be created or appreciated, the existing social and cultural ills must be cured. Ellison here, did not leave behind his political, social and historical equipments. Nor did he hesitate in pointing out their importance in the art world. If Ellison's *Invisible Man* speaks to many readers of colour, it is not only because the novel so eloquently records the feelings of rage and

invisibility that are a consequence of living within a racist culture, but also because this work gives voice to a particular intuition about music.

In order to understand the real meaning of black music and the significant role it plays in *Invisible Man*, one has to have a look at the ethos of black music, as manifested in different forms like jazz, blues, rag-time, bossa nova, developing into many other styles of music, until the days of the modern counterparts of rap, raggae and hip-hop. The invisible man's search for an identity, and his struggles to re-invent it, is closely related to the struggles these musical styles undergo before they can become part of the great American musical scene.

Throughout slavery, the proof of an African heritage was evident in the elements of early Afro-American music. Consciously or sub-consciously, Old Africa, the Mother Country of civilization, remained the most important source of originality for blacks, and eventually, for many musical attempts in American nationalism. For instance, one could recall the multi-tribal formation which enhanced the African social systems. This fact alone assured that great varieties of musical substances would exist in early slave music. When compounded, these innumerable features define the music as a distinctive collection of sounds marked by diverse improvisations in performance with melismatic or ornamental melodies, exciting dances, rhythms, unique harmonies, scales, forms, titles and textures. In Africa, the soul of music evolved from an inseparable combination of the sister arts of music; drama and dance, and became expertly woven into the language and customs of the people. These elements blended according to an event's appropriateness into the speech of the participants into different age groups

and into the categories of their sex and status. None of the elements like the instrument, form, peer group, text, dance, and other musical elements could be taken out of the context of the event for which the music was planned, and none of these elements or media could be mixed unless prescribed by tradition.

The oral tradition must be held responsible for the maintenance of the African heritage which miraculously survived through the centuries. When passed orally, music was subjected to change in its generation, transportation and reception. The ornamentation of melodic tones, song forms, and accompanying body movements involved spontaneous change from singer to singer, verse to verse and from locale to locale. Speaking of African music, A. M. Jones notes that there is an identical characteristic of improvisation, in Ware, Allen and Garrison's transcriptions of *Slave Songs*. This practice of variation marked almost each performance and was often suggested at the will of the master drummer or the lead singer. It must be understood that, in African music, the freedom to vary the structure depends upon the basic underlying form allowing only specific points within a piece to be used for addition or alterations. African languages themselves were musical in the spoken form and demanded that pitches be relatively perfect for correct communication. One notes a similarity between this and the "sing-song" speech of Southern blacks. Even drum idioms attempted high and low imitations of speech intonations, when they are performed on female and male instruments whose small and large sizes denotes levels of pitch sounds. Therefore, the "talking drums" were capable of sending out vital messages which were clearly understood by the population. So

important were the words that they served as the basis around which were formulated the remaining musical elements of melody, harmony, rhythm, form and timbre.

The protagonist of *Invisible Man*, focusing on the black music tradition, underlined the fact that through music the blacks are able to come to terms with themselves after having gone through inhuman suffering. Music has always been a source of reassurance to the blacks for its freshness and lasting beauty.

Ellison's *Invisible Man* has a thesis, or at least an overriding motive driving it; namely, that in recognizing the central contribution made by black American musicians to the history of music itself, the contributions made by white American musicians must not be slighted. His efforts carry the conviction that music may not be so much a black American experience as an *American Experience*, with various racial and ethnic groups playing indispensable and interlocking roles. A good indication of how important music is as an element of the "Newness" is underpinned in the premise that it is a means of discovering one's identity. Through music, many black musical artists were able to create a name for themselves, forging a reality through the American Dream idea of striving forward to success. The black colour may have been a big drawback, but it is the black colour again, that helped put these artists in the forefront of the musical world. Thus the protagonist of *Invisible Man* was able to identify his own self, and by doing so, he was able to come to terms with everything around him – culture, history, political and economic conditions.

Identity is an important marker of the individual in America. The identification of the American individual is problematic if it is not supported by a consideration of the whole populace of America: a populace that thrives on democracy, includes great men and women – of different colours, creeds, races and most importantly, of different economic backgrounds, striving forward for success and honour as entailed by the American Dream – ideas, which has found ground for a leap of faith and optimism.

The African diaspora as popularly conceived is a denotative label for the dispersed people removed and exiled from a common territorial origin, sub-Saharan Africa. The term *diaspora* itself was probably not used to refer to people of African descent until the mid-1950s, when it began to be employed by intellectuals involved in pan-Africanism and the effort to raise consciousness and create solidarity among blacks across the globe. Nevertheless, the themes and ideas encapsulated by the term African diaspora had been developed long before the term itself came into fashion. Indeed, the attempt to identify, define and characterise a transitional identity of people of African descent, had already been an important feature of black scholarship.

The work of Ellison represents a middle ground between the ontological essentialism of Afrocentricism and the anti-essentialism of diaspora as hybridity. In his elaboration of what we can refer to as anti-anti-essentialist perspective on these issues, he addresses the question of the unity and commonality of the African diaspora, not only as a political and theoretical problem but also as a social, economic, cultural and racial

problem of the individual, rather than as an ontological given rooted in a presumed racial essence or mythological origin. For Ellison, diaspora refers to the historical stay of his people in America through the old story of enslavement, the creation of different black cultures in the New World, and the contemporary effort to imagine a shared sense of peoplehood in confrontation with persistent systems of racialized terror. Consequently, reinvention is central to Ellison's aesthetic. One of the problems he recognizes in the black aesthetic is the absence of opportunity for reinvention. That is why, in the epilogue to Invisible Man, the narrator speaks of the "heart of darkness" of the South and he also speaks of his own "disembodied voice". It is obvious throughout the novel that Ellison is extremely concerned with desegregation and has been angered by Southern congressmen.

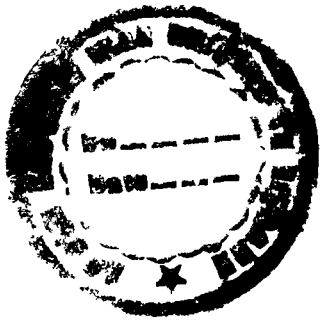
The protagonist of the novel must learn through his many experiences, and he must come to terms with and understand the socio-cultural and political reality. In elaborating this theme, Ellison emphasized the practical. Even though the invisible man learns and studies he is not impressed by the sheer fact of learning because he has seen that learning can exist without being useful and that in itself it does not emphasize mental superiority. However, Ellison rescues his protagonist through narrative openness. The mythic quest becomes a journey backward, hitting the open road and coming home to one's own people. The invisible man goes through the process of initiation only to prepare himself for reinventing his identity as a black man having learnt his lessons about black cultural life.

So we have a man with an identity, but an identity that is invisible. He tells us about his world, his complex feelings and thoughts and how it feels to live in a racist society. His insights are genuine and profound because they are painfully gathered from his own experiences, which he hardly can escape. The novel narrates those experiences while the prologue and epilogue give us Ellison's view on life and its renewal in deconstructing history.

While stressing the fact that the invisible man was forced by necessity to adopt indigenous language and material practices, Ellison takes a detour in replacing the hero's African origin, religion, music and dance. In his view, the invisible man occupies a unique status, belonging to the old as well as the new worlds of Afro-American culture. It is to such a world that the author of *Invisible Man* calls our attention: a world of diversity and change, where men and women, seen in the context of historical perspective are paradigms of courage, endurance, grace and beauty. Writing in the *New Negro* in 1925, Alain Locke assured his audience that the days of aunties and uncles, Toms and Sambos were over. *Invisible Man* tells us now, that the days of darky entertainers, parodying dolls and sweet yams, if not over, are numbered; that an excursion into the cultural past can provide images by which people can measure themselves. It tells us that in the protagonist's search for an identity in order to reinvent a new image, it is history and culture that exemplify those values by which men throughout the history of the world have lived and died. These values found their greatest expression in the South, in the first home away from home for the Afro-American. It is there, where men and women, having undergone the racial holocaust and

survived, that the best examples of a viable reinvention of identity is possible.

In the light of the above discussion the present study attempts to explore the concept of identity as manifested through orality, textuality and music in Ellison's *Invisible Man*.



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4. Ralph Ellison, "Discipline", in *Shadow and Act,* New York: NAL, Random House, 1964: 80.
5. Ralph Ellison, "Art", in *Shadow and Act,* p. 75.

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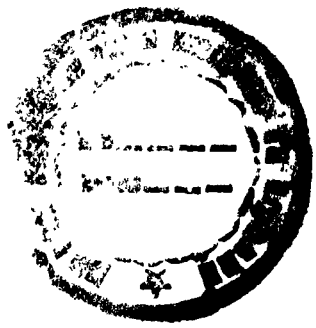

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DECLARATION

I, ***Ms. Dolly Noreen Kharlukhi***, hereby declare that the subject matter of this dissertation is the record of work done by me, that the contents did not form the basis of award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institution.

This is being submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy in English.**

(Dolly Noreen Kharlukhi)
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(Dr. K. C. Baral)
Supervisor
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CIEFL Regional Centre, Shillong

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It is a pleasure to acknowledge some of the many important debts I have incurred in the course of this project. The help I received was abundant and I thank God first and foremost for continuing to bless me in every sphere of my life. I owe a special and continuing "Thank You" to Prof. K. C. Baral, under whose specific direction the dissertation was completed. He deserves more credit than I can fairly record.

In shaping the thesis to its present form I have had the help of some distinguished friends and I thank them all: Rachelle for supplying me with some of the much needed materials and whose perceptive helpfulness is legendary. The labour of typing was performed by an exceptional and competent friend Feri, who saved me from many errors during the initial stage of my project. And Della, for accompanying me in traipsing the streets of Delhi while searching the material for this thesis.

It was my privilege to use the North Eastern Hill Univeristy Library, Shillong, the library at the American Centre, Janpath, New Delhi and the library at JNU, New Delhi, which were helpful for the study.

I also wish to thank Mr. Joseph F. Khongbuh, without whose help the computerized printing of this thesis would not have been possible, because he did the work so skillfully and so encouragingly that both style and logic improved markedly under his direction.

My grateful thanks are also due to Prof. A. Basaiawmoit, the Principal of Synod College, for allowing me to expand my educational horizons, and Dr. (Mrs.) T. Ao, the Head Department of English for the interest shown in my work.

I am also happy to acknowledge my late Grandfather Mr. S. N. Roy, for the collection of musical books left at my disposal. His inspired ideas will forever remain a legacy to me.

Shillong **(DOLLY NOREEN KHARLUKHI)**

The 2001.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

The decidedly ethnic and cultural configuration of the American literary scene over the past decades has underscored the primacy of the diversity of the American cultural life. Stretching from the late 1920's into the middle years of the ensuing decade, there came a bright, happy time of great promise, in the field of the arts and intellectual affairs because of the arrival of the "New Negro". The sudden emergence of a large number of gifted writers, writing fiction, producing plays and composing poems, have carved a niche for themselves and enriched Afro-American literature. Afro-Americans of the 20th century attempted to articulate themselves by using their ancestral memories as well as the strange, bitter exactions of their experiences from slavery to the present, that the American reality entailed.

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The world which takes shape in the novels of the 20th century black writers, particularly of the South, is part of Southern history. For thirty years before the Civil War and as many more years following it, the South's obsessed self-interpretation of modern history repressed the participation of the Southern literary minds in the civilizational drama

representing the past in the present, and the self in history. After World War I this drama broke out of its imprisonment in the narrowly historicist cast of the Southern literary mind. A larger vision of Southern history was slowly opening to writers in the South even before World War I. But in the illumination of this cataclysm, the War for Southern Independence and the South's defeat, the darkness of Reconstruction and the ironic rise of a materialistic New South, appeared as vivid symbols of the Southern participation in the final act of the dramatic transit in Western civilization from the traditional to the modern society.

When the second phase of World War II terminated in 1945, the modern literary subject, the myth of the past in the present, was abandoned and thrown into oblivion and lay in the cultural debris. The atomic explosions over Hiroshima and Nagasaki had blown the past out of the present, rendering obsolete the vision of the crossing of the ways. Novelists must now define the drama of the world and the self beyond the crossing. The common theme of the American novel, Southern or not, became a quest to define a vision of the self's being in a posthumanist, post-Christian society; in short, in a post-modern world. In this world, the Southern novelist has to struggle to confront the meaning of the vision of existence no longer assured historically.

To Ellison, the so-called rupture between the self and history was not acceptable, for in his understanding, the continuity between the past as it was before and the present as it has been after World War II, are important to a black writer. To put it in other words, in a somewhat paradoxical yet more definite way, Ellison has resisted the effort of the

post-modern self to close history on the self by denying it its own historical character. This is a profound embodiment of Ellison's imagination of history and myth as modes of human representation. Like Ellison, his protagonist is in possession of his own history, myths, along with his contemporary reality. Ellison's understanding of history embraces the visionary powers of such literary giants like Proust, Mann and Joyce. Ellison realized the possibilities of the Afro-American individual as a representation of the crossing of the ways, and thus created in *Invisible Man*, a compelling drama of *self* and *history*. Within a broader framework, the present study, against the backdrop of the historical context, proposes to explore (a) orality and textuality, (b) music and narrative, and (c) the question of identity in Ellison's work.

One way that Ellison bridges the gap between the uniqueness and the universality of black experience is by using black folklore. *Invisible Man* is filled with folk elements: tales, trinkets, toasts, songs, sermons, jazz, jives, and jokes. In his essays and interviews, Ellison has repeatedly singled out Black folklore as the source of genuine Black self-definition:

> In the folklore we tell what Negro experience really is. We back away from the chaos of experience and from ourselves and we depict the humour as well as the horror of our living. We project Negro life in a metaphysical perspective and we have seen it with a complexity of vision that seldom gets into our writing.[4]

Negro folklore, evolving within a larger cultural domain is regarded as the blackman's own core, and is more than the literal. It announces the Negro's willingness to trust his own experience, his own

sensibilities in defining reality, instead of allowing his masters to define these crucial matters for him. This understanding is implied throughout *Shadow and Act*, that behind "John Henry is Hercules, behind specific folk expression is the long tradition of story-telling ... of myth".[5] So when Ellison uses black folklore in his fiction, he consciously integrates it with the myths of the larger American and Western cultures.

The specific implications of the difference between the social and the mythic view of folk experience can be illustrated by considering Ellison's critical discussion of the Battle Royal scene in *Invisible Man*:

> Take the Battle Royal passage in my novel, where the boys are blindfolded and forced to fight one another for the amusement of the white observers. This is a vital part of behaviour pattern in the South, which both blacks and whites thoughtlessly accepted. It is a ritual in preservation of caste lines, a keeping of taboo to appease the gods and ward off bad luck. It is also the initiation rituals to which the greenhorns are subjected.... In any society there are many rituals of situation which, for the most part, go unquestioned. They can be simple or elaborate, but they are the connective tissue between the work of art and the audience."[6]

The Battle Royal is rooted in the slave experience. It goes back to the many versioned folk-tale "The Fight", in which the *Old Master* and his neighbour pit their two strongest slaves against each other and stake their plantations on the outcome. Ellison turns this aspect into an essentially religious ritual. By emphasizing the symbolic rites, Ellison transforms social experience into a mythic one. The social and the mythic

interpretations of a situational ritual might co-exist peacefully if such a situation is not a function of so abnormal a condition as slavery.

The ritual also symbolises the relation of an individual to his own community, of an oppressed people to those who oppress. Because the social and the mythical rituals reflect different levels of relationship between people and power, without having compatible meaning. To equate the Battle Royal as an appeasement ritual for the gods is to assume that the relationship between blacks and whites, in its dramatized mode, is divinely sanctioned and eternal. Although the relationship has always seemed permanent, black folklore is based on the premise that it is not. In his theoretical analysis, Ellison places *Invisible Man* in a context that distorts its meaning and makes it a series of initiations that finally demonstrate not the politics of slavery, but the chaos of the universe. In his work, he fits in black-American folk expression to the forms of Western and American myths. To do so, he must ignore, minimize, distort or deny the peculiarities of the black folklore reflect the peculiar institutions from which they evolve, the effort to transcend them, has to distinguish black experience from all others. Thus the end of the identity quest in Ellison's fiction is only the beginning.

Music is in many ways central to the slave experience, and among Afro-Americans many types of musical expressions are derived from the polyrhythmic subtleties of African drum-language. Music and dancing continued to form an essential part of Afro-American life in the American plantations, where the slaves assimilated the religious songs and hymns of the white man. Afro-American folklore and music evolved

within a larger culture and gradually bore its own identity. The evolving cultural identity through music and dance, announces the Negro's willingness to trust his own experience, his own sensibility in defining his reality.

Ellison's world view, his understanding of the relationship of art to life, his merging of cultural history with music, criticism with propaganda, and art with civilization must be understood and recognized in viewing the true perspective of his work. One may rightly question the critical understanding and foundation of such views. If one takes Ellison's music as a form of criticism, it reveals that he accepted his duties as a critic seriously, injecting into his work all the knowledge and conviction that he had. But before any "artistic craving" could be satisfied, before anything worthwhile could be created or appreciated, the existing social and cultural ills must be cured. Ellison here, did not leave behind his political, social and historical equipments. Nor did he hesitate in pointing out their importance in the art world. If Ellison's *Invisible Man* speaks to many readers of colour, it is not only because the novel so eloquently records the feelings of rage and invisibility that are a consequence of living within a racist culture, but also because this work gives voice to a particular intuition about music.

In order to understand the real meaning of black music and the significance role it plays in *Invisible Man*, one has to have a look at the ethos of black music, as manifested in different forms like jazz, blues, rag-time, bossa nova, developing into many other styles of music, until the days of the modern counterparts of rap, raggae and hip-hop. The

invisible man's search for an identity, and his struggles to re-invent it, is closely related to the struggles these musical styles undergo before they can become part of the great American musical scene.

