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Title

**Political Context For Ralph Ellison In The
Invisible Man**

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Dedication

To our mothers, our candles

to our fathers our mainstays

All my supportive family and friends.

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, we must acknowledge how grateful we are for God for drawing such a path for me. The pursuit of knowledge is noble: it enlightens the mind, awakes the reason, and elevates the human being above other creatures. We wish to express my most sincere thanks to my respectable supervisor, Prof **Abdelaziz Bousbai**, who is the epitome of a competent teacher. He has been there for me since day one, providing me with sound, valuable advice and guiding my intellectual drive, yet teaching me autonomy in research, not dependence. I highly value his opinions and expertise in the literary and academic field, and we are deeply thankful for his mentorship and supervision of this thesis. A debt of gratitude goes to the members of the jury who contributed to the honing and finalization of this research to make it look as it is now: in its final and finest shape through their valuable feedback. we would like to thank and acknowledge their efforts and time invested in reading this thesis. Their careful examination is highly appreciated

Abstract

The invisible man is a fiction novel by the American author RALPH ELISON, the first published was in 1952 during the literary period of modernism and postwar American fiction. RALPH ELISON was born on March,1, 1914 in Oklahoma City, ELISON was named after a journalist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson because his father wanted him to become a poet that is just a famous. The narrator in the invisible man is a nameless young black man this is what add more curiosity, because the people he faces see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imaginations, he is effectively invisible. The invisibility of Ellison protagonist is about the invisibility of identity- above all, what it means to be a black man-and its various masks, confronting both personal experience and the force of social illusions. The novel is special quality its deft combination of existential inquiry into identity as such –what it means to be socially or racially invisible- with more sociopolitical allegory of the history of the African American experience in America In the process, Ellison offers sympathetic but severe critiques of the ideological resources of black culture such as religion and music in addition of that Ellison is tone mixes various idioms and registers to produce an impassioned inquiry into the political of being. On April 16,1994, Ralph Ellison died from pancreatic cancer in New York city. However, The Invisible Man did not die out of him. It still considered as one of the most highly regarded works in American literature.

Key terms

Black American , Slavery, Identity , Invisibility , Discrimination.

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	i
Acknowledgement	ii
Abstract.....	iii

General Introduction

Introduction.....	2
Statement of the problem	2
1. Research Questions	2
3.Aims of the study	2
4.Methodology	3
5.Structure of the Study.....	3

Chapter One : Theoretical part

INTRODUCTION	5
1. The Approach to the Novel.....	5
1.1. New Historicism	5
1.2 The Approach to the Novel.....	7
2. Psychoanalysis	8
2.1 The different Psychoanalytic Perspectives towards Literary Works	8
2.2 The Approach to the protagonist in the novel.....	10
1.3. African American Literature	10
1.3.1. Identity in African American Literature	14
1.4. Ralph Ellison’s Biography	17
CONCLUSION	19

Chapter Two :The Investigation of Political Context

INTRODUCTION	21
1.1The Individual and the Bildungsroman.....	21

1.2Oppression of Society	33
1.3The Investigation of Political Context, Concept, and Ideology.....	44
Conclusion	52
GENERAL CONCLUSION	53
WORKS CITED	55
الملخص	59
Résumé.....	60

General introduction

Introduction

Novels, plays, and poems are examples of literature, which are appreciated as works of art. In most situations, literature is a collection of sociological, political, psychological, and historical viewpoints that are applied to various works of literature. In truth, history is a form of literature; it is interpreted, molded, and converted into novels, plays, and poetry by artistic means. As a result, there is a mutual tie between literature and history.

Typically, writers construct works of literature in order to artistically portray true events; it is a useful technique of entertaining the reader while also informing him about real historical events. It is also used to criticize events that occurred in a society at a given period and place. For many writers, literature is a beneficial tool for dealing with life's issues and defending their rights; for example, minorities who were marginalized by the majority developed literature to demand their rights and equality with the majority.

1. Research Questions

Does the novel represent Ralph's experience?

To what extent does the protagonist influence his society?

2. Hypothesis

To prove his curiosity Ralph Ellison must behave as an invisible man the novel is an interpretation of Ralph's speech, action, thoughts, and experience. The protagonist is entirely a brave personality.

3. Aims of the Study

This study has a major objective which is discussing the reasons such ideologies, notions, and principles existed in societies even now.

4.Methodology

Data from the various sources will be used in this study. It uses primary data (from Ralph Ellison's novel *The Invisible Man*) and secondary data (from other sources) (journals, textbooks, and Websites). Because the researcher will not adhere to a single style or set of ideas, he will employ an eclectic method that combines New Historicism and Psychoanalysis.