Throughout slavery, the proof of an African heritage was evident in the elements of early Afro-American music. Consciously or sub-consciously, Old Africa, the Mother Country of civilization, remained the most important source of originality for blacks, and eventually, for many musical attempts in American nationalism. For instance, one could recall the multi-tribal formation which enhanced the African social systems. This fact alone assured that great varieties of musical substances would exist in early slave music. When compounded, these innumerable features define the music as a distinctive collection of sounds marked by diverse improvisations in performance with melismatic or ornamental melodies, exciting dances, rhythms, unique harmonies, scales, forms, titles and textures. In Africa, the soul of music evolved from an inseparable combination of the sister arts of music; drama and dance, and became expertly woven into the language and customs of the people. These elements blended according to an event's appropriateness into the speech of the participants into different age groups and into the categories of their sex and status. None of the elements like the instrument, form, peer group, text, dance, and other musical elements could be taken out of the context of the event for which the music was planned, and none of these elements or media could be mixed unless prescribed by tradition.

The oral tradition must be held responsible for the maintenance of the African heritage which miraculously survived through the centuries. When passed orally, music was subjected to change in its generation, transportation and reception. The ornamentation of melodic tones, song forms, and accompanying body movements involved spontaneous change from singer to singer, verse to verse and from locale to locale. Speaking of African music, A. M. Jones notes that there is an identical characteristic of improvisation, in Ware, Allen and Garrison's transcriptions of *Slave Songs*. This practice of variation marked almost each performance and was often suggested at the will of the master drummer or the lead singer. It must be understood that, in African music, the freedom to vary the structure depends upon the basic underlying form allowing only specific points within a piece to be used for addition or alterations. African languages themselves were musical in the spoken form and demanded that pitches be relatively perfect for correct communication. One notes a similarity between this and the "sing-song" speech of Southern blacks. Even from idioms attempted high and low imitations of speech intonations, when they are performed on female and male instruments whose small and large sizes denotes levels of pitch sounds. Therefore, the "talking drums" were capable of sending out vital messages which were clearly understood by the population. So important were the words that they served as the basis around which were formulated the remaining musical elements of melody, harmony, rhythm, form and timbre.

Because of its impact upon the total American population, rhythm or movement was considered the most basic characteristic of African music. Much like the principle used in liturgical chants of Western music, rhythm was dictated by the flow of words and generally reflected African life styles. From the city markets to the country side, rhythm imitated the movements of the various lingual and human activities, whether fast or slow. When transcribed into Western terminology, traditional African compositions showed life's constancy and tribal diversities through both complex and simple rhythms of time, space, energy and change.

To summarize the last quarter of the 20th century we may note that Black musicians in all genres paid homage to the past even as they were breaking new paths in the world of music. In 1989, for instance, Quincy Jones erected an appropriate milestone for the history of Afro-American music. Producer, song-writer and arranger of such albums as Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (the best selling album of all time) and his own *We Are The World,* Jones took his listeners back to the old inner-city neighbourhood with his album *Back On The Block.* Described as a "lavish collage" of black music styles, the album attempts to tell the history of the music over a period of six decades. Jones drew upon every known black music style and genre, from a Zulu chant to the big band. Several of the album cuts begin with rap introductions that segue into jazz or other music forms. To perform the music, Jones called upon many pre-eminent artists of the time, among them, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Miles Davis, Dizzie Gillespie, Ray Charles and Bobby

McFerrin. The performance groups include the Andrae Crouch Singers (gospel). Take 6 (the harmonizing quarter), and rappers Big Daddy Kane, Melle Mel, Kool Moe Dee, and Ice-T.

The protagonist of *Invisible Man*, focusing on the black music tradition, underlined the fact that through music the blacks and able to come to terms with themselves after having gone through inhuman suffering. Music has always been a source of reassurance to the blacks for its freshness and lasting beauty.

Ellison's *Invisible Man* has a thesis, or at least an overriding motive driving it; namely, that in recognizing the central contribution made by black American musicians to the history of music itself, the contributions made by white American musicians must not be slighted. His efforts carry the conviction that music may not be so much a black American experience as an *American Experience*, with various racial and ethnic groups playing indispensable and interlocking roles. A good indication of how important music is as an element of the "Newness" is underpinned in the premise that it is a means of discovering one's identity. Through music, many black musical artists were able to create a name for themselves, forging a reality through the American Dream idea of striving forward to success. The black colour may have been a big drawback, but it is the black colour again, that helped put these artists in the forefront of the musical world. Thus the protagonist of *Invisible Man* was able to identify his own self, and by doing so, he was able to come to terms with everything around him – culture, history, political and economic conditions.

Identity is an important market of the individual in America. The identification of the American individual is problematic if it is not supported by a consideration of the whole populace of America: a populace that thrives on democracy, includes great men and women – of different colours, creeds, races and most importantly, of different economic backgrouns, striving forward for success and honour as entailed by the American Dream – ideas, which has found ground for a leap of faith and optimism.

Despite the achievements of black writers in the era of the Black Aesthetic, a major area of the black experience which is fundamentally Southern, was almost totally neglected: not the now outdated South of Richard Wright's novels, where blacks were the eternal victims of whites, nor the South in which black people lived complacently with fear and oppression, but a black South where black nationalism is closer to achieving actually than anywhere else in America, where a people know only too well that the solution to social and political problems must be wrought by their own hands. That is the South where black women still maintain their proud carriage, where young people continue to look with defiance upon the white world; a South where the ghosts of Harriet Tubman and David Walker, Sojourner Truth and Martin Luther King remain omnipresent, constant reminders of the greatness of a race of men and women, who, forced to desert their gods and their land, struggled to survive the American diaspora as related to questions of race, culture and politics. In tracking various attempts to identify and define the African diaspora, we can see a shift in focus that underlines not so much the

essential features common to various people of African descent through which communities and individuals identify with one another, but highlighting the central importance of race – racial constructions, racial oppressions, racial identification – in the making and remaking of diaspora.

The African diaspora as popularly conceived is a denotative label for the dispersed people removed and exiled from a common territorial origin, sub-Saharan Africa. The term *diaspora* itself was probably not used to refer to people of African descent until the mid-1950s, when it began to be employed by intellectuals involved in pan-Africanism and the effort to raise consciousness and create solidarity among blacks across the globe. Nevertheless, the themes and ideas encapsulated by the term African diaspora had been developed long before the term itself came into fashion. Indeed, the attempt to identify, define and characterize a transitional identity of people of African descent, had already been an important feature of black scholarship.

It is important to recognize that from the very beginning, the African diaspora as a theoretical project has been political. It was originally constructed in opposition to a racist ideology that depicts blacks in essentialized terms as biologically "negroid"; a people without culture, without significant history or national or territorial connection; and are racially inferior, marginal and uncivilized. The term itself began to be employed at a particular moment in the civil rights and pan-African movements by intellectuals and activists striving to increase racial consciousness and solidarity in confronting racism and colonialism. It

became conceptualized not simply as a racial entity, but as a racial community dynamically uniting Africa and its communities in displacement through commonalities of African cultural practice and world view. These ideas have remained prevalent over the last three decades in the work of Anglo-scholars like Mintz and Price (1976) and Thompson (1983).

The work of Ellison represents a middle ground between the ontological essentialism of Afrocentricism and the anti-essentialism of diaspora as hybridity. In his elaboration of what we can refer to as anti-anti-essentialist perspective on these issues, he addresses the question of the unity and commonality of the African diaspora, not only as a political and theoretical problem but also as a social, economic, cultural and racial problem of the individual, rather than as an ontological given rooted in a presumed racial essence or mythological origin. For Ellison, diaspora refers to the historical stay of his people in America through the old story of enslavement, the creation of different black cultures in the New World, and the contemporary effort to imagine a shared sense of peoplehood in confrontation with persistent systems of racialized terror. Consequently, reinvention is central to Ellison's aesthetic. One of the problems he recognizes in the black aesthetic is the absence of opportunity for reinvention. That is why, in the epilogue to *Invisible Man*, the narrator speaks of the "heart of darkness" of the South and he also speaks of his own "disembodied voice". It is obvious throughout the novel that Ellison is extremely concerned with desegregation and has been angered by Southern congressmen.

The protagonist of the novel must learn through his many experiences, and he must come to terms with and understand the socio-cultural and political reality. In elaborating this theme, Ellison emphasized the practical. Even though the invisible man learns and studies he is not impressed by the sheer fact of learning because he has seen that learning can exist without being useful and that in itself it does not emphasize mental superiority. However, Ellison rescues his protagonist through narrative openness. The mythic quest becomes a journey backward, hitting the open road and coming home to one's own people. The invisible man goes through the process of initiation only to prepare himself for reinvesting his identity as a black man having learnt his lessons about black cultural life.

So we have a man with an identity, but an identity that is invisible. He tells us about his world, his complex feelings and thoughts and how it feels to live in a racist society. His insights are genuine and profound because they are painfully gathered from his own experiences, which he hardly can escape. The novel narrates those experiences while the prologue and epilogue give us Ellison's view on life and its renewal in deconstructing history.

While stressing the fact that the invisible man was forced by necessity to adopt indigenous language and material practices, Ellison takes a detour in replacing the hero's African origin, religion, music and dance. In his view, the invisible man occupies a unique status, belonging to the old as well as the new worlds of Afro-American culture. It is to such a world that the author of *Invisible Man* calls our attention: a world

of diversity and change, where men and women, seen in the context of historical perspective are paradigms of courage, endurance, grace and beauty. Writing in the *New Negro* in 1925, Alain Locke assured his audience that the days of aunties and uncles, Toms and Sambos were over. *Invisible Man* tells us now, that the days of darky entertainers, parodying dolls and sweet yams, if not over, are numbered; that an excursion into the cultural past can provide images by which people can measure themselves. It tells us that in the protagonist's search for an identity in order to reinvent a new image, it is history of the world have lived and died. These values found their greatest expression in the South, in the first home away from home for the Afro-American. It is there, where men and women, having undergone the racial holocaust and survived, that the best examples of a viable reinvention of identity is possible.

In the light of the above discussion, the present study attempts to explore the concept and context of identity through orality, textuality and music in Ellison's *Invisible Man*. The work is divided into the following chapters:

1. Introduction.
2. Historical Context.
3. Orality and Textuality.
4. Music.
5. Reinventing Identity.
6. Conclusion.

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CHAPTER - II

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE BLACK EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA DURING 1960S AND 1970S

Films in the 1920s' radio in the 1930s, and television after the war caught America in an electronic web of overlapping cultural loyalties. Although the naturalists of the 1930s worked to create a total vision of America with diverse demographic representation the Afro-American identity was somehow misplaced. It found its ground for a leap of faith and optimism in the diffused idea known as the American Dream, only during the 1940s. The Afro-American thus was initiated either to believe in the American Dream at the cost of his historical personality and community values. However, the optimism flared from the rhythms picked up from the abolitionist agenda as articulated in slave narratives. These narratives absorbed the tenets of Christianity, the ideals of the Enlightenment and renewed its faith in the American Constitution. This redefining of the American Dream has become a practice of constructing a parallel vision that seriously interrogated the Dream itself. The clearest way out of the maze was to create the most overarching vision of black identity. Focusing on the situation of the Black in America, Ralph Ellison in his prophetic work *Invisible Man* helped create a style in which *orality, textuality and music* mingled to portray a vision of an America that has gone mad. In a world of paranoid discriminations and impersonal power, the imagination of the individual is the last refuge of will. Ellison moved closer to the realm of popular culture, absorbing its vitality and variety into a self-created coherence that mocked at official position even while pushing it to absurdity.

With the force of a revelation, the mind of Ellison's protagonist discovered himself and his situation in re-possessioning the history of its own world and its myths. The making of that history embraced the visionary powers of such literary giants like Proust, Man and Joyce. Ellison realized the situation of the Afro-American individual as a representation at the crossing of the ways, and thus created in *Invisible Man* a compelling drama of *self* and *history*.

Although the novel in America makes its full acknowledgement of all the bitter social realities that are the consequences of racial animus in general, the terrifying capacities for violence and cruelty that are resident in the human heart are subtly articulated in Ellison's work. His sense of the relationship of art to life, his merging of narrative with music and his deconstruction of race in the context of American civilization, constitute the narrative of *Invisible Man*.

Before elaborating on Ellison's world view, I would like to discuss the historical context of the Black Experience in America during the 1960s and the 1970s.

The 'struggle' as it is known to the black community, for securing the legitimate space with dignity and honour in America started from the 1920s. Around the 1960s, the 'black' or the Afro-Americans carved a literary space for themselves. The emerging black hero or the *New Negro* in the literary writings finally arrived. The sudden emergence of a large number of gifted black writers auger in the inception of a Third Force in the American literary scene. The Harlem Renaissance is the product of

that creative upsurge. This awakening touched the peoples' sensibility and a new awareness emerged. Afro-Americans of the 20th century first encountered a large expression in lyric form of their ancestral memories and, then, the strange bitter *exactions* of their fated involvement in the American reality.

Amongst those associated with the Harlem Renaissance it was Langston Hughes, who had the longest productive career, and by the early 1960s, his impressive accomplishment won him a considerable following. But none of the other representatives of the Harlem movement succeeded in making any large impact on the general literary scene except Weldon Johnson and Countee Cullen, who were cherished within the Negro community for a brief moment. When Black writers and artists were felt to be wondrously strange, they were hawked about by such specialists as Nancy Cunard and Carl Van Vechten in the exotic *Tendenz*. As part of literary politics, critics such as Edmund Wilson and Malcolm Cowley, and the editors of *The Hound and Horn* and *The Southern Review* simply ignored them.

The year 1963 marked the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation and it was notable, for huge demonstrations by Negro groups in cities of both North and South America. These groups pressed forward their demands for the abolition of desegregation of public facilities and for the extension of fair employment opportunities. As Congress debated over President Kennedy's proposal of a new Civil Rights Act, the flurry of activities were brought to a kind of climax on the 28th of August by the March to Washington For Jobs and Freedom. The event was sponsored

by hundreds of groups with national constituencies and many of their leaders – A. Philip Randolf, Roy Wilkens, Walter Reuther - delivered speeches before the large crowd. However, more than anything else, the rolling periods of Martin Luther King's great movement culminated in "I have a dream..." that became symbolic of the national memory.

Less than a year after, in the Spring of 1964, under Lyndon Johnson's Presidency, Congress enacted the most comprehensive civil rights legislation in the country's history, giving the Attorney General effective powers to defend all citizens against any deprivation of their free access to public facilities, of their exercise of the ballot, and of their use of the nation's public educational resources.

Amidst all this ferment, there was the cry for "Black Power" that began to sound in the Summer of 1966 by the Young Chairman of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee), Stokely Carmichael. Immediately, it had a mesmerizing effect on the youth. Although it did not bring about a radical change, it did keep the illusions alive for freedom. A new sense of assertiveness started taking shape that had a stirring effect in the homilies of James Baldwin. The perilous and exhausting civil rights battles in the South followed the Montgomery boycott that helped discover a sense of heroism of which the blacks were themselves capable. Nor were they untouched by the new vitalities that seemed to be at work south of the Sahara, in the achievement of independence by Ghana and Tanganyika, by Kenya and Zanzibar, by Sierra Leone and Uganda. Africa the Land of their forefathers, was at last beginning to be free from European colonialism and ready to take charge

of its own destiny. As they looked back at their own past – "rope, fire ... humiliation" – and at their brothers, sons of "Mother Africa", they were wanting to affirm, with the force of a newly strengthened certitude, that here, in this saga of struggle and suffering, there is, as *The Fire Next Time* says: "something very beautiful" and something which, as they began to feel, stands to be betrayed by any vision of the future as involving nothing more than their assimilation into the world of white America. And thus, once Carmichael raised his cry of "Black Power", in animating these passions, it was instantly captivating. The immediate response was, yes, - let us have Black Power, let us consolidate that which is distinctly *ours*, for as the watchword soon began to be – "Black is beautiful" and overnight, the semantics of self-definition made it *de requeur* amongst the youth that the term "Negro" be supplanted by the term "Black".

The rapidly increasing assertiveness of this new mood in the 1960s had of course, certain consequences in the political arena, in the occasional disturbance of old alliances between Negroes and liberal whites and in various abortive programs of "Black Nationalism". But its most telling result was observable in the changed tone of cultural enterprise which found its most vigorous expression in the emerging literary situation. In 1968, the young black writer Julius Lester said:

> I'm an Afro-American. This implies that I'm an amalgam. It is my responsibility to reflect the Afro side of the hyphen. The other side has been too much reflected.[1]

Lester's intention was clear and loud. There was an attempt to distinguish the Negro writer with a separatist ethnicist attitude, disengaging him not only from the larger world of American literature but also from the entire Western tradition. The program was gradually worked out in such magazines as *Freedomways, Negro Digest* – later *Black World* – *The Black Scholar*, and in the writer's conferences that were convened on campuses and in community centers all over the North in New York, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Those who emerged as the chief strategists were the poet and playwright, Leroi Jones, who now calls himself Imamu Amiri Baraka, the novelist, John Oliver Killens, the ideologue, John Henrik Clarke, poets, Larry Neal and Don L. Lee, and the editor of the now defunct *Black World*, Hoyt Fuller.

The effort was an attempt at a radical reordering of the Western aesthetics vis-a-vis black aesthetics. The political overtone of the effort was resounding. The mood of the new aggression is expressed in the words of black nationalist leader Ron Karenga:

> Black art must expose the enemy, praise the people and support the revolution. It must be like Leroi Jones' poems that are assassins' poems, poems that kill and shoot guns and 'wrassle cops into alleys taking their weapons, leaving them dead with tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland'.[2]

Leroi Jones says:

> The black Artist's role in America is to aid in the destruction of America as he knows it. His role is to report and reflect so precisely the nature of society, and of himself in that society, that other men will be moved by the exactness of his

> rendering, and if they are black men, grow strong through this moving, having seen their own strength and weakness; and if they are white men, tremble, curse and go mad because they will be drenched by the filth of their own evil.[3]

Adam David Miller maintains that a literature responsive to the black aesthetic is one whose task is not so much of "telling it like it is" as of telling it "like it needs to be ... [if a black man is] to make sense out of his experience".[4]

John O'Neal says that a truly black art is:

> Affirmation of the black reality ... Affirmation of black potential, not trying to take black dreams and paint them white till we don't know the difference anymore.[5]

Addison Gayle conceives the black aesthetic to be:

> A corrective – a means of helping black people out of the polluted mainstream of Americanism.[6]

In spite of various attempts at rediscovering or redefining the black art, what is most important for the Afro-American is to look back and consider the writings of some of their predecessors, because there had already been writers, like W. E. B. DuBois – a historian, a black leader and an educator, who sought not merely to manifest the inchaoteness of the whole ideology of black aestheticism, but to rewrite the history of Africa itself and to think in epistemological terms about what it means to be an African in the modern world and its significance for social research.

During his years at Harvard and the University of Berlin, DuBois boldly projected the possibility of subjecting to scientific scrutiny the problem of race in the modern world. He contended that the central object of American sociology should be the study of race. The intellectual core of what became a unique DuBoisian epistemology of race was a reconceptualization of Africa. DuBois sometimes openly, often quite subtly, sought out ways to reconceptualize the social, cultural and civilizational universe from an Africa-centered standpoint. Forthrightly, he insists in *The Souls of Black Folk*:

> One who is born with a cause is predestined to a certain narrowness of view, and at the same time to some clearness of vision within his limits with which the world often finds it well reckon.[7]

The review in a way locates both his intellectual style and the object of his project. He concludes by saying that:

> In its larger aspects... the style is tropical-African. This needs no apology. The blood of my fathers spoke through me and cast off the English restrain of my training and surroundings. The resulting accomplishment is a matter of taste. Sometimes I think very well of it and sometimes I do not.[8]

The Afro-American Church is the peculiar and characteristic product of the transplanted African. As a social institution, the Afro-American Church may be said to have antedated the African family on American soil. As such it has preserved, on the one hand, many of the family functions called "tribal functions" and "communal functions"

which preserved the African tradition of female authority. Even through the storm and stress of slavery, the Negro brought the African past to America. Primarily, the slaves represented everything African. Africa and the trans-Atlantic slave trade, in fact, immensely contributed to the foundations of the modern world economy. Moreover, the political and moral agencies of modernity, we can say, were disproportionately located in the slaves, their culture and resistance. Africans indeed are a moral force. Africans in America would give the first and most consistent examples of what Marx called the class-struggle.

The dialectical relationship between a person's self-image and his social position, which is a major determinant of social behaviour, is a problem particularly acute for Afro-Americans. Issues of self-image and social behaviour are most evident in several discussions of employment and criminal behaviour. The back-street corner men and women of whom DuBois writes in 1899 had a pervasive presence throughout American history. This presence is attested to in myriad historical studies and contemporaneous research monographs, not to talk of DuBois own *The Negro American Family* (1908). Discrimination against the black in the sphere of socio-economic activities placed him between a personal demand for self-respect and a non-affirming social structure. A subject, constrained by perceptions of an environment vacant of opportunity, may sink into despair and apathy, or may join the company of similar situated subjects, in that, projection of a self-chosen oppositional identity becomes the most basic and empowering form of human identity.

Such identical agencies span a range of identities from the constructive rebellion of those who pursue prizes reserved for the other to the wasted and bitter cry of the street hustlers, criminals and non-belongers. Social outcome are neither structural inevitabilities nor behavioural destinies fated by genes or pathological cultures. Social outcomes are mediated by human choices that become part of experience. The mediation occurs within social institutions like the family, schools and churches. When institutions fail to affirm an individual's self-image, his response to the status discrepancy corresponds to identity formation. To interpret what motivates these agencies, we must discover how social identity is related to social institutions that affirm or deny a self-image.

It is common knowledge that during the past quarter century, rewards received in the competitions for jobs are major affirmations or denials of the validity or the self perceptions of men and women. Explication of the social meaning of the concept of "slave" clarifies the relation between discursive location, identity and labour supply. Conceptually, the jobs of a slave makes several highly repugnant claims about the job and its occupant. If the metaphor is taken seriously, then being employed in a slave category, by self-admission, if not a slave precisely, is that the person becomes slave-like. Thus to work as a slave is likely to undermine one's identity and self-esteem.

The most important characteristics of a slave job is that it entails repellant interpersonal relations. It involves a demeaning and close supervision. It does not offer a career – long time employees are doing

the same work, under the same demeaning conditions and it does not pay well, or for that matter, not paid at all, given its other characteristics.

The verbalized point of view of a slave is that he loses public respect in addition to losing self-respect. The point is illustrated nicely in the following rap poem delivered by a Baltimore street hustler during the mid 1960s:

> A hustler is a very wise person, but yet he's lost, he's a person who refuses to "eight" (for Charlie) the white boss. His life consists of heartaches, a little pleasure and no pity, at times I hesitate to believe that hustlers are very witty. His profession ranges from dealing seconds to controlling the cue from conning, pimping and cheating at crap and sometimes after making a misplay, he'll gladly confess that being a back-street hustler is his own mishap.... Now when this man has a good day, you'll see him smile, hear him say "All bonafide hustlers come forward, all suckers stay away". The moral of this poem is very sad but true, a hustler's life is not all roses most of it is blue and chumps you be glad the title "hustler" doesn't mean you.[9]

This rap poem illustrates several aspects of the hustler's philosophy and value system. His discursive location is that of the *malcontent* (DuBois refers to the slave as a malcontent). The underlying point of view emphasizes independence, self-determination with the choice of work, maintenance of social dignity and freedom from white control. While this rap piece provides evidence of pride in the lifestyle chosen, much of this pride is lodged in the negative act of refusing to be a slave – "eight" – under white supervision. About the actual lifestyle of the hustler, there is great ambivalence, even regret. The back-street

hustler's message is shaped by a gritty realism. He visualizes no prospect for a really satisfying life and his lifestyle would not be chosen under more favourable conditions. The hustler is doomed by his own chosen lifestyle and he knows it.

The tragic irony dominating this lyric renders an implicit statement of the malcontent's most central ideological stance, the trope of forced agency and the phenomenon of suspended values. Stated briefly, the trope of forced agency is a commonly articulated argument that rationalizes the commission of negative and immoral acts. The malcontent's discursive location is shaped by the discrepancy between his self-image and the value placed on him. As part of the Black Nationalist Movement, the South took the lead in formulating what is called Black Aesthetics. As John Killens said:

> We are a Southern people, "because that is where our people are closest to Africa. But our literature does not show this".[10]

It was a process of return to the Africa of their forefathers, that the literary artists tried to formulate an aesthetic that created images and symbols in an attempt to make a paradigm shift. In spite of a resurgence in black writing, what was taken seriously note of is the way the black man was stereotyped. The prevalent mood was to restore honour and selfhood to the black man. The stereotyped depiction of the black man as half-man, at best, needs to be revised. The literature that engaged in projecting the whole-man of the Negro has to, on the one hand, protest

the hitherto representation of the black man, and on the other, transcend the boundaries of colour and race.

Despite the achievements of black writers in the era of the black aesthetic movement, a major area of the black experience was called to a halt. They have called a halt to the madness demonstrated by those who argued that black men were half-men at best, ersatz Americans at most, and that, via the vehicle of protest literature, a transcendence might occur which would allow for the existence of whole men. The emerging black writers called a halt to the themes of black pity and gratuitous black suffering. This call reiterates the significance of the South as a place where the blacks are not the eternal victims of the whites, nor is it a place where they lived complacently with fear and oppression, but a black South where black nationalism is closer to the reality than anywhere else in America. The American South is the place where black women and young people maintain their proud carriage and continue to look with defiance upon the white world; where the ghost of Harriet Tubman and David Walker, Sojourner Truth and Martin Luther King remain omnipresent as constant reminders of the greatness of a race of men and women, who, forced to desert their gods and their land, struggled and survived the American diaspora.

The books that were published during the 1970s, attempting to capture the black situation have the same wavelength with *Invisible Man.* These works together move us from an all pervasive preoccupation with urban America towards an exploration of the other, and meaningful areas of the black experience. Houston Baker's *Long Black Song* (1972) and

Askia Muhammad Toure's *Songhai!* (1972), are different in terms of genre, emphasis and theme, but comparably important departures in the area of black literature and criticism.

Long Black Song is a scholarly critique, an examination of the roots and foundations of black literature from its oral tradition to the literature of the 1960s' and 1970s'. *Songhai!* is a collection of verse and prose – melodic, rhythmical – weaving fascinating images and metaphors of the new black world, a-coming. Together they tell the same truth: that the strength of black people lay in a culture outside that of the white American. That the "New Jihad", to use Toure's phrase, is possible only after a return to the values and ethics of their African forefathers. While *Long Black Song* is descriptive of the odessey undertaken towards reaching the new world. *Songhai!* is a celebration, as much of the odessey as of the new world itself. The declaration of Ellison's protagonist at the end of *Invisible Man* that perhaps he speaks for every man – "who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you"[11] - in a sense, does not speak for a distinctive identity. Although critics point out the ambivalence in the utterances of the protagonist, he in fact makes a fundamental cultural statement that is part of his experience and legacy. The rights of passage that propels him on his quest for selfhood in this novel, becomes his *bildungsroman*. As a Southern black, the protagonist has inherited a past that is steeped in a history of slavery which, before he reaches manhood, must come to understand and accept. Later, when he bites into the hot buttered yams that he purchases from a street vendor, the protagonist declares: "I yam what I am", signaling, in

many ways, his final internalization of his identity, including the historical past that is his legacy.

The historical context is necessarily significant to a black writer. In a sense, he is trapped in a history produced by the white man. He needs to liberate himself. The process of liberation, becomes contingent upon the exploration of the past. In black literature the past is ever present. The past and present of the black race is entwined with racism, otherness and loss of identity. To reconstitute the other and retrieve the lost identity, literary works must not forget history, but contextualize it in order to transcend the boundaries. The African persona, therefore needs to be reconstituted as reflexive, having the ability to meditate on selfhood, exploring his desires and fears, longings and terrors, in order to rewrite his/her own history.

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CHAPTER - III

ORALITY AND TEXTUALITY: FOLK ELEMENTS IN *INVISIBLE MAN*

The predominant theme in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is the quest for cultural identity. The protagonist seeks identity not as an individual, but as a Black man in a white society. The invisible man searches for self-definition in terms of his lived life and values gained from the unique Black-American experience. His quest lies in the conviction that the Black experience is unique, that is part of the community's struggle: "Who knows but that on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?"[1] Cultural identity becomes indistinguishable from the human condition.

One way that Ellison bridges the gap between the uniqueness and the universality of Black experience is by using Black folklore. *Invisible Man* is filled with folk elements: tales, trinkets, toasts, songs, sermons, jazz, jives and jokes. In his essays and interviews, Ellison has repeatedly singled out Black folklore as the source of genuine Black self-definition:

> In the folklore we tell what Negro experience really is. We back away from the choas of experience and from ourselves and we depict the humour as well as the horror of our living. We project Negro life in a metaphysical perspective and we have seen it with a complexity of vision that seldom gets into our writing.[2]

Negro folklore, evolving within a larger cultural domain is regarded something as a Blackman's own core hence more than the literal. It announces the Negro's willingness to trust his own experience, his own

sensibilities in defining reality, instead of allowing his masters to define these crucial matters for him. At the same time, however, Ellison insists that "On its profoundest level American experience is of a whole",[3] as it is implied throughout *Shadow and Act*, that behind "John Henry is Hercules, behind specific folk expression is, "the long tradition of story telling ... of myth".[4] So when Ellision uses Black folklore in his fiction, he consciously integrates it with the myths of the larger American and Western cultures.

Ellison then goes on to identify the problem by saying:

> For example, there is the old saying amongst Negroes: if you're black, stay back; if you're brown, stick around; if you're white, you're right. And there is the joke Negroes tell on themselves about their being so black they can't be seen in the dark. In my book this sort of thing was merged with the meanings which blackness and light have long had in Western mythology: evil and goodness, ignorance and knowledge, and so on. In my novel the narrator's development is one through blackness to light; that is, from ignorance to enlightenment: invisibility....
>
> It took me a long time to learn how to adapt such examples of myth into my work – also ritual. The use of ritual is equally a vital part of creative process. I learned a few things from Eliot, Joyce and Hemmingway, but not how to adopt them.[4]

The saying, "if you're black, stay back" is not myth, but folk wisdom. Ritual is not completely independent of myth, it is the form through which myth is often expressed. What Ellison attempted to do, in order to adapt Black folk expression in literature was to turn it into ritual and put

it at the service of a myth larger than itself. Folklorists, myth theorists and literary critics differ widely on the definition of myth and its relationship to the rest of folklore. Those who believe that a myth involves divine characters and folktales human, that myths take place in prehistoric and folktales in historic time, or that myths are believed by teller and audience and folktales told as fiction, are acknowledging not necessarily a sharp distinction between two levels of folk belief – one concrete, temporal and specific to the folk group, the other abstract, eternal and universal. "Eternal" and "Universal" are here relative terms. They refer to times and worlds larger than those of the immediate social context, however, the largeness of the world is unimportant. In Ellison's novel such "myths" refer to the abstract level of "folk-expression".

The specific implications of the difference between a social and a mythic view of the folk experience can be illustrated by considering Ellison's discussion of the Battle Royal scene in *Invisible Man*:

> Take the "Battle Royal" passage in my novel, where the boys are blindfolded and forced to fight one another for the amusement of the white observers. This is a vital part of behaviour pattern in the South which both Negroes and Whites thoughtlessly accepted. It is a ritual in preservation of caste lines, a keeping of taboo to appease the gods and ward off bad luck. It is also the initiation rituals to which the greenhorns are subjected. This passage which states what Negroes will see I did not have to invent; the patterns were already there in society, so that all I have to do was present them in a broader context and meaning. In any society there are many rituals of situation which, for the most part, go unquestioned. They can be simple, elaborate, but they are the connective tissue between the work of art and the audience.[6]

The Battle Royal is rooted in the slave experience. It goes back to the many versioned folktale "The Fight", in which the old *Master* and his neighbour pit their two strongest slaves against each other and stake their plantations on the outcome. It has been used by Wright in *Black Boy* (1945), Faulkner in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and Killens in *Young Blood* ( ) in dramatizing social relations between blacks and whites. It encapsulates the physical, economic, psychological and sexual exploitation of slavery, while dramatizing the slaves' comprehension of it. Identifying the rituals of a slave society for example: "keeping of taboo [is] to appease the gods" and an "initiation ritual which all green horns are subjected", Ellison turns them into an essentially religious ritual. By emphasizing the symbolic rights, Ellison transforms social experience into a mythic one. The social and the mythic interpretations of a situational ritual might coexist peacefully if such a situation is not a function of so abnormal a condition as slavery.

The ritual also symbolizes the relation of an individual to his own community, of an oppressed people to those who oppress. Because the social ritual and the mythic ritual reflect different levels of relationship between people and power without having compatible meanings. To equate the Battle Royal as an appeasement ritual for the gods is to assume that the relationship between blacks and whites, in its dramatized mode is divinely sanctioned and eternal. Although that relationship has always seemed permanent, Black folklore is based on the premise that it is not. In his theoretical analysis, Ellison places *Invisible Man* in a context that distorts its meaning and makes it a series of initiations that

finally demonstrates not the politics of slavery, but the chaos of the universe. In his fiction, in general, he fits-in Black-American folk expression to the forms of American and Western myth. To do so, he must ignore, minimize, distort, or deny the peculiarities of the Black folk expression and its authentic meaning. The peculiarities of the Black folklore reflects the peculiar institutions from where they evolve and transcend them. Thus the end of the identity quest in Ellison's fiction becomes the beginning.

As has already been stated, through the early part of the 20th century, Afro-American ideology renewed optimism, sought to find a place in the complex ideas of the American Dream. The Afro-American therefore has to believe in the American Dream or destroy much that is of value to him. The optimism can be seen as embracing the after-beat of rhythms picked up from those established by the abolitionists in slave narratives. Today the rhythms of the American Dream runs in a parallel pattern with a more serious questioning of the Dream itself. Benjamin Mays' *Born to Rebel* (1971) recounts the encounter with nothingness during Mays' youth, but finds ground for optimism in the fruits of public service. On the other hand, Richard Wright's *Black Boy* (1945) an autobiographical work questioned the very notion of the dream itself. Although the autobiography's ending leaves ground for hope in the promised land of the North, the work torn apart the cultural fabric of the slaves by interrogating its various claims to authenticity as it comes round to the brink of nothingness:

> After I have outlived the shocks of childhood, after the habit of reflection had been born in me, I used to mulled over the strange absence of real kindness in Negroes, how unstable was our tenderness, how lacking in genuine passion we were, how void of great hope, how timid our joy, how bare our traditions, how hollow our memories, how lacking we were in those intangible sentiments that bind man to man, and how shallow was even our despair. After I had learned other ways of life I used upon the unconscious irony of those who felt that Negroes led so passionate an existence! I saw that what had been taken for our emotional strength was our negative confusions, our flights, our fears, our fenzy under pressure.[7]

Wright was offended by the fact that a Black folk tradition was oriented toward mere survival, base submission, and escapism. As he further stated in "Blueprint for Negro Writing" (*New Challenge*, Fall, 1937), he wished to mould the tradition into a martial stance. With the help of Marxism, he also wished to create the values by which the race was to live or die, but should not withdraw from decisive action and obscuring "clarity of vision". He decried that "a cowardly sentimentality which had deterred Negro writers from launching crusades against the evils which Negro ignorance and stupidity have spanwed."[8] Thus from his autobiography and from several works of fiction, there emerges a hero as Black rebel-outsider, embattled, particularly after *Uncle Tom's Children* ( ), both with the pretensions of the American Dream and his own folk tradition.

Ralph Ellison's response to Wright's portrait of Black life has been mixed. In his essay, "Richard Wright's Blues" in *Shadow and Act* (1964), he seems to partly accept and partly reject Wright's perspective. Among

other things, he notes that the personal warmth of black communal life, following Wright's illustrations, "is accompanied by an equally personal coldness, kindliness by cruelty, regard by malice," that the opposite qualities are quickly set off "against the member who gestures toward individuality," and that "The member who breaks away is apt to be more impressed by its negative than by its positive character."[9] Wright was rejecting not only the white south but the south within himself. "As a rebel, he formulated that rejection negatively, because it was the negative face of the Negro community upon which he looked most often as a child." Embattled, himself with Irving Howe in his latter essay "The World and the Jug", in *Shadow and Act* (1964), Ellison rejected the same quotation as having its source in Wright's attempt to see the forms of Negro humanity through the lens of Marxism and in Wright's paraphrase of Henry James: "catalogue of those items of high civilization which were absent from American life during Hawthorne's day, and which seemed so necessary in order for the novelist to function."[10] However, it must be said that Wright's intense rendering of negative images of Black life in such works as *Black Boy* (1945), *Native Son* (1940), *Lawd Today* (1963), and *The Long Dream* (1958) without precluding James and Marxism, would seem to require that we accept his negative remarks as an article of faith and belief. Ellison's earlier remarks, taking into consideration the stance of the rebel, and Wright's own aspiration to launch crusades against ignorance and stupidity, seem to come closer to accounting for the degree of negativity in Wright's position.