The New Historicists understood the literary work as a collection of discourses positioned within both historical and cultural contexts (religious, political, economic, and aesthetic) that both shaped it and were shaped by it. While psychoanalytic literary criticism uses specific psychological principles to the study of literature; it examines the writer's, character's, readers', and even the literary text's psychology.

(Parker, 2008; Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, &John, 2011).

5.Structure of the Study

A General Introduction, two major chapters, and a General Conclusion comprise the work. The research's goals and the research will answer are defined in the General Introduction. The introduction is an overview of the research subject, as well as the methodology and structure of this study. The theoretical underpinning of the study is presented in the first chapter. It then goes on to introduce several theories (New Historicism and Psychoanalysis), as well as the author's bibliography. The exploration of political situations in Chapter two demonstrates the link between the novel's historical and psychological analyses.

Finally, the General Conclusion summarizes the problem, the research findings, and offers some thoughts on the idea.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORITICAL FRAEWORK

INTRODUCTION

Literature is the art of words, the expression of minority voices, and a vehicle for promoting and repressing such voices. The relationship between the author and the work is formulated by literary theory, which is a method and set of ideas that we use to choose to read any literary work in order to comprehend the underlying principles.

A literary theory enables the reader to study literature from a variety of angles. Literary theory is more about how the reader interprets literature, in which he or she may be interested in the text's purpose.

1.1 The Approach to the Novel

1.1.1 New Historicism

New Historicism proposes a critical approach to literary analysis. It began with German writers at the close of the eighteenth century and continued through twentieth-century philosophers. The New Historicism is defined as "a technique of literary criticism that stresses the historicity of a piece by linking it to the configurations of power, society, or ideology in a given moment" by Merriam-Webster Dictionary. The literary text is not unique; rather, it is a complex of cultural discourses, including religion, politics, economics, and aesthetic discourses. This approach demonstrates that a literary work is influenced by the author's environment, ideas, and prejudices, as well as his period and circumstances. It focuses on the literary text as a part of a social and historical context with a focus on the literary text as a part of a social and historical context with a focus on the literary text

(“Merriam- Webster”, 2015; Parker, 2008: 219-220)

New historicism proposes a critical approach to literary interpretation. Historicists

view literary studies through a new lens, in which "literary texts influence the sociohistorical reality, which influences literary works, such that the textuality of history and the history of texts change and remodel each other in a continual cycle of mutual influence." Literature and history are intertwined with interchangeable impact. Old Historicists, on the other hand, thought that literature merely reflected history at the level of flat contrast between text and background. As a result, Old Historicism reduced the importance of meaning in every text. Parker (2008), pp. 219-220.

New Historicism tries to capture the culture of the texts by considering a wide range of cultural, political, social, economic, and aesthetic problems. In other words, history can explain cultural and social occurrences. As a result, history is as complicated as literature. New Historicism is a school of thought informed by Michel Foucault's philosophy and based on Stephen Greenblatt's literary criticism.

Greenblatt, an American critic, invented the phrase New Historicism with his book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980), which is considered its origin. Greenblatt presents a group of British Renaissance writers in that book, demonstrating how their culture shapes their concept of selfhood or subjectivity. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* claims that in the sixteenth century, self-consciousness increased in the creative process of shaping human identity. Our identity can never achieve the self since it is always a creation. Self-fashioning is the result of an interplay between the way you portray yourself and the way you dress.

The problematical process of self-fashioning depicted in literary Renaissance works and its non-literary reality, demonstrating the text-context reciprocal influence relationship. As a result, the literature is not merely a passive depiction of cultural reality; rather, it shapes and produces it (Parker, 2008; Guerin et al., 2011).

The poststructuralist philosopher Michel Foucault had a significant influence on the New Historicism, possibly the broadest direction in which Foucault influenced the New Historicism was in his distinctive publications. He stressed the role of social and political authorities in guiding and restricting social institutions. Foucault's studies were centered on modern society and who governs the human subject through institutions such as hospitals, prisons, education, and information. He demonstrates how the discourses of disease, criminality, and crazy are used to influence individuals.

To put it another way, he studies the development of ideologies and political systems in which various cultural, political, and social discourses function as power vehicles. Power operates in this setting through discourses.

As a result, literature not only reflects power dynamics, but also participates in the construction of discourses and ideologies. Rather than simply recording history, literature actively creates it. As a result, New Historicists are interested in the role of literature in politics and the concept of power. (Guerin et al., 2011; Parker, 2008).

1.1.2 The Approach to the Novel

The novel's events, which took place between 1920 and 1930, might be considered as a metaphor for the novel's historical, social, economic, and political situations. To accomplish so, this research uses the New Historicism technique, which allows the researcher to examine this literary work not just through the lens of history, but also through the lenses of social, political, and economic considerations.

The researcher uses the New Historicism technique to analyze this novel, focusing on Stephen Greenblatt and Michel Foucault's perspectives. In other words, the novel's events will be interpreted to show how they correspond to real-life occurrences during that period (the Jazz Age).