The folk influence in *Invisible Man* defines not an action but an attitude of ironic withdrawal from the white world, an attitude represented metaphorically by the lives of all those characters – Bledsoe, Trueblood, Brockway and Rhinehart – who deal with it successfully and traditionally by the protagonist's withdrawal into his half-lighted cellar. All the characters who function well in the white world inhabit some sort of wider world through Bledsoe's calculated humility; Trueblood's subconscious; Rhinehart's organized disguises; Brockway's mixing up Liberty Paints, they all accepted the chaos that is apparent. "You have looked upon ... madness and are not destroyed?" Mr. Norton asks Trueblood. "No such, I feels all right".[11] "This here's the uproar department and I'm in charge"[12], boasts Lucius Brockway. Rhinehart cannot simply live with choas; as Rhine the fighter, Rhine the gambler, Rhine the briber, Rhine the lover, and Rhine the Reverend. He "is" choas: "could he be all of the?" ... Could he himself be rind and hert? .... It was true as I was true... The world in which we lived was without boundaries. A vast seething, hot world of fluidity, and Rhine the rascal was at home. Perhaps only Rhine the rascal was at home in it. It was unbelievable, but perhaps only the truth was always a lie".[13] Having this insight, the protagonist realizes that he "no longer has to run for or from the Jacks and the Emersons and the Bledsoes and Nortons, but only from their confusions, impatience, and refusal to recognize the beautiful absurdity of their American identity and mine".[14] He goes underground following the model of these folk characters, having the wisdom of his folk advisers, he acts out the lesson that folk allusions have helped him to understand.

This ironic withdrawal is presented as negation of the white world and its absurdity. The protagonist is relieved from the "illness of affirmation, of saying 'yes' against the nay-saying of my stomach, not to mention my brain".[15] The characters he is imitating and accepting their advice are all from the conventional point of view, a bit diabolical, the crazy grandfather, the insane vet, the neurotic young Emerson all are a bit mad. It is against this perceived negation that Ellison sets the contrived reinterpretation of the grandfather's advice: "could he have meant-hell, he *must* have meant that we were to affirm the principle on which the country was built and not the men ...."[16] Reflecting on the grandfather's advice he makes a dramatic statement: "perhaps that's my greatest social crime, I've overstayed my hibernation, since there's a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play".[17]

But withdrawal into a hole is not negation. To say that the world is absurd, that the only reality is in the mind, is a way of saying that the world and the falsehoods that make it absurd are unimportant. And that is, if not affirmation, at least acquiescence. The goal in *Invisible Man* is to know, not to change knowledge is presented as the equivalent of change. But knowledge does not necessarily produce change. The affirmation of *Invisible Man* is neither the survival technique nor the political weapon that are used by the characters, for the negation behind it all is in the mind. The ultimate effect of *Invisible Man's* reinterpretation of the Black folk image is not to elevate such characters as Lucius Brockway, the cellar rebel, to the status of Dr. Bledsoe or Mr. Norton but to reduce the archetypal Black folk hero to that of Brockway.

Thus the result of the protagonist's identity quest is not an attempt at self-definition, but reaffirmation of the identity provided by the White culture.

There are two folk characters in the novel who have the potential for a positive representation of the Black folk perspective: Mary Rambo and Brother Tarp. Both are explicitly characterized as anchors against choas. The protagonist thinks of Mary as "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".[18] He regards Brother Tarp's gift of the sawed-open chain link as a "paternal gesture which at once joined him with his ancestors, marked a high point of his present, and promised a concreteness to his nebulous and choatic future".[19] Both offer the protagonist advice in direct opposition to the counsel of underground: "Its you young folk what's going to make the changes", Mary says, "y' all's the ones. You got to lead and you got to fight and move us all on up a little higher. And I tell you something else, it's the ones from the south that's got to do it, them what knows the fire and ain't forgot how it burns. Up here too many forgets".[20] Brother Tarp echoes Mary with the gift of the leg-chain link:

> Even when times were best for me I remembered. Because I didn't want to forget those nineteen years. I just kind of held on to this as a keepsake and a reminder.... I'd like to pass it on to you, son .... Funny thing to give somebody, but I think it's got a heap of signifying wrapped up in it and it might help you remember what we're really fighting against. I don't think of it in terms of but two words, *yes* and *no*; but it signifies a heap more ....[21]

This passage bears upon the activist perspective and the stabilizing effect of Mary and Tarp on slavery, the South, the past – the Black folk experience. The anchor against choas that each provides is a clear perception of the source of the choas, not as general absurdity, but as the specific legacy of slavery, something to be confronted in the world, not just in the mind. But the perspective of Mary and Brother Tarp is not the perspective of the novel. Ellison does not follow the implications of their articulations. Their advice is never confirmed, never refuted and never even dramatized. Though they are introduced as admirable and illuminating characters, they are soon dropped and forgotten. Mary Rambo is further developed in an unused chapter entitled "out of the Hospital and under the Bar", but even if it were included, she would still have no sustained effect on the novel. The final perspective remains that of the grandfather who has said "no" so secretly that even his family is shocked to hear him call himself a traitor.

"The literature of the slave" is an ironic phrase, at the very least, and is an oxymoron at its most literal level of meaning. "Literature", as Samuel Johnson used the term, denoted an "acquaintance with 'letters' or books", according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*. It also connotes "polite or humane learning" and "literary culture". While it is self-evident that the ex-slave who managed, as Federick Douglass puts it, to "steal" some learning from his or her master and the master's texts, was bent upon demonstrating to a sceptical public an acquaintance with letters or books. We cannot honestly conclude that slave literature was meant to exemplify either polite or humane learning or the presence of literary

culture. Indeed it is accurate to argue that the literature of the slave consisted of texts collectively railed against the arbitrary and *inhumane* learning which white masters foisted upon them to reinforce a perverse fiction to the "natural" order of things. The "slave" by definition, possessed at most, a liminal status within the human community. To read and to write was to transgress this nebulous realm of liminality. The slave's texts, then, could not be taken as specimens of black "literary culture". Rather the texts of the slave could only be read as testimony of defilement. The slave's *representation* of the master's attempt to transform a human being into a "commodity", and his verbal witness of the possession of "humanity" were shared in common with Europeans. The slave wrote not primarily to demonstrate humane letters, but to demonstrate his or her own membership in the human community.

This intentions cannot be disregarded as a force extraneous to the production of a text. We recall, in this context, Ralph Ellison's apt expression what we call "tradition", is "a sharing of that 'concord of sensibilities' which the group expresses."[22] Black writers to a remarkable extend have created texts that express the broad "concord of sensibilities" shared by persons of African descent in the Western hemisphere. Assertions that the slave narratives begin the Afro-American literary tradition are repeated so often that they have acquired the force of self-evident truth. Charles Davis makes the argument up front in titling one of his important essays: "The Slave Narrative: First Major Art Form in an Emerging Black Tradition."[23] James Olney echoes Davis, only more strongly, in stating, "the undeniable fact is that the Afro-American

literary tradition takes its start, in theme certainly, but also in content and form from the slave narrative."[24] Making an even bolder claim, H. Bruce Franklin argues that the slave narrative was the "first genre the United States of America contributed to the written literature of the world."[25]

The narratives focus on two crucial aspects that not only make slavery intelligible, but the "black experience" as well. The slave narrative also moves in two directions: the 'here and now' and the 'there and then'. It is the narrative actions in the 'here and now' that interest us. In an attempt to define a major stand of development in a black tradition, one has to take into account the theme of a journey like that of the invisible man. The black narrative has an ambiguous relationship to American institutions, manifesting an erosion of faith in the American Dream which earlier had provided grounds for optimism. The emerging self, equipped with imagination, resourcefulness, and a sense of the tenuousness of childhood innocence, attempts to foster itself by crediting the adult world with its own estimate of its god-like status while managing to retreat into the autonomy of the childhood world in the face of conflicts. Given the black adult's compulsion to compromise with prevailing institutions, while developing limited codes through which nobility, strength and beauty can be registered, a child's requirement of love, security and consistency are barely anchored on adult support and prevailing chaos. The black adults in the absence of other institutional support depend on the religious and blues traditions.

Ellison's ability to redefine, rather than simply include, Black folklore in his fiction is regarded as his special contribution to the literary

interpretation of both folklore and Black culture. A few commentators have criticized Black folklore for its dependence on Western mythology. Larry Neal, who singles Ellison out for his broad and profound understanding of Afro-American culture, considers the fact that Ellison overlays his knowledge of Black culture with concepts that exists outside of it. George E. Kent regards Ellison's use of the folk and cultural tradition in *Invisible Man* with a "certain unease", inspired by the elaborate system of interconnection with western symbols and mythology. These comments treat the elements of blackness and Western tradition in Ellison's fiction as separable. But Ellison's adaptation of Black folklore produces an alloy rather than separate metals. The process of ritualization itself changes the meaning of the folklore.

Although rituals do undergo change, they do so much more than other aspects of life. While fixity remains the principle of ritual as a form, people used it to deal with "those sectors of experience which do not seem amenable to rational control,"[26] or as Ellison himself put it, "People rationalize what they shun or are incapable of dealing with; these superstitions and their rationalizations become ritual as they govern behaviour. The rituals become social forms and it is one of the functions of the artist to recognize them and raise them to the level of art."[27] Thus ritual by its very nature formalizes the relationship of individuals to an order they do not understand and think they cannot change. By formalizing, it is perpetuated and celebrated. As a form, ritual tends to affirm the powerlessness of human beings and the permanence of a fixed order.

Adoption of ritual in literature explains the implications of the 'form' to the conflict between characters and the social, natural, or metaphysical forces controlling their lives. It diminishes the role and responsibility of individuals in shaping their own world, personifies impersonal forces and dehumanizes social institutions, homogenizing human experience by emphasizing continuity rather than development. It reduces any particular human action to an insignificant gesture among many in the long run. Ultimately, it reduces the significance of the very conflict it expresses by setting it in the context of innumerable others, past and future, by foreordaining the outcome, and approving the outcome as a contribution to maintaining the order.

Ritualization of Black folklore applies to the specific social conflict between Black people and the institution of slavery. It implies that this conflict is part of a general, eternal and inescapable conflict between human beings and their limitations. It transforms the social conflict at the heart of the folk expression into the metaphysical conflict of framing the myth, thus denying the social conflict any importance of its own. But the relationship between an oppressed people and an oppressive society *is* social, it is the result of human action and can be changed by human agency. To imply otherwise in Ellison's own words is to rationalize.

Rationalization is in fact just what Ellison's ritualization of Black folklore accomplishes. It implicitly justifies the relationship between Black people and American society by effectively denying it. The folk advisers in *Invisible Man* offer the protagonist a way of looking at society

that allows him to live with it as it is. They teach him to consider invisibility as a personal asset, rather than a social liability and to embrace chaos as the natural order. However, invisibility in the novel *is* a social liability that represents chaos in racism. In this *Yes* means *No* only in the mind of the speaker. In *Invisible Man*, Ellison offers folk expression as a definition of blackness, then uses folk characters and allusions to deny the social reality that has created the folk identity.

Thus the tradition of black experience achieved by Ellison's ritualization of Black folklore ultimately becomes white. The implication is not only white for its own sake but for the "larger" context of white American culture into which rituals integrate the folklore. Because the very idea of a change in the mind set, can change social reality. The support and the interests of white society implicitly are real and that deny any privilege to the Black. Ellison's adoption of Black folklore, however involuntarily, exchanges the self-definition of the folk for the definition of the masters.

The protagonist of *Invisible Man* moves through various levels of society, and in each one undergoes an experience representative of the illusion of the Black people and the machinery by which those illusions are produced. The destination of his journey from the South to the North, from illusion to reality, is understanding, the clarifying of the confusions. At the point that he achieves clarification he throws up the false identities and assumes his own reality as an invisible man. His reality does not rise out of what people – black or white – say he is or would have him to be, but from his own sensibilities and his link with his own people.

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CHAPTER - IV

MUSIC AND NARRATIVE: MUSIC IN *INVISIBLE MAN*

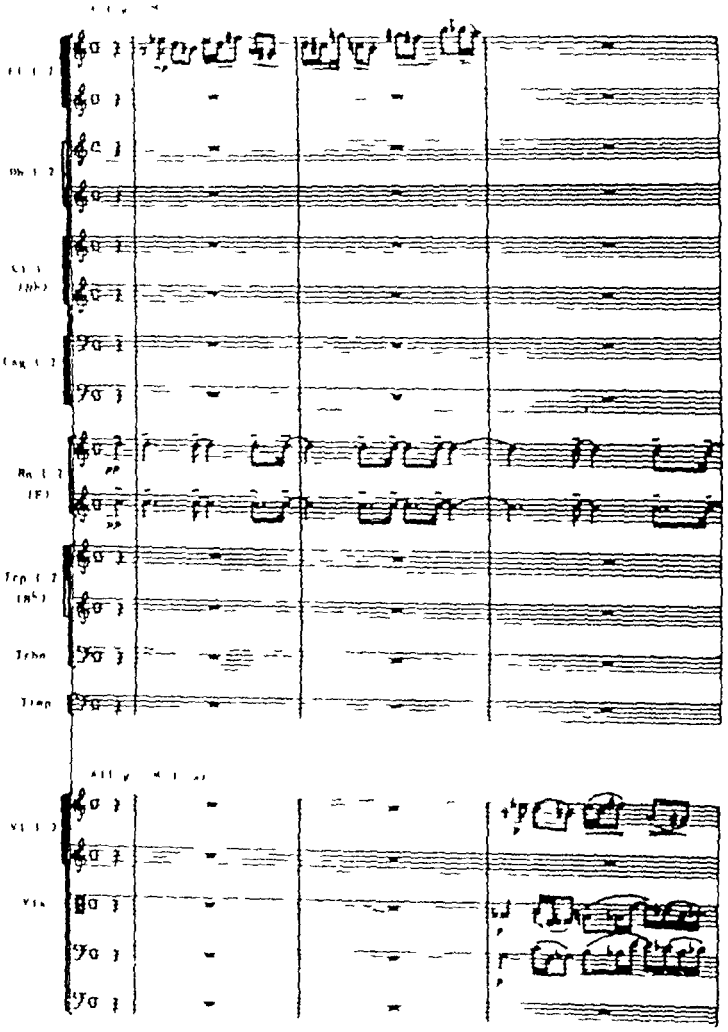
Music is in many ways central to the slave experience. Among Afro-Americans many types of musical expressions flowed down from the polyrhythmic subtleties of African drum language. Music and dancing continued to form an essential part of Afro-American life in the American plantations, where the slaves assimilated the religious songs and hymns of the white man. Afro-American folklore and music evolved within a larger culture and gradually bore its own identity. The evolving cultural identity through music and dance, while asserting the Negro's willingness to trust his own experience, his own sensibility, helped him define his own reality, rather than allowing his master to define for him the crucial matters of culture and identity.

Ellison's world view, his sense of the relationship of art to life, his merging of cultural history with music, criticism with propaganda, and art with civilization must be understood and recognized in order to view the true perspective of his work. One may rightly question the critical understanding and foundation of such views, for if we take Ellison's music as a criticism, it reveals that he accepted his duties as a critic seriously, injecting into his work all the knowledge and conviction that he had. But before any "artistic craving" could be satisfied, anything worthwhile could be created or appreciated, the existing social and cultural ills must be cured. Ellison here neither left behind his political, social and historical equipment, nor did he hesitate in pointing out their importance in the art world. If Ellison's *Invisible Man* speaks to many

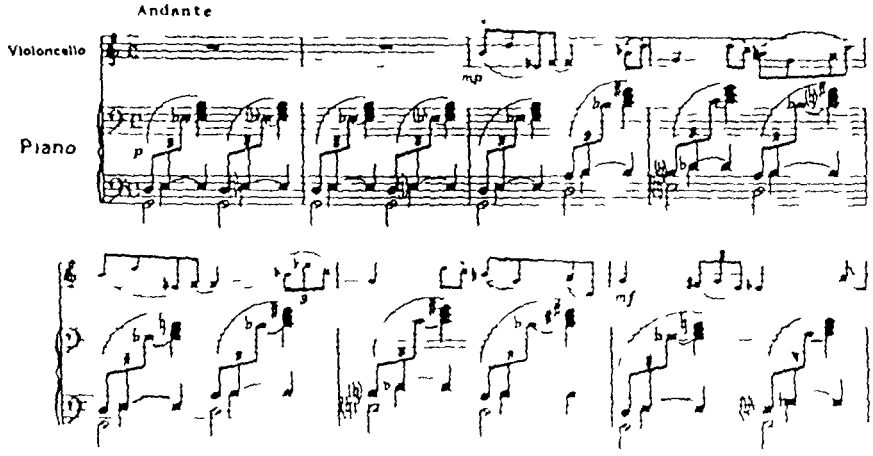
readers of colour, it is not only because the novel so eloquently records the feelings of rage and invisibility that are a consequence of living within a racist culture. It is also because this work gives voice to a particular intuition about music that it derives a specifically musical gratification. It is this musical quality which Ellison underscores in his novel.

There is a commercial in one of America's radio stations that boasts that it represents "the total Black experience in sound." Howard Swanson's *Short Symphony* (1948), which opened the programme, represents the black musical experience in its most sophisticated form. In it, the threads of "Negritude" have been so subtly woven into a fabric of beauty that it must be given the place of honour to be appreciated. In the opening movement, the blues are ever present even though they sometimes become seemingly lost in the contrapuntal gyrations.

Excerpts from "Short Symphony"[1] and "Suite for Cello and Piano"[2] taken from *The Black Experience in Sound* are appended in the following page.



Excerpt from Short Symphonies



Excerpt from Suite for Cello and Piano

The poets and musicians of Negritude were placed in a situation where they had to express their blackness in a language foreign to their cultural heritage. They not only mastered this language, but revitalized it by imposing on it their own special rhythmic and tonal characteristics. It is a triumph of their artistry.

Shortly before the premiere of his Symphony From the New World (Opus 95) in 1893, Antonin Dvorak stated: "In the Negro molodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music".[3] To this day, his work remains a shining example of how to use Negro folk material. Just as Eliot's *Four Quartets* is understood to be in the sonata-form, similarly specific implications of the difference between a social and a mythic view of folk experience, can well be understood by the consideration that is given to the significance of music in *Invisible Man*. "Quartets" suggest the quartets of instrumental music instead of constructing a work by developing several distinct themes both separately and in relation to each other. If we are to follow the analogy actually proposed by Eliot's title, we have to think of the fact that quartets in the sonata-form define the themes that are effected by using the distinctive characteristics of design, to allow the instruments to remain distinct from each other, while performing together. However, the implications the analogy holds in the composition of the poem are important. In the context of a poetical composition, we deal with words and their performance as "voices". Since we are dealing with the sense which words make in the mind, we might think of them as different

modes of thinking as well. They are "voices" and are also the modes in which the mind of the poet operates while working out the themes.

While the musical heritage of a black man is different from that of his white counterparts, how can he really make a difference in an ever changing society? Further, if the music of the black is so great, why does it crave for recognition and acceptance? The answer to these questions would be a blend of cultural history, social, political as well as economic meanings, which in musical terms is known as "fusion", a meaning of the self in relation to all the above aspects. "Fusion" actually denotes a fusing together of Oriental and Occidental musical instruments and musical features for the creation of an entirely new style of music, which is altogether different from the two component parts of its creation. In the context of *Invisible Man*, Ellison has attempted to fuse together a certain number of ideas relating to history, folk element, culture and social narrative into the fabric of the American culture and the American Dream ideas and visions, of a natural and successful future of peace, understanding and social consideration. But in order to understand the real meaning of this and the significant role that music plays in *Invisible Man*, we have to go back to the days when the Afro-type of music was just initiated into America, that is, to the days of popular jazz, blues, rag-time, bossa nova, and many other styles of music, until the emergence of their modern counterparts such as rap, raggae and hip-hop. The invisible man's search for an identity, and his struggle to reinvent it, is closely related to the struggles of these musical styles before they become part of the great American musical scene.

Black American music has its source in African music and developed over a period of time from the earliest to the present. Throughout slavery, the proofs of an African heritage was evident in the elements of early Afro-American music. As the slaves steadily produced successive generations of off springs, the influence of their African characteristics and those of Europe merged to create the modern era of Americanism. Consciously or subconsciously, Old Africa, the Mother Country of civilization, remain the most important source of originality for blacks, and eventually for many musical attempts in American nationalism. In order to further comprehend this African spirit within an artistic realm of Afro-American music, it is necessary to consider the African roots. For instance, one could recall the multi-tribal formation which enhanced the African social systems. This fact alone underlines that varieties of musical approaches existed in early slave music. The innumerable features of multi-tribal fusions define black music as a distinctive collection of sounds marked by diverse improvisations in performance with melismatic or ornamental melodies, exciting dance, complex rhythms, unique harmonies, scales, titles, forms and textures. The essence of African music represented the core of black music in America. In Africa, the soul of music evolved from an inseparable combination of the sister arts of music with drama and dance, and became expertly woven into the language and customs of the people. These elements are blended according to the event, appropriateness of the vernacular, age, sex, and status of the participants. Yet neither the instrument, form, peer group, text, dance, nor musical elements could be taken out of the context of the event for which the music was planned.

None of these elements or media could be mixed unless prescribed by tradition.

African instruments, costumes, accessories and dramatic responses were dictated by the correlation of the composite arts of music, drama and dance and one would be meaningless in the absence of the other. Seen in various activities, the correlation weighed heavily on the importance of speech and life itself. For example, a dramatic play or story could include the spontaneous interpolation of music and dance and could be based on actual experiences such as hunting or harvesting. A master drummer could begin a pattern based on word derivatives, inspiring dancers to sing and act out words in a real life-like situation, expressing a particular emotion. A funeral would require appropriate costuming, instruments and references to the deceased's history, specific peer characters, resulting appropriate prayers and dances, while demonstrating necessary elements towards cohesion. Thus African music generally involved a close relationship between performers and the community. For example, the funeral mentioned could begin with dirges and prayers from the family members, and gradually include members of the total community or village. Singers were answered by a communal response, a technique referred to as "call and response" which was later reflected in religious sermons, jaz and other forms of the Afro-American musical representation.

The oral tradition was greatly responsible for the continuance of the samples of African heritage, which miraculously survived the centuries. Because of the illiteracy of most blacks (at least in the English

language) and because of the diversity of African languages, a process of rote teaching was instrumental in sustaining the legends and music of old Africa. Although many Africans had composed their own symbols to represent language sounds, the oral tradition was still by far the most common practice in Africa for decades, and remain the most effective method of reaching the thousands of slaves in America.

The oral tradition must have been instrumental in the most exciting aspects of African and Afro-American performance that has allowed improvizations and variations. When passed orally, music was subject to change in its transportation and reception. The ornamentation of melodic tones, song forms, and accompanying body movements involved spontaneous change from singer to singer, verse to verse, and from locale to locale. Speaking of African music, A. M. Jones underlines the significance of improvization as found in Ware, Allen and Garrison in their transcriptions of *Slave Songs*. This practice of variation marked almost each performance and was often suggested at the will of the master drummer or the lead singer. It must be understood that, in African music, this freedom to vary the structure depended upon the basic underlying form and that only specific points within the pieces were used for addition or alterations. Melodic alteration, however, is more liberal, as is seen in Black American music. The most important factor of African music always seems to have been the text. African languages themselves are musical in the spoken form and demand that pitches be relatively perfect for correct communication. One notes a similarity between this and the "sing-song" speech of Southern Blacks. Even drum

idioms follow high and low imitations of speech intonations when they are performed on female and male instruments whose small and large sizes denoted levels of pitch sounds. Therefore, the "talking-drums" were capable of sending out vital messages which were clearly understood by the population. So important are the words that they served as the basis around which are formulated the remaining musical elements of melody, harmony, rhythm, form and timbre. According to J. K. Nketia, Professor at the University of Ghana, the words could be realized by modern musical transcriptions as in Example I, and could suggest to a composer the actual elements of music.

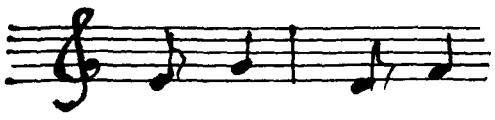
Ex. I. A representation of textual influence in African music.[4]

Text : "wo ho te sen?" (How do you do?)

Tone levels : low high, low high

Rhythm : short long, short long

Melody :



Because of its impact upon the total American population, rhythm of movement is considered the most basic characteristic of African music, and essentiality, makes it unique from any other parts. Much like the principle used in liturgical chants of Western music, rhythm was dictated by the flow of words and generally reflected African life-styles. From the city markets to the countryside rhythm has imitated the movements of the various lingual and human activities, whether fast or slow. When transcribed into Western terminology, traditional African

compositions showed life's constancy and tribal diversities through both complex and simple rhythms of time, space, energy and change.

Although double and triple rhythms could be detected, actual beats within transcribed measures were not restricted to strong or weak beats, as in Western music, but rather to word emphasis. They are not measured always in even numbers of four, eight or sixteen. While not composed in the same symmetry or design, this employs a freedom of "over the bar phrases" as felt in the music of J. S. Bach, or even a feeling of non-measure. Thus the odd numbers of measures are balanced by more correct representation with emphasis on speech. The resulting designs of three, five or seven measures, while common to contemporary music, were nevertheless strange to the ears of the early Euro-Americans.

Melody is suggested by the rise and fall of vocal inflections. When polylinear tones (many melodies) are combined in African music, the resulting combination become harmony. Melody and harmony are both planned by tribal practices, which varied from a mixture of Asian and African elements in the Eastern region to strict African ornamentations in the West. Quite frequently African harmony appeared to grow melodically either as overlapping melodies, or as melodic calls with harmonic answers. The latter technique was simulated in early Afro-American spirituals and hollers, etc.

An important feature of African melody was its constant change and variation or ornamentation. Similar to Western characteristics of religious chants from the middle ages, vowels are extended over several

different notes, complete with pitch waverings resembling thrills or vibrato. The vowels involved quarter tones, which are somewhat smaller than half-steps, and like the Asian scale which is constructed on the Sitar. Other ornaments, common to African melodies are the glissando, slides and grace notes. Not only were the milismatic melodies under constant ornamentation, but modern transcriptions of these show variations in actual repeats of verses or refrains. Even though some African elements were also common to periods of Western music, the total performance indicated a difference between European music and early Afro-American music. This was particularly true of both the ornamental variation in black performances, the characteristic accompaniments and the overall manner of presentation.

The form or structure of African compositions represented the end product of improvised or planned music. Its shape contains an overview of harmony, melody and rhythm. Form was also dependent upon the text around which it was constructed. By its title, form implied the medium of performance, such as the instrumentation, sex and appropriate age group. In general, these forms are represented at incidental, occasional or recreational events. Into the first group went songs for work, games, story telling and the like. Occasional music were composed for the royal houses, for festivals, special groups and ceremonies. Recreational music implied music used in groups for both young and old and centered around events.

The practice of singing religious songs in secular folk tunes is more closely linked with the early history of American music than is

usually realized. As early as the 1730s, folk-hymn appears to have flourished, prospering under the impetus of the "Great Awakening", when Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and other inflammatory preachers seared the religious conscience of New England. It is highly probable that folk-harmony was an omnipresent phenomenon during the second half of the 18th century although it is difficult to cite concrete written evidence to that effect. Despite their popularity and widespread diffusion among the populace as a whole during the 18th century, folk-hymns do not seem to have achieved the permanence of print much before the beginning of the 19th century. It was not until after the second great wave of religious revivals swept the country around 1800 that the history of folk-hymn in print actually began. The transit of folk-hymnody from the North to the South seems to have taken place during the second decade of the 19th century, roughly coinciding with the retreat of the quasi-folk composed American music of the singing schools from urban to rural surroundings. During the crucial decade, these two related types of music joined hands, in that the Yankee fuging-tune and psalm-tune are found side by side with the folk hymn. In this form, they become a prominent feature of Southern musico-religious life throughout the 19th century. Even today, the tradition is not yet extinct, although it must be said that it appears to be moribund.

A new kind of dance music – a syncopated, semi-improvised hybrid of ragrime, brass-band music, popular song, and the blues – began to be heard in New Orleans and other American cities during the early part of the 20th century. It had coalesced into an identifiable style by

1910, and came to be called "jazz", a term whose etymology is an elusive as the origins of the music itself. In 1917, the original Diexieland Jazz Band made the first recordings of jazz. Just 21 years later, the jazz clarinetist Benny Goodman and his orchestra performed at Carnegie Hall, then, as now the best known concert hall in America. Even those who believed jazz to be a vulgar fare fit only for the masses suspected that it was here to stay. It evolved long ago into an art music, studied in colleges and universities and heard as often in concert halls as in night clubs. One critic has gone so far as to dub it "America's classical music". However, it remains essentially a *popular* music, in keeping with its humble utilitarian origins as an accompaniment to social dancing.

In 1934, H. L. Menken dismissed jazz as "undifferentiated musical protoplasm, dying of its own affluvia .... Its melodies all run to a pattern, and that pattern is crude and childish.[5] Similar statements were made by many American cultural commentators in the 1920s and 1930s, even those who admired jazz tended to see it less as an art form than as a symptom of reaction against the "genteel tradition". But today, the emergence of jazz is highly ranked among the most significant musical events of the 20th century. The speed with which jazz evolved into an art form comparable to American classical music was an evolution that inevitably outpaced the best efforts of critics and scholars.

Jazz has always been stylistically diverse. At any given moment it still has tended to be dominated by single prevailing style-Dixieland, big-band seeing, small-group bebop – as well as such styles by giants like Armstrong, Parker and Davis. Moreover, all varieties of jazz prior to

1960 shared a common musical vocabulary that succeeded over time in assimilating such seemingly incompatible idioms as bebop and bossa nova, thus making it possible for Stan Getz to record with Chick Corea, or Benny Goodman with Wardell Gray and Fats Navarro. But the rise of free jazz and abstract modal improvisation led to a rupture in the ongoing jazz tradition, and soon entered into what critic Mac Harrison would describe in 1980 as "a postmodernist phase: all styles, the music of all periods, are, it seems, valid ... jazz no longer has a lingua franca."[6] In practice, older mainstream players stopped trying to assimilate post-Coltrane developments, while avant-gardist showed little interest in earlier kinds of jazz, for listeners began to turn about in large numbers, preferring newer, less demanding styles of popular music. Whatever the future brings, the invention, efflorescence, and maturing of jazz remain one of the most remarkable cultural phenomena of the century just past. Thanks to the timely invention of the phonograph, the music of Armstrong, Ellington, Parker, Coltrand and their contemporaries, has been preserved for all time. America already has a classical music of its own – the music of such composers as Samuel Barber, Aaron Copland and Charles Ives – and to praise jazz at the expense of these composers' achievements is tendentious at best, invidious at worst. Beyond this, it seems jazz necessarily has come up short. The Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm, who has surprisingly enough written penetratingly about jazz, discussed this problem in his book, *The Jazz Scene* (1959):

> Jazz is little music and not big music, in the same sense as lyrics are little poetry and epics big poetry .... Limitation of scope and relative smallness of scale do not make an art less

> good or true or beautiful. They do, however, put certain artistic achievements out of its reach .... If we ask: has Jazz produced anything like the Beethovan Ninth, or the Bach B-Minor Mass, or *Don Giovanni*, the answer must be flat no.[7]

But it is no less evident that within its admittedly narrow compass, jazz at its best is one of the most expressive forms of music that Western culture is yet produced. And while comparisons with classical music must be made with extreme caution, surely it is safe to say that such recordings as "West End Blues", "KO-KO", or "Parker's Mood" embody the profoundest of human emotions no less truly than a Schubert song or a Chopin nocturne.

Cabaret music originated in the black community as a special style of popular music, like jazz in the early 20th century. The entertainers often were chic, elegant personalities who offered jazz story telling of a quality that held listeners spell bound, but their numbers also included the nameless, down home singers whose blues and folk ballads helped alleviate the loneliness of the black migrants who moved into the inner cities after World War II. The memory of the early Afro-American cabaret scene in New York City has been perpetuated in water colours by the American painter Charles Demuth. Dating from 1915-17, the paintings show patrons sitting at small tables in Harlem's basement club rooms of Marshall's Hotel or Barren Wilken's Café, entertained by a three piece "jazz" ensemble composed of piano, banjo and drums. One of the pictures, "Negro Girl Dancer" (1915), depicts a woman dancing to the music with a brooding expression on her face. Another, "Negro Jazz

Band" (1916), shows a woman singing the ballad "Bill Baily" with great passion. The artists drew upon a standard repertory of cabaret ballads, theater songs and other tunes. Cole Porter, the Gershwins, and Noel Coward were favourite song writers though each singer has a special flair in delivery. The early club vocalists were as much proud of their piano artistry as in the virtuosity of their vocal gifts.

Although the great revival of the 1980s swept along all styles of black music in its wake, both recent and not so recent. Black musicians gave their primary attention to the "old fashioned" music of the 1960s and '70s.

Since the heyday of the "country blues" in the late 1920s and '30s, there have been two blues revivals in the 1960s and 1980s. The bluesmen, legendary guitarist Robert Johnson (1912-1938) and bassist Willie Dixon (1915-1922), sparked the later revivals. Johnson's popularity emerged when his recordings including *Hell Hound on My Trial* and *I Believe I'll Dust My Broom*, were "discovered" by enthusiastic fans and then by the music industry, which retrieved them from archives and reissued them as CDs. Dixon has been called the Architect of the Chicago Sound. As arranger and song writer for the major Chicago blues of his time, he infused the old down home blues they were singing with elements of pop, jazz, spirituals, and gospel songs producing a new sound that found new urban audiences. For established blues singers such as Buddy Guy, John Lee Hooker, and B. B. King, the revival has meant more engagements in the clubs and at festivals, and more lucrative record contracts. For the new comers, such as Kenny

Neal, Walter "Wolfman" Washington, and Artie Moore, the popularity of the blues has meant survival in a demanding profession.

Like jazz singers, many singers of popular music experienced slow periods during the 1970s. But most of them made successful come back in the eighties. As in jazz, the older singers met with ever increasing competition from younger ones – Paula Abdul, Anita Baker, Toni Braxton, Mariah Carey, Natalie Cole, Whitney Houston and Janet Jackson and others. Nevertheless most of the older singers held their own. Aretha Franklin could announce confidently on her recording *Through the Storm* (1989) "I'm the Queen of Soul", and no one could contradict her. Tina Turner, another artist, who made a come back in the eighties – as a soloist – demonstrated her importance as soul singer on such recordings as *What's Love Got to Do with It* and *Private Dancer*.

Michael Jackson maintained his fame in the entertainment World as the greatest Entertainer of All Time. Not only that his records register the phenomenal sales and his audience grew, but also he succeeded in a new form of television performance, the music videos, through the 1980s and into the 1990s. Jackson made important innovations, such as a new dance-music style in *Thriller* (1982) that blends rock, disco and bop. He returned with another new dance style in *Dangerous* (1992), which uses New Jack Swing, a style developed by composer-producer Teddy Riley that blends rap with rhythm 'n' blues.

The new pop music of this period reflects the influence of several genres and styles that have effected significant changes in the sound of

music. This new music was the direct heir of R & B, Soul and Funk, but its sound was altered and enriched by the use of advanced synthesizer technology and the absorption of unconventional musical and literary elements. A Bronx New York disc jockey, Afrika Bambaataa is credited with being one of the pivotal forces in the development of the music that early pecked up the label of "rap". Bambaataa, an ex-gang member and self-taught student of black culture as well as the philosophy of Malcolm and other black nationalist leaders, came to believe that the arts could be used to combat the rampant street violence of the youth gangs in his community. In 1973, he founded the Youth Organization at Adlai Stevenson High School (later renamed the Zulu Nation), which brought together large numbers of teenagers and young adults who shared his interest in the street arts. The artistic expression of youngsters in Bambaataa's groups prepared the way for the inner-city youth art movement of the 1970s, whose activities included break dancing, disc jockeying, rapping, and graffitti drawing. Bambaataa pointed out, "I had them to battle against each other in a non-violent way, like rapper against rapper rather than knife against knife." He may well have been the first person to apply the term "hip-hop" to the South Bronx street culture he helped bring about. He had heard a rapper at Bronx party chanting: "hip-hop, you don't stop/that makes your body rock" and starts using the term himself, "Then it caught on."[8]

In 1975, the Young Jamaican Clive Campbell began his disc-jockeying career in the South Bronx area of New York City under the name Kool D. J. Herc. He introduced some of the practices that

contributed to the development of rap as a bonafide music genre. K. Maurice Jones in his book, *The Story of Rap Music*, and under the chapter entitled "Rap Music and Its African Nexus", said:

> (Herc) would pick the most recognizable part of a hit or a soul classic and play it over and over again, integrating pieces of other songs with rhyming over them.... (He) became notorious for incorporating the most obscure records into his mixes. Anything was fair game for inclusion in a mix: a James Brown Scream, a Wilson Pickett grunt, a funky bass line, a guitar riff, and even tit bits of jingles and theme songs from popular TV shows and movies. Soon party goers were showing up at halls and clubs just to check out what the deejays were "dropping" on the music and the turntable.[9]

It soon became obvious that this dance music call for two kinds of skills: the deejay would have to concentrate on mixing the music and spinning the records, while the MC (Master of Ceremonies) or emcee, usually a young man, gave his attention to improvizing rhymes over the music or "rapping".

By 1990, rap had become far more musically complex than it had been in its early days, and it continued to evolve. One music critic observed:

> Layer after layer of sounds are placed on top of each other until the music becomes nearly tactile, with whisperings and murmurings placed carefully in the background while choruses sampled from other records act as riffs, and guitar noises repeated over and over again like an unattended machine gone berserk. It's the sound of urban alienation, where silence doesn't exist and sensory stimulation is

> oppressive and predatory. But Public Enemy had conquered it .... Through the mess comes the redemptive beat; the group makes some of the best dance records around. And in the midst of the sonic jungle, there's order. As if trying to complete a history of sound, the tracks have elements lifted from Public Enemy's own earlier songs, reminding listeners that the group itself is not only part of a tradition but has a history of its own.[10]

There is a long standing tradition in the black community of using language creatively in everyday life. "Pattin' juba", for example, which dated from the early 19th century, was often a two-person operation, the patter provided dance music and a second person accompanied him, or her, reciting verses that were made up on the spur of the moment. Then there is the modern ritual called "playing the dozen", which sets two males at each other's throats in exchanging clever insults via verses they improvise as the game proceeds. Influences from abroad on the development of rap include the "toasting" rites, a blend of rap and raggea, which were brought to the United States by Jamaican disc jockeys, and the practices of some rhythm 'n' blues singers of reciting lyrics while backed up only by a rhythm track which is in vogue. James Bernard, in an article titled, "A Newcomer Abroad, Rap speaks up", in the *New York Times*, dated August 23, 1992, described rap as something more than just dance music:

> Rap's emphasis on rhythm rather than melody makes it easy to export.... It is catchy, visceral, cancelable. Where pop songs offer solace from an increasingly perplexing world, rap engages it. Its beats are up front and impolite, not content to be mere background music. Rap embraces choas as art: complex drumbeats stagger and stutter, punctuated by

> dissonant samples using everything from James Brown to obscure jazz to television commercials, the mix held together by a steady stream of intricate word play.[11]

As the black music world moved into the 21st century rap seemed likely to have made its own ground. It has become popular around the world, especially as protest music. As more than one critic has observed, rap processes essential components that appeal across gender lines to all ages and ethnic groups.

To summarize the last quarter of the 20th century, we may note that black musicians and all genres pay homage to the past even as they were forging new paths into a future of experimentation. In 1989, for instance, Quincy Jones erected an appropriate milestone for the history of Afro-American music. Producer, song writer, and arranger of such albums as Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (the best selling album of all time) and his own *We Are The World*, Jones took his listeners back to the old inner city neighbourhood with his album *Back On The Block*. Described as a "lavish collage" of black music styles, the album purports to tell the history of the music over a period of the last four decades. Jones drew upon almost every known black music style and genre, from a Zulu chant to the big band. Several of the album cuts begin with rap introductions that segue into jazz or other musics. There are speakers as well as musicians, including the Reverend Jesse Jackson. To perform the music, Jones called upon many pre-eminent artists of the time, among them, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Ray Charles, and Bobby McFerrin. The performance groups include the Andrea

Church Singers (Gospel), Take 6 (the harmonizing quartet), and rappers Big Daddy Kane, Melle Mel, Kool Moe Dee, and Ice – T.

Does this music *deserve* to be preserved? In other words, is the black music of permanent interest, like the music of Mozart and Stravinsky? Or in relation to *Invisible Man*, does the protagonist's confrontation with blues or jazz-street traditions manage the same balance in portraying the search for an identity through culture or through what can certainly be called his own music? The questions are begged by the increasing tendency of journalists and musicians to refer to jazz as "America's classical music", a phrase coined by the critic Grover Sales. The words are not without meaning – they properly emphasise the fact that jazz unlike classical music, is indigenous to America, developed exclusively by the Blacks. Through music they were able to come to terms with themselves after having gone through trying times and untold suffering. Different levels of development of this tradition through the fluid movement of interaction between theirs and other traditions, and the originality with which they portray their traditional heritage, Black music traditions continue to be fresh, vivid and lasting.

Several critics noted that Ellison's interest and training in music have left an indelible mark on his novel *Invisible Man*. This novel depicts a set of cultural circumstances where the subversive appropriation of technology signifies an act of sabotage of social norms and conventions. Technological systems in this novel often signals the more subtle workings of social systems of domination and power. Significantly, the novel's final line implies that the protagonist's voice exists not as words

written on paper, but rather on air waves, a "disembodied voice" broadcast from some underground source: "who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for your?"[12] This statement at the literal level serves as a signpost that contextualizes the novel within the electronic revolution of the 1950s, when electronic media helped carry a stronger black presence into once insular white households. At least one commentator has suggested that the conclusion of *Invisible Man* points toward a sense of "degeneration", where Ellison's protagonist "is left with his 1,369 light bulbs, but they are no substitute for the reality, and he knows it".[13] With his final line, Ellison radically imagines black subjectivity maintaining an underground presence along the same currents previously used to render such subjectivity invisible. This "act of sabotage", as the *Invisible Man* calls it, parallels other forms of sabotage that occur throughout the novel, not the least of which occurs on the level of musical language.

In the 1981 introduction to *Invisible Man*, Ellison discusses how his novel draws upon seemingly conflicting elements, namely the tradition of novel-writing, and the tradition of "telling a 'lie'", as part of the Afro-American communities' ability in improvising telling of stories. Beyond this symbolic function, however, the presence and play of electronic related features indicate Ellison's awareness of the ever increasing role these features would continue to play in determining the accessibility and possible shapes of reality. Historically speaking, in fact, electronic medium had enabled the undermining of rigid social barriers, just as verbal play can undermine rigid linguistic structures. In his

influential 1960s study, *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan announces a bold change in consciousness made inevitable by the "extended nervous system" of an electrified world. He notes that this electrification acts as an:

> Implosive factor that alters the position of the Negro, the teenager, and some other groups. They can no longer be contained, in the political sense of limited association. They are now involved in our lives, as we in theirs, thanks to the electric media.[14]

Dealing figuratively with these energies in their newest form – the substance of their medium, pure electric energy – Ellison's novel bears upon the imprint of McLuhan's "extended nervous system" well before *Understanding Media's* public action. That Ellison has frequently hinted at the cultural implications of electricity and the forms of media it propagates – without however, McLuhan's unproblematic sense of de-containment. Elsewhere in *Invisible Man*, Ellison reinforces the notion that electric forms of media help perpetuate white forms of power, most notably when Dr. Bledsoe talks about radio as one of the many instruments through which white America constructs its idea of "truth": "These white folks have newspapers, magazines, radios, spokesmen to get their ideas across. If they want to tell the world a lie, they can tell it so well that it becomes the truth".[15] Passages like this indicate a consensus view of reality built upon white codes of reality, an effect that Ellison reinforces through the demanding power of electric shocks to maintain submission and create invisibility. It becomes possible then to read *Invisible Man* as a subversive revision of the popular conception of

"American ingenuity", at least as one critic has pointed out in noting the novel's similarities to Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*. Yet Ellison's means of incorporating music as a signifier involved in construction of rece points towards another possible predecessor, George Schuyler's *Black No More*, a satirical 1931 novel. Much of Schuyler's purpose in this novel, in fact, involves dismissing the legitimacy of unique black culture, including the blues, which eventually becomes dear to Ellison's protagonist. At one point, Schuyler lampoons scholarship that intends "to prove conclusively that the plantation shouts of Southern Negro peons were superior to any of Beethoven's symphonies".[16] At another point, Schuyler discusses radio music lamenting the disappearance of "Vanishing Mammy" which comes over the air waves "with the weird medley and clash of sound that had passed for music since the days of the Panama Pacific Exposition".[17]

As W. T. Lhamon Jr. has explained, the invention of the transistor "started the necessary process of miniaturization that allowed hoisting computers into outer space", even as it allowed "ethnic voices into America's most private inner spaces".[18] In other words, the resulting technologies – produced on a massive scale – did more than provide new ways of assessing discourse. They radically altered the content of this discourse in a way that resonates with the Invisible Man's manner of speaking on the "lower frequencies", by implication lending form to the very narrative we read. A technological correlation to the grandfather's cryptic advice emerges, where living "with your head in the lion's mouth" corresponds to a changing social climate. Lhamon helps us see

how new consumer electronics led to a greater black presence on the air waves, resulting in the dissemination of its codes into everyday language. Television, Lhamon notes, began to usurp programs once popular on radio, such as game shows, while radio responded to turning to "the previously denigrated content of black music, in the form of rhythm 'n' blues and rock 'n' roll, and to imitating older, black voice artists".[19]

Even as Ellison depicts music as a means of reinforcing white versions of reality or "truth", he also recognizes the conflicting and often contradictory cultural implications it brings, drawing upon the changes that Lhamon noted. This changing reality becomes apparent in *Invisible Man* when the protagonist enters the subway station following the death of Tod Clifton. Standing among the flashing blue sparks of the trains, he reflects upon the "transitory ones", those:

> Birds of passage who 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 centres of historical decisions to sign or even to applaud the signers of historical documents.[20]

The protagonist continues to ponder as he sees three men in zoot suits come onto the platform and compelled him to follow them. He eventually becomes a part of a crowd of people whose similar style of dress mark their place "outside the groove of history". He becomes aware of "the growing sound of a record shop, loudspeaker blaring a languid blues".[21]

This passage opens itself to different connotations of "groove", including the grooves found on the LP record, which, incidentally,

initially was produced in the same year of the invention of the transistor. Here, Ellison points toward the blues as an alternative medium for recording history. "Was this all that would be recorded?" The passage continues: "Was this the only true history of the times, a mood blared by trumpets, trombones, saxophones and drums, a song with turgid, inadequate words?"[22] For using on the broader themes of history and the undocumented lives of invisible citizens, Ellison's loudspeaker stands out in this section as an indication of circulation of cultural energy in the process of transformation and adaptation – not only for the content of the sounds but for the medium itself. A similar effect occurs during the Rhinehart episode, when the protagonist comes across the glowing sign of the Holy Way Station. Inside he encounters a "new kind of guitar music" introduced by "Rever'n Rhinehart". The Invisible Man looked into a room where a "slender woman in a rusty black robe played passionate bougie-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 gleaning white and gold pulpit".[23] The significance of this experience lies in Ellison's choice of imagery, the guitar riffs are suggestive of a way of processing music into expressive channels beyond the closed circuits of white power bases. This instance embodies a process of transformation as vital as that which Rhinehart performs with his own identity.

The rhythm and blues forms that Ellison incorporates are placed at the crucial idea of cross roads, a feature of *Invisible Man* that Thomas F. Marvin has most recently noted. Marvin explains that in blues as well as

in jazz, musicians act as "followers of Legba" through their position "at the cross roads where cultures meet connecting their listeners with the spirits of the ancestors and the lessons of history".[24] Ellison depicts further possibilities of cultural intersection through his loudspeakers and electric guitars, forms of technology that not only carry the blues and jazz forms of which Marvin speaks, but in themselves hint at music's capacity to transcend cultural boundaries. The idea of cross roads in Ellison's novel exists along side the politically subversive possibilities of crossing currents. We see this idea most vividly in instances where Ellison's characters accept the currents of power normally and used to shock and control black citizens into the new ways of disseminating black codes of expression. By playing with the idea of a narrative voice spoken on the "lower frequencies", Ellison creates a self-reflexive example in the form of the novel itself. In effect, Ellison stresses the need to do more than simply master the social, political and technological apparatus of white America. For doing so entails the risk of replicating old systems of subjugation. He therefore points toward the necessity of cagey performance, subverting established forms of power from within. Brockway inadvertently teaches this tactic to the Invisible Man when, perceiving the youth as a threat, he tricks him into exploding the factory, "like a small boy who has thrown a brick into the air".[25] The narrator's suspicion that Brockway's basement "was not just an engine room" becomes relevant in this context: "No, he was making something down there, something that had to do with paint, and probably something too filthy and dangerous for white men to be willing to do even for money".[26] This vague intimation of something being created points toward the

novel's underlying processes of creating new subject positions from which one may disrupt established forms of power or, in electrical terms, of covertly adding new links to the network, the kind that the Invisible Man engineers in literal terms by illegally wiring his own basement with 1,369 light bulbs. Blues and jazz in the novel create forms of extension, not only in the literal level but in ways which demands that we see these as forms of networks in themselves.

In *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*, Houston A. Baker Jr. visualises a "blues matrix", which functions as a discursive space "where endless antinomies are mediated and understanding and explanation find conditions of possibility". Baker's notion of a "blues matrix" suggests a form of network, existing along side the technological networks of electricity that reinforce racists ideologies in *Invisible Man*. Significantly, Baker draws a parallel between the blues and electricity in the opening of this influential study. In referring to Hegel's work, Baker argues that "the blues, employed as an image for the investigation of culture, represents a *force* not unlike electricity".[27] Although Baker refers specifically to discursive movement, his paradigm invites consideration for the literal forms where "input and output" interacting with less tangible forms, create the dynamic that Ellison's novel incorporates.

One of the most compelling and perhaps least obvious examples of this dynamic occurs during the much analysed Trueblood episode. When Trueblood recounts his turbulent story of incest to Mr. Norton, he does so with the nearby power station in the background, creating noise and power that cannot be called music, and that fails to reach his home.

Indeed, Trueblood's story is rooted in the miserable physical conditions of his home, pointing out to Mr. Norton that "it was cold and us didn't have much fire.... It was so cold all of us had to sleep together: me, the old lady and the gal. That's how it all started, suh".[28] Without access to these literal networks of electricity, Trueblood extends them figuratively through another source of input and output: the blues, which grants a degree of power by emphasizing powerlessness. For Baker, this effect "enables (Ellison) to extend the value of Afro-American folk forms by combining them with an array of Western narrative forms and tropes".[29] Such combinations proliferated rapidly thanks to the electronic developments of Ellison's period. Further, Ellison also experiments with the idea of the blues as a from of network, capable of creating its own nodes and connections. Performing the kind of reversal essential to a trickster's performance, Trueblood deals with his home's lack of energy by having his blues plug in figuratively, creating striking images of music and machines. A figure often associated with the image of the cross roads, Trueblood uses the blues to depict the distance between himself and electricity as embodied by the power station; yet beneath this depiction of distance lies a strategy for subjecting this embodiment of power to a process of signification, allowing him to invert his relationship to the signs of musical power in his narrative. In effect, Trueblood verbally infiltrates the networks of power at work around him, thereby forging new possibilities of connection between superficially dissimilar kinds of networks. As a corrective to the violence of the electric light, the blues visits upon him under the night sky as an accessible system that give him the means to generate his images: "I

didn't think 'bout it, just start singin'. I don't know what it was, some kind a church song, I guess. All I know is I *ends up* singin' the blues".[30] Trueblood's visitation becomes suggestive of a form of energy that allows his story to generate a form without his conscious effort. Ellison echoes this notion, when he describes *Invisible Man* as a "self-generating novel", one that allows him to integrate the "rich culture of the folk-tale" with "that of the novel". Like Trueblood, Ellison connects with the "down here", a phrase that contains a resonance of meaning beyond the sense of physical space. Rather, it indicates a shared cultural place, a blues-related practice "so shared in one's culture as to have long ago become second nature to the users".[31]

In discussing the influences on *Invisible Man,* Ellison identifies Harlem as the primary scene of the novel's composition, placing it where it could easily incorporate "the voices, idioms, folklore, traditions and political concerns of those whose racial and cultural origins (Ellison) share(s)".[32] Thus Ellison does more than disrupt the hegemony of white electrical inventors. He also invites an understanding of the novel as a feat of engineering in itself, part of an electronic revolution through which Afro-American codes of expression and consciousness penetrated the seemingly insular lives of white Americans. Thus Ellison's protagonist goes beyond just being a singer in lending his voice to forms of intersections, cross roads and cross currents. In his last line, the Invisible Man intimates that his voice can speak for us, and by playing on the "lower frequencies", he becomes a form of networked consciousness, one that substitutes the openness for the closed circuitry of monopolised

power. Ultimately, as no network remains impenetrable, the novel suggests that there are networks that are designed to maintain the invisibility of an entire population.

Bernard Shaw once mocked at the pedantry of music critics, who "parsed" their subject as comparable literary pedants, parse Shakespeare's "To Be or Not to be"? Ellison's *Invisible Man* has at least an overriding motive driving it, that is in recognizing the central contribution made by Black American musicians to the history of music itself. The contributions of White American musicians must not be slighted. His efforts are made in the conviction that music may not be so much a Black American experience as an *American* experience, with various racial and ethnic groups playing indispensable and interlocking roles. A good indication of how important music is as an element of the "Newness" is the fact that the subject is directly related to identity. Through music many black musical artists were able to create a name for themselves, forging a reality through the American Dream idea of striving forward to success. The black colour may have been a big draw-back, but it is the black colour again that helped put these artists at the forefront of the musical world. Because of their musical heritage, the Afro-Americans were able to come up with something that will remain for a long time, not only in America, but in the whole world. Thus the protagonist of *Invisible Man* was able to rediscover his identity and by doing so, was able to come to terms with everything around him.

The Invisible Man's rediscovered identity helps him relate to his surrounding while accepting the reality around him, remembering the past for reassurance, and finally, understanding his own true being.

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CHAPTER - V

REINVENTING IDENTITY

Toni Morrison in her work, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992) asks:

> What happens to the whitely imagination of a black author who is at some level *always* conscious of representing one's own race to, or in spite of, a race of readers that understands itself to be "universal" or race-free? In other words, how is "literary whiteness" and "literary blackness" made, and what is the consequences of that construction? How do embedded assumptions of racial (non-racist) language work in the literary enterprise that hopes and sometimes claims to be "humanistic"? when in a race conscious culture, is that lofty goal appropriated? When not, and why? Living in a nation of people who *decided* that their world view combine agendas for individual freedom *and* mechanisms for devastating racial oppression presents a singular landscape for a writer. When this world view is taken seriously as agency, the literature produced within and without it offers an unprecedented opportunity to comprehend the resilience and gravity, the inadequacy and the force to the imaginative act.[1]

In view of Morrison's observation, it is understood that a black writer is always conscious of his/her racial identity. This understanding of identity is placed at the trajectory of "individual freedom" and "the mechanism of oppression". The self-consciousness of the writer thus determines his imagination as well as explains his understanding of identity.

Identity is a dynamic concept. The so-called Afro-American identity is embedded primarily in the black experience. In defining blackness, Henry Louis Gates Jr.,[2] a theorist of black literature underpins

its signifying systems that reside in the black tradition. The language of a black text expresses the distinctive quality of this tradition. It is not only writing, but language, like culture and other factors that contribute to constructing identity. According to him, the most important function of black texts, has been testified in its ability to contain black experience. Gates has a very different approach in which, rather than applying theory to black texts, there is a form of dialectical play between figural, rhetorical criticism and the black figural tradition he calls signifyin(g). The kernel of Gates theory in its most influential form is expressed in his essay "The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey". It refers both to the Afro-American tradition, with its roots in African folk myths, and contemporary critical theory which has its roots in the linguistic theory of Saussure. Signifyin(g) is a form of critical parody, it has been a part of black vernacular and refers to the verbal skill of parody in reversing and revising another's language. The figures of the signifyin(g) Monkey can be found in folktales from Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas. It is a creature which is a "mediator" and these "mediations" are tricks of language in which a story is first heard, then twisted and related to a third party, repeated but with trouble-making differences. Gates suggests that a type of signigyin(g) is characteristic of Afro-American literature. Gates shows how Ralph Ellison's modernist *Invisible Man* 'signifies' on the title of the two earlier, more naturalistic works by Richard Wright: *Black Boy* (1945) and *Native Son* (1940). Wright's titles suggest a powerful racial identity. Ellison's title is however ironic and an anxious response to signifying the problematical nature of race and identity.

In the articulations of Morrison and Gates Jr., it is evident that Black identity in America is not simply a racial difference, but also a linguistic difference. Further, identity is not a stamped document, it is constructed variously taking into account psycho-social and economic factors. However, in considering black identity one has to take into account black experience and tradition. Stuart Hall[3] attempts to theorize identity as being formed at the unstable point where the "unspeakable" stories of 'subjectivity' meets the narratives of history, of a culture. As Gilroy[4] maintains 'Black repressive cultures affirm as they protest,' and protest here could not just include opposition to rejection of the West's universalizing assumptions, while affirmation could include both the celebration of positive aspects of black life and a commitment to a better future.

The production of identity in the context of *Invisible Man* is directly linked to what Gilroy calls repressive cultures of the black. *Invisible Man* takes a detour in identifying the location of culture in its relation to what Hall underlines as the stories of subjectivity meeting the narrative of history. In confronting the history of subjugation and violence, the protagonist of *Invisible Man* explores his identity in the oral tradition of the Afro-American community and in black music. This process culminates in moving backdoor and re-identifying identity.

This position raises a pertinent question. How can America unite all the factors of differences in a culture so varied and diverse yet attempting to signify unity in diversity? The question is important in reflecting what Emerson wrote to Carlyle in April 1853, that "America is

incomplete". It has not stopped its restless movements and thus shows no signs of terminating into a white culture or black culture.

John Killens has said, "We are a Southern people, because that is where our people are closest to Africa. But our literature does not show this."[5] Many critics, social and literary, who associate themselves in some manner with the concept of the Black Aesthetic are Southerners. But few have journeyed back to the South – to the sounds and smells, the folklore and music, the ribald jokes and humane laughter – which as Killens noted, was close to the Africans experience for the symbols and images, the paradigms of history that form the underpinning of a people's literature.

The elevation of the black critic and black criticism into acceptance and respectability by the black community is a major achievement, for the job of the critic, as Toni Cade avers, is to call a halt to madness and it is primarily the critics of the Black Aesthetic who have attempted to fulfill this function. They have called a halt to the madness of the 1940's and 1950's that propounded the idea that literature could serve as catharsis for whites, that it might produce changes in them that would force them to move towards producing the "great society". They further rejected the fanatic argument that black men were half-men at best, ersatz-Americans at most, and that via the vehicle of protest literature, a transcendence might occur which would allow them the existence of a whole man. They have also called a halt to the themes of black pity and gratuitous black suffering.

Writing was a vehicle for moving outside the black community and publishing a novel, play or collection of poems, while moving up to a higher status than other blacks, expecting that the writer will be free from white exploitation and oppression. They have called a halt to the madness of those who argued that writing made them less African-American, In the writing itself, they achieved a sort of mutation – "I am a writer, not a Negro writer", and assumed that the value of black literature could be validated only by white critics and a white audience.

Despite the achievements of black writers in the era of the black Aesthetic movement, a major area of the black experience which is fundamentally Southern, was almost totally neglected. It overlooked the type of experience articulated by Richard Wright, the southern experience where Black nationalism flourished. The South where black women still maintain their proud carriage, where young people continue to look with defiance upon the white world, where the ghost of Harriet Tubman and David Walker, Sojourner Truth and Martin Luther King remain omnipresent, constantly reminding the greatness of a race of men and women, who, forced to desert their god and their land, struggled to survive the American diaspora, as a collective people, tracting down the concept of the African diaspora as related to questions of race, culture and politics was also overlooked. In attempting to identify and define the African diaspora we can see a shift in focus that concentrates not so much on essential features common to people of African descent as on the various processes through which communities and individuals identify with one another highlighting the central importance of race –

racial constructs; racial oppression, racial identification and cultural difference in the making and remaking of diaspora.

As initially constructed in the pan-African political ideologies of Delaney, Blyden, Garvey, Du Bois, Padmore and others, the African diaspora was identified with *blackness* or *negroness*. It is a phenotypically constructed and ascribed racial identity indicative of sub-Saharan African territorial origin and simultaneously, of biological difference from white skinned populations.

It is important to recognize that from the very beginning the African diaspora as a theoretical project has been political. It was orginally constructed in opposition to racist ideologies that depicted blacks in essentialized terms as biologically "negroid"; a people without culture, without significant history or national or territorial connection, having nothing cultural or intellectual to offer to "modernity". The term itself began to be employed at a particular fertile moment in the civil rights and pan-African movements by intellectuals and activists striving to increase racial consciousness and solidarity. The struggle not only conceptualized racial identity but worked towards uniting Africa and its communities in displacement through a shared African cultural practice and world view. Contemporary constructions of the diaspora retain their political vitality as a response to dominant ideas about Afro-American people which depicts them as nothing more than cultures of poverty and dismissed them as culturally pathological. Even if the body of work on the African diaspora has been characterized as "objective" and "apolitical", it has emerged from a sustained tradition of oppositional

scholarship and provided the foundations for a cultural-political identity for people of African descent in America.

Despite the undeniable intellectual and political achievements facilitated by this formulation of the diaspora paradigm, there are those working from what can be broadly termed a "post-modern" perspective. Authors such as David Scott, Kwame Appiah and Stuart Hall argue that prominent theories of black cultures and identities rely on forms of racial or cultural essentialism that collude with Western understandings of race, culture and nationalism. They claim, that the "Afrocentric" aspiration to construct an "authentic, natural, and stable rooted" African identity and a racial-self has resulted in an ethnic absolutism that reifies the very categories of racial oppression. They also assert that these notions valorized a male, patriarchal subject and thus exclude many who identify as *black* but do not fit the essentialist criteria, such as women, homosexuals, people of mixed descent. That is why many of these critics have turned to the notion of "hybridity", for resolution to these problems in theorizing the *Black Diaspora*. In fact, *hybridity* along with terms such as *syncretization* and *creolization*, has come to stand for a particular trend in this field, a trend that has been specifically formulated against the ontological essentialism of Afrocentric formulations of the diaspora.

The works of Ralph Ellison represents a middle ground between the ontological essentialism of Afrocentricism and the anti-essentialism of diaspora as hybridity. In his elaboration of what we can refer to as anti-anti-essentialist perspective on these issues, he addresses the question of unity and commonality of the African diaspora, not only as a

political and theoretical problem but also as a social, economical, cultural and racial problem of the invididual, rather than as an ontological given rooted in a presumed racial essence or mythological origin. For Ellison, diaspora refers to the historical stay of his people in America through the old story of enslavement, the creation of different black cultures in the new world, and the contemporary effort to imagine a shared sense of peoplehood in confrontation with persistent systems of racialized terror.

Consequently, reinvention is central to Ellison's aesthetic. One of the problems he recognises in the Black Aesthetic is the absence of opportunity for reinvention. His sense of the Black Arts Movement includes artists like Imani, who duplicates existing forms rather than recreates them. Ellison sees reinvention as central to the experience of African Americans. It is a premise for artistic creation and a survival technique.

That is why, in the epilogue to *Invisible Man* the narrator speaks of the "heart of darkness" of the South and he also speaks of his own "disembodied voice". It is obvious throughout the novel that Ellison is extremely concerned with desegregation and has been very angered by Southern congressmen. He has also been concerned for others, for example, middle class white students. He says: "we shouldn't overstress Negro alienation and agony because not only the black man but the white American too has a dual identity".[6] Ellison has objected to *Invisible Man* being called an autobiographical novel, and his objection is valid, in that the novel contains not only incidents from real life but Ellison's dream life, his visions and his intellectual judgement, and thus the book is

synthetic. Ellison himself, like the protagonist of his novel, remains whole and optimistic, a man calm in the face of human dilemma. A central metaphor in the novel concerns the blindness of the invisible man to his many experiences for he must come to terms and understand the culmination and summary of the experiences narrated in the novel. In elaborating this theme, Ellison emphasized the practical. Even though the Invisible Man learns and studies, yet he was not impressed by the sheer fact of learning because he had seen that learning could exist without being useful and that in itself it did not angur mental superiority. But Ellison rescues his protagonist through narrative openness. The mythic quest becomes a journey backward, hitting the open road and coming home to one's own people. The Invisible Man goes through the process of initiation only to prepare himself for reinventing his identity as a black man having learnt his lessons about black cultural life.

The identity the invisible man discovers is camouflage in invisibility that tells us about his world, his complex feelings and thoughts. Here, in capsule form are his insights into his position as a black man in a racist society, an American pitted against the history of the world. His insights are genuine and profound because they were painfully gathered from his own experiences – experiences he barely escapes at times. The novel narrates those experiences, while the prologue and epilogue give us his conclusions and philosophy. It is important to look at the prologue and epilogue together because essentially they tell so the same thing, for both are logs made on a journey, and these two records are progress of the journey of the Invisible

Man's life. Ellison says in the prologue "the end is in the beginning". And the last words of the novel before the epilogue repeat the same; "the end was in the beginning". This is true not only for the meaning of the book, but of the form also. The end and the beginning, epilogue and prologue, are one, in both sections. Ellison talks of his hibernation in a hole. This hole symbolically represents the hole he has always been in – a hole which he did not recognize. He says he has to be literally clubbed into the cellar before he saw the real condition of his life. Interestingly enough, in both sections he talks either of spring or coming out of his hole, for Ellison sees life's cyclic aspect and knows that after winter hibernation comes spring and renewal. So he seems to have a circular view of life. The circular view of life is one big round, and the invisible man was engulfed in it in order to comprehend the meaning of his being. For a while, he seems to be loosing focus on his own self because of the darkness within and around, but eventually he was able to come out of it in search of his identity, being able to identify himself with the society, the culture that surrounded him. We look at this circular view as the cyclic fount of the seasons, even though Ellison focused attention on only two of them.

Although Ellison seems to have a circular view of life, he says at one point that history is a boomerang, emphasizing the violent condition of the cycle, rather than the rebirth. Part of Ellison's vision of the boomerang includes his insight into the shifting nature not only of winter and spring, death and birth, but also of evil and good, and honesty and dishonesty. As an invisible black man the values that might appear

obvious to others, to the protagonist seems to be confusing. This confusion leads to a soul sickness, something Ellison talks of both at the beginning and at the end of the book. But this soul-sickness is not fatal for Ellison. He says in the prologue, "all sickness is not unto death, neither is invisibility".[7] His desire to be fit and strong is primarily an individualistic impulse. He recounts nearly killing a man, who saw him only as the phantom "nigger", a vision of a racist mind-set. But learning that he is invisible gives him a kind of power over those who do not see him. This understanding gives him an identity – an identity, others probably do not have. With this identity he can defeat his soul sickness and assert that life is to be lived. Thus the narrator not only begins to live his life, but he also begins to write it down. And as a writer and a sensitive artist, he is aware that there is an area where "a man's feelings are more rational than his mind".[8] So he writes down his story, not as a mental exercise, but as an affirmation of his deepest felt experiences. Writing has a positive value for him. But he goes even further in the epilogue when he says that an invisible man is also a responsible person.

However, he faces the problem of playing socially responsible role, for he is not like his grandparents, who believed implicitly in the Emersonian ideal of the part being connected to the whole, or the fingers of the hand being separate but equal. For the Invisible Man the ideal is not just something out there for him to grab, because even though the ideal may run true theoretically, yet its practical dimensions are lost when it is evaluated against the experiences that the Invisible Man encountered as a black man. So he laughs in his encounter with Mr. Norton reminding

him "I'm your destiny".[9] Ellison's dilemma and encounter with the absurd is that he believes in the Emersonian ideal yet knows well that it is just not true.

What is more interesting for the Invisible Man is that, in trying to bridge the cultural gap, he also comes face to face with the problem of the generation gap with his father and grandfather. His dilemma arises from misunderstanding a seasoned advice offered by his grandfather; "Son after I'm gone, I want you to keep up the good fight.... Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yesses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction".[10] This Afro-centric folk wisdom is neither a "riddle" nor a delightfully ambitious joke, but a cruel and cryptic curse. Far from being a "parody of itself" the old man's utterance is a serious piece of advice calculated to enlighten others while confounding his family. That the protagonist's father misunderstands the advice and rushes his children from the room, warning them "emphatically" to forget the incident, underscores, ironically, the cultural distance between the sententious old man and his prosaic son, between the old Negro of the Reconstruction and the New Negro of the post-Reconstruction era.

Unlike the protagonist's father, whose sight is linear and fixed, the grandfather possesses a mobile, multidimensional insight. He does not see the choice before him in terms of absolute either-or's-either life or death, suffering or bliss, utter resignation or brutal resistance. For he has somehow managed to reconcile "Being" with "not Being". Instead of a clear cut situation in which life is either war or peace, he has been able to

live in peace even while fighting his own battles. Where his son would probably value bliss above pain, the old man sees an alchemical value in pain. To content with pain, he believes in strengthening one's sinews and in one's survival skills. The grandfather believes in surviving the day, to keep on fighting the battle not having an open confrontation with a powerful enemy, but defeating him in his own game.

Invisible Man foregrounds the theorization of diaspora as a problem of politics and identity. In order to make this point clear, it is useful to distinguish two interpretations of *diaspora*; as a conceptual tool or referential term denoting a specific group of people, and, as a term to denote a certain kind of identity formation, the feeling of belongingness to a community that transcends national boundaries. In practice the two come together, for the very development of diaspora as a conceptual tool has been part and parcel of a political project whose objective is the creation of solidarity. It is true that race is a social construct, it is also a social fact whose effects are undeniably real. An analysis of who belongs to the African diaspora cannot ignore race, but must investigate processes of identity formation, analyzing forms of racialized classification and subordination as well as the creative efforts of people living through such systems to formulate and reevaluate their own sense of the self.

Like any sense of peoplehood, the identity of the Invisible Man is formed and transformed in relation to other identity constructions. He confronts a mine of racial ideologies that differentiate between people on the basis of phenotype and ascribed them to particular, often pejorative, biological and cultural qualities. While these ideologies vary over time

and place, they resonate with previous meanings and transcend the Invisible Man as an individual. This does not imply that the identity of the Invisible Man is derived from dominant racial constructs, but that it necessarily engages him in the effort to imagine a sense of peoplehood.

On this note, it can be pointed out that white identities are also constructed in relation to other group identities, even if "white" people have acquired differential power to create and disseminate racial constructions. In attempting to discern how black people construct their own identities, Ellison's *Invisible Man* serves as an inspiration by providing fresh insight into the processes of travel, communication and cultural exchange, while creating forms of community and raising consciousness that subvert the norms of race, nation and capitalism. In his polemic against Afro-centrism, Ellison did not fail to explore the power of the imaginings of Africa held within various constructions of diasporic identity. If diasporic identity is created and recreated through different routes, it is also imagined on roots. Africa serves as the key symbol for the particularity of black identities. In his search for identity, the *Invisible Man*, in the presence of Bledsoe, moves from rage to confusion to utter helplessness because he cannot connect together the remarks that Bledsoe makes. In the Founder's story, even in the manner in which he questioned his young masters to teach them to "reason", we see that the underlying emphasis of Negro learning is to make him function in a subterranean manner in the white man's world without even asserting his own basic end – individuality. It is ironic that the visionary Reverend Barbee cannot realize that the original dream of the Founder is

being subtly perverted by Dr. Bledsoe. In a return to the original image of the novel, it is revealed that Barbee is unable to see this because he is both literally and figuratively blind. As the Invisible Man walks to Bledsoe's office, he smells fresh bread baking, which gives him a sense of identity, since bread is the stuff of life. Little emphasis is given to food in the novel until much later when the Invisible Man is just discovering his true identity and he stands on the street corner eating fresh baked yams bought from a street vendor. Here the smell of bread gives him pleasure in life and a sense of joy – a joy soon to be ruined by Bledsoe.

Bledsoe's general view of life is expressed in his comment, "You're black and living in the South – did you forget how to lie?"[11] This again suggests Bledsoe's understanding that the Negro can only succeed by being a hypocritical liar. He refuses to accept the white person except as someone to deceive. Bledsoe's first premise is that he knows what the white man wants, and his assumptions is that the white man wants to be lied to. In other words, Bledsoe hates the white man and just uses him to gain power. He has not yet gained insight to evaluate Bledsoe and the betrayal, instead sees himself as a sacrifice for the college. If he did not accept the fact that he has to be sacrificed, then he would have to admit that his grandfather's remarks made sense. Since the young protagonist cannot yet accept the absurdity of life, as pronounced by his grandfather, he sees the necessity of his own punishment. The only other alternative was to accept the world of Trueblood and the Golden Day, which represent a type of madness and chaos. This is the end of yet another stage in the Invisible Man's development and the beginning of a

longer journey toward discovering his identity as he leaves the campus with the seven impressive letters which are not letters of recommendation, but actually letters of betrayal.

When the Invisible Man meets the insane Vet in the bus, he associates his expulsion with the episode of the Golden Day. He is at first afraid of the Vet, but then he remembers that the Vet is violent only in his speech. His encounter in Harlem with Ras the Exhorter, who is about to start a riot with his violent speech, also reveals the power of words to the protagonist, who soon will use his own power with words to become a member of the Brotherhood. Besides discussing the idea of freedom, suggesting the importance of being invisible, and giving the protagonist some good advise, the Vet also correlates the black man's struggle with the white man, mankind's struggle with the authority of God and fate, implying that mankind is in a constant struggle against some force which he cannot distinguish. In actuality, the Vet has given the protagonist some good insights, but the young man, being still blindfolded, does not regard this advice because he considers that the Vet is "a mad man".

It is perhaps symbolic of what is happening to the protagonist's life, when he arrives at his new apartment. He places his brief case with the broken image on the table. This broken image symbolizes the broken pattern of his life and his failure to live up to his own dreams. It also symbolizes an attempt to break with the past, for he is no longer the subservient "Sambo" type. His task now is to discover his true identity.

The Invisible Man's association with, and initiation into, the Brotherhood is, in one sense, the beginning of a new life for him represented by his new clothes, his new apartment, his new name and his new position. One is reminded of the black man's plight upon reaching America, when he was divested of his own religion and culture. Embedded in all of this newness is the concept that the Invisible Man is developing an entirely new system of values and a new personality. Having a new name and new personality, he longs to become someone whom people will recognize and respect. He becomes an effective leader because he combines ideology, inspiration, theory and action. He can get the community leaders to support him on the eviction issue in spite of the fact that the leaders are against the Brotherhood. He organizes the People's Hot Foot Squad – a jazzy drill squad – and is the leader of successful parades which bring out the Harlem citizens. He works very hard at his job and believes that he is a soldier in the organization. He puts himself under the strict discipline of the party and believes that he has freedom of action within this discipline. These are days of certainty for the Invisible Man.

However, his encounter with Ras the Exhorter is unsettling. The latter has the tremendous ability to move people, has "a blood for blood" philosophy and as Todd Clifton says about Ras the Exhorter, "sometimes a man *has* to plunge outside history".[12] This is in contrast to the Brotherhood philosophy which tries to combine science and history. The Brotherhood supposedly has a philosophy of non-violence, while Ras the Exhorter and his followers, consciously have a violent separatist

philosophy. The chapter ends with a significant encounter with the Exhorter. At this juncture, not only has Todd Clifton questions about the party, but the Invisible Man is also having problems with establishing his own identity in terms of the Brotherhood. Therefore, Ras the Exhorter's harangue about the black man's place in the world upsets Clifton and the Invisible Man. Now that the invisible man recognizes how absurd it is to think that if a man is called a name, that man becomes what he is called. Thus by recognizing that absurdity, the invisible man knows he is still searching for his identity.

The death of Todd Clifton and the events following it are among the central events of the novel. This incident helps removing one of the blindfolds of the Invisible Man, for it clearly shows the division among the black community. The Invisible Man on his return to Harlem senses an alienation from his own people and this estrangement is closely related to the disappearance of Tod Clifton. Returning to Harlem is like returning to a city of the dead, and the Invisible Man struggles to bring some life back into the Harlem Brotherhood.

It is never clarified in the novel how Tod Clifton left the Brotherhood and why. Once having left, he decides to do something as degrading as selling paper sambos. There is an indication that Todd Clifton left because the Invisible Man has disappeared, an implication which causes the Invisible Man to feel responsible for the death of Todd Clifton. He is the person whom the Invisible Man most resembles in the novel and through their friendship, the protagonist has achieved some degree of identity. In Clifton's death, this identity is again lost. He feels

disillusioned and considers that Todd Clifton has stepped outside of history. The implication is that the Brotherhood is like the "establishment" and that Todd Clifton as a Negro realized he was not a part of the Brotherhood therefore as a Negro and as an individual, he is outside of history. Thus the selling of the dolls is a type of public parodying of the position of the Negro, especially since the dolls are like jumping-jacks performing a sort of obscene dance, which aligns them as symbols with the degrading Battle Royal rug scene in which the Invisible Man participated. With Clifton's death, the Invisible Man intellectually rejects a part of the Brotherhood. He sees that history is not like the Marxian view – a logical working out of certain laws of science – instead history consists of blind chances where there is much gambling and luck. This idea is expressed by the insane Vet in the Golden Day, who had maintained that history was like roulette, with white on top now but black soon to be on top. The Invisible Man now adopts this view of history and believes that great men are merely accidents in history. Having reached this conclusion, he sees a black nun and a white nun on the sub-way and concludes that the crosses which the two nuns wear must be of different weights because for the black man the cross is always heavier.

Although he decides to use Clifton's death to get members back into the Brotherhood, at his funeral for he evaluates his own past, his stay at the college, and his earlier home life. Thus he is no longer the mechanical doll performing for the Brotherhood – now he is searching for some private answer outside the propaganda lunched by the Brotherhood. Therefore, the song at the funeral touches something that is

deeper than protest and profound than religion – it releases his suppressed anger.

Despite his assertion of primordial claims and a recognized history of the indigenous people, the protagonist of *Invisible Man* emphasizes the blackness or African components of his identity. While stressing the fact that the Invisible Man was forced by necessity to adopt indigenous language and material practices, Ellison highlights the African origin of the protagonist's religion, music and dance, and claims that he occupies a unique status as a New World Black. We can see that Ellison has framed an acceptable account of the culture and history of the protagonist, within the context of the African diaspora.

Houston Baker in *Long Black Song* maintains:

> The question of the black man's humanity recedes with the acknowledgement of his culture: passive, bestial victims and sambo personalities are not generally what one has in mind when he speaks of culture as a whole way of life. The goal of an investigation of black American culture is to discover what type of man the black American is and what values and experiences he has articulated that might be useful in one's attempt to make sense of the world.[13]

This statement points at the heart of the black aesthetic, for it demands that the black artists help make sense out of the world, help achieve a sense of morality, not out of the values of the Euro-Americans, but out of their culture and history. To accomplish this does not mean that one must find irrelevant and invalid every artifact of the Western world. It suggests that the offerings of the West must be scrutinized in

light of the question, "Is it good for black people?" We know, for example, that the Viet Kong did not return captured machine guns because they bore the label "made in America", instead, they utilized them in their struggle to overcome the Americans.

It is to such a world that the author of *Invisible Man* draws our attention, a world of diversity and change, where men and women, seen in the context of historical perspective, are paradigms of courage, endurance, grace and beauty. To this world people must as did the Invisible Man return.

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CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSION

Diverse conceptual elements have gone into the making of *Invisible Man*, including folk elements and music. Ellison put together these aspects in order to formulate an outlook of literary culture that is constant, with a view to socio-political and economic upliftment of the blacks. Ellison insists that the black man must identify himself not only as a black man living in America, but as an American who is black. This comes about from the fact that throughout *Invisible Man*, Ellison not only focuses on the Invisible Man's quest for an identity, but on the idea of re-inventing identity in order to re-establish himself as part of a society that is so diverse.

In an effort to subvert the invisible status of the Invisible Man in the American society, the author of *Invisible Man* presents himself as a historian arguing that only from a rootedness in the past that the protagonist can derive the strength in handling his responsibilities, while moving back into the past and looking forward to the future. Ellison here is not talking about connecting the past with the present in some magical fashion. His perception is more immediate and tangible, in the sense that he looks at America, as his homeland, trying to understanding the reasons for being a black American.

Invisible Man is rich in portraying a wide assortment of blacks, their lives and confrontations with both elemental life and racism. The graphic depiction of the many characters in the novel, apart from the protagonist, is always in relation to the development of the self. The

various symbols employed in the novel operate at certain levels - as mirrors of both the vigour and the unsteadiness of the self's innocence and its independent vibrations in the context of black life.

The theme of *Invisible Man* presents itself as an epic statement about black identity and self-definition. The protagonist, characterized as a representative black man, on an identity quest, discovers himself only when he gives up his white master's definition of reality and follows the black folk tradition. The invisible man encounters and combats the problem Ellison identified in an interview with three young black writers in 1965:

> Our lives, since slavery, have been described mainly in terms of our political, economic and social conditions as measured by outside norms, seldom in terms of our own sense of life or our own sense of values gained from our own unique American experience.[1]

Invisible Man chronicles three stages in the protagonist's life – education, employment and political activity – framed by his entry into the life of society through high school graduation and his exit from it through disillusionment with political organization. Each stage in his personal history corresponds to an era in the social history of black Americans. His soujourn in the southern black college modelled on Tuskegee Institute corresponds to a reconstructed; parody of Emancipation. His exit from the college under compulsion, in the company of a disillusioned World War I veteran, represents the Great Migration. His first few weeks in New York – job hunting, working in

the paint factory, encountering unionism and undergoing electric shock treatment – contain the elements of the hopeful twenties, when industry was growing and self-reliance became its gospel. His experience in the Brotherhood reflects the Great Depression, where dispossession was the common complain and communism the intellectual's cure. His disillusionment with the Brotherhood parallels the general post-Depression retreat from communism. And the riot he drops out of sight in the novel – suggests the Harlem riot of 1943.

The protagonist enters each stage hopefully, but is discussed forcibly. His hopes are based on faith in the word or belief or method that each historical stage has offered as a solution to the difficulties blackness has always presented. In school and college, it is the principles of Booker T. Washington, as quoted by the protagonist in his graduation speech, used by the Rev. Homer Barbee in his gospel-service account of the Founder's life, and practised by Dr. Bledsoe in the administration of the college. In the business world, it is capitalism, individualism and Emersonian self-reliance. In politics, it is "brotherhood", whether of class or of race, as insisted by his competitor, the Garveyesque Ras the Exhorter. Reliance on these conventional principles leads the protagonist into chaos that propels him from one stage to another – from the Battle Royal, to the melee at the Golden Day, to the paint factory explosion, to the Harlem riot. And the proponents of these principles – Jack Norton, Emerson, merged in the protagonist's mind by the end of the novel "into a single white figure".

Opposed to the conventional and stoical doctrines of the white world are the forms of experience of the black folk tradition, which expose the falseness of the white view of reality and offer an alternative vision offered by the protagonist's grandfather, the nineheart man, the Vet, and ironically, Bledsoe and Emerson Jr. Each of these characters has some link with the folk past. The grandfather has been a slave, the push cart man talks about rhymes and fables, and sings the blues, the Vet, though educated and erudite, is connected in the protagonist's mind with the push cart man (p. 132). Bledsoe is modelled on Booker T. Washington, a real life reflection of the conventional trickster. Even Emerson Jr. is a traditionalist, who frequents Harlem nightclubs, collects African art and reads *Totem and Taboo*. These characters are linked to each other and advise the protagonist in his dealing with blackness.

The principle of emancipation through accommodation is refuted by the folk storyteller Trueblood: "I done the worse thing a man could ever do in his family and instead of chasin' me out of the county, they gimme more help than they ever give any other coloured man, no matter how good a nigguh he was (p. 52)". The principle of emancipation through capitalism is punctured by the folk rhyme the protagonist remembers when he hears of Bledsoe's treachery. "They Picked Poor Robin Clean" explains not only what Bledsoe has done to him but what Liberty Paints has done to Lucius Brockway and will do to him, what capitalist industry generally strives to do to all its workers. The irony of Brother Jack's betrayal is sharpened by the background of the John-and-Old-Master tales. "Brother Jack", whose name echoes of "Brother John",

reminds the protagonist of "Old Master", a bulldog he "liked but didn't trust" as a child (pp. 255-561), and becomes in the end "Master Jack" (p. 357). Even the Brotherhood, which as both abstract philosophy and political movement, promises the ultimate liberation – offers only the same old oppression.

While the folk perspective substitutes for the "rational" programs in ordering chaos it also underlines acceptance of chaos as reality. Under the stream of conventional advice on how to deal with blackness runs a current of counter-advice distilled in the protagonist's grandfather's *death-bed* dictum: "overcome 'em with yesses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction (p. 13)." The grandfather, the Vet, the push cart man, Bledsoe and Emerson offer a vision of reality based on contradiction in that yes is no, freedom is slavery, things are not what they seem. The push cart man sings the characteristic contradiction of the blues:

> She's got feet like a monkey
> Legs like a frog – Lawd, Lawd!
> But when she starts to loving me
> I holler whoooo, God-dog!
> Cause I loves my baabay,
> Better than I do myself....

The protagonist is left to wonder whether the song expresses love or hate and whether he himself is hearing it with pride or disgust (pp. 134-35).

"Play the game but don't believe in it", counsels the Vet (p. 118). "You're black and living in the South", exclaims Bledsoe, "Did you

forget how to lie (p. 107)?". "For God's sake, learn to look beneath the surface", Exhorts the Vet (p. 118). "Are'nt you curious about what lies beneath the face of things?", asks Emerson Jr. (p. 143). What lies behind the face of things is, like the black dope in the white paint. The inclusion of Emerson Jr. and Bledsoe as spokesmen for the "folk", as well as for the white point of view, is not self-contradictory, but illustrative of the simultaneous sway of opposites that Ellison sees as the heart of folk wisdom.

In the 20th century, arguments over fate and free will were lively, and the tentative answers just as hard-won. History, culture and chance rule the century. The self which is merely mundane is caught up by circumstances, but the transcendent self wills as it chooses. For this very reason, Ellison asserts that the free self takes care not only of achieving its aims, but sticks to its successful outcome like glue. In order to gain success of being, the hero must choose not to stop short of perfect action, but to stop short of perfect observation. In a world of fatality, the Invisible Man struggles between two further choices – to be great or to act it. What the Invisible Man understands is that *being great* is reality, even if he exists in a world where acting great seems the only evidence.

Still there is no reprieve for the Invisible Man. He does not know how to overcome the hurdles in front of him, undermine the real world he found himself in and agree to what he is yet to understand. He could sense that involvement is the need of the hour, but his invisibility makes it hard for him to precisely explain the dimensions of what he has to believe in.

There is another channel through which the Invisible Man re-establishes his identity. In order to act out his greatness, not only for the sake of his own individuality, but for the identification of his own people, he has to *turn* to that other channel which is his own legacy, his musical heritage.

However musicologists unlike the historians believe that interpretation of music is possible in linguistic terms. The stylistic devices apart, *Invisible Man* interprets music in the context of black history. The folk merges into the contemporary through different musical styles that encompass the totality of black life past and present. Music has been the only means for the black to transcend the brutalities of history. Ellison has his training in music and the *Invisible Man* carries the stamp of a musician as a novelist in the most sophisticated way.

It is through the things that can be called his own, like music, dance and myths, that the protagonist of *Invisible Man* was successful in creating a world of his own, while transcending the brutalities of slavery, historical contingencies and economic marginalization. Writing in the *New Negro* in 1925, Alain Locke assured his audience that the day of Aunties and Uncles, Toms and Sambos were over. *Invisible Man* tells us now, that the days of darky entertainers, parodying dolls and sweet yams, if not over, are numbered that an excursion into the cultural past can provide images by which people can measure themselves. It tells us that in the protagonist's search for an identity in order to re-invent a new image, it was history and culture, that exemplified those values by which men throughout the history of the world have lived and died. And that

these values found their greatest expression in the Western World in the South, in the first home away from home for the Afro-American. It is there, where men and women having undergone the racial holocaust and survived, the best examples of a viable re-invention of identity is possible through the continued renewal of black literary and cultural traditions.

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All the chapters in this thesis include a list of works cited for general reference work about the author and book of the quotation used, with regard to the issue in each chapter for consideration.

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BIO-DATA

I, ***Ms. Dolly Noreen Kharlukhi*** come from a family background of Lecturers, Professors and Doctors of Philosophy, and am glad to be born on the 22nd of July in the year 1971, to Mr. Maswell Kharkongor and Mrs. Mercia Kharlukhi, the eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. Nobarwell Swer and the eldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. S. Norindel Roy.

I finished my schooling from the Synod High School and my graduation from the Synod College and continued with my Masters in English in the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. While in college and in the University I took part in several events that include sports, singing and the other social activities.

I live in Mawlai Iewrynghep and am an active member of the Synjuk Samla Mawlai Iewrynghep (SSMI). I have helped organized some of the social activities of the locality like seminars, sports events, musical night, fishing competition etc. There are still some more social activities under consideration to be carried out in the near future for the welfare and upliftment of the youths of the locality under the banner of the SSMI.

I am a qualified Lecturer in English in Synod College and have held the post for nearly four years now. The experience I have accumulated through the years are priceless. I like the interaction with students, especially since I am in-charge of the NCC Girls' Wing as an ANO (Associated NCC Officer) of the College. I get the satisfaction of seeing my students being awarded medals and honour in different category in the NCC, and seeing them walked out of college with pride after having graduated at the end of the term.

I have not yet been able to publish the essays, poems and articles I have written, but I am planning to do so in the near future.

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