1.2 PSYCHOANALYSIS: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The psychoanalytic approach is one of the twentieth-century critical methods; it examines and interprets literary works through the prism of psychology. The theories of Sigmund Freud and the Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist Carl Jung served as the foundation for this method. Psychological Approach is used by critics to interpret writers, characters, and audiences. They examine literature using unique psychological principles.

1.2.1 The different Psychoanalytic Perspectives towards

Literary Works

The psychoanalytic approach relates to Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who contributed to the development of this approach with his ideas of psychology over the twentieth century. According to Freud, we don't even understand why we behave and act the way we do. As a result, he established a variety of theories and concepts that aid in the comprehension of human behavior. In fact, Freudian ideas aid in the psychological study of literary works through the interpretation of writers, characters, and audiences, as well as the interpretation of literature.

The Psychoanalytic Approach examines the psychology of characters in a play, novel, film, or story as if they were real people. This method examines the characters' psyche by posing a series of questions, such as: What forces motivate the characters? Is there a character that corresponds to the parts? Is this work compatible with Freudian or other psychologists' theories? How far do you want to go? Without knowledge of Freudian theories, the reader or

researcher will be unable to answer these questions. First, repression and the unconscious; Freud distinguished between conscious and unconscious mental activity, emphasizing the unconscious parts of the human psyche. As a result, Freud argued that everything that had been forgotten was painful in some way. As a result, any overwhelming desire or instinct that was embarrassing continues to work and now remains in the unconscious domain (outside of conscious awareness) where it hides its full intensity. This instinct manifest itself in the form of neurotic symptoms. This process, which Freud named repression, is the fundamental defense mechanism produced by the ego, which is obligated to protect itself from any risk, and is also referred to as resistance to our urges when we feel threatened by them (Parker, 2008; Guerin et al.,2011).

The id, ego, and superego are three psychological zones that work together to form complex human behaviors, according to Sigmund Freud. The id, ego, and superego are the three parts that make up the personality.

The id is the only aspect of personality that has existed since birth; Freud regards it as a pleasure principle that is completely unconscious and encompasses instinctual and primitive conduct. The function of the id, according to Freud, is to gratify our needs and instincts without regard for societal conventions or moral restriction. The ego, on the other hand, is guided by realistic principles; it governs the innate id's urges and satisfies them in realistic and socially acceptable ways. The superego, on the other hand, is the element of personality that embraces socially acquired moral norms and ideals. It reflects the moral restraints that stifle urges or drives id's since they are deemed inappropriate in society (superego). The superego alters the ego's principals from realistic to idealist in order to civilize and idealize human actions. As a result, the ego is the balance between the id and superego; it satisfies the id desires in the social context (Parker, 2008).

Second, dream interpretation: Freud paid close attention to dreams, believing that dream interpretation is similar to literary interpretation. In his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*,

Sigmund Freud claims that dreams are the realization of a goal. He demonstrates that the dream signifies the fulfilment of an impulse. However, the ego focused on extracting energy from all aspects of existence, and as this energy was repressed, the unconscious impulse took advantage of the opportunity to enter consciousness through dreams.

Finally, Freud and literature: in his paper *Creative Writers and Day- Dreaming* (1907), Freud viewed works of art as dreams, both of which are imaginary fulfillments of unconscious wishes, whereas Carl Jung believes that people used dreams as a way to communicate and introduce themselves to the unconscious, and that they were a way of revealing something about themselves, their relationships with others, or their situations in everyday life (Parker, 2008; Guerin et al.

1.2.2 The Approach to the protagonist in the novel

Characters are more than just objects in literary works; they are the life of the story. "What is character except the determination of incident?" writes novelist Henry James. What is an incident if not a character illustration?" In other words, this quotation alludes to the characters' and plot's reciprocal relationship (Bennett & Royal, 2004: 60)

As a result, the focus of this research is on the character's psychological interpretation. To put it another way, it centers on the protagonist, the anonymous narrator. Through the novel's events, the researcher examines and analyses the character's psyche, including his nightmares, the causes and repercussions of his depression, disappointment, and alienation.

1.3. African American Literature

African American writers are solely responsible for the creation of this genre of literature. The Harlem Renaissance, which was located in the African American neighborhood of Harlem in New York City, gave it a boost in the late 18th century. It was a component of a more extensive intellectual blooming of social ideas and culture. In genres like jazz and theatre, many black musicians, artists, and others created timeless

masterpieces.

Donald B. Gibson's "the Harlem Renaissance city: its Multi Illusionary Dimension" emphasizes how black writers used this urban space to create many new directions in black literature. Harlem's urban literature, which was based on a complex and multifaceted vision of city life, continued to have an impact on black literature well after the end of the 1920s. Gibson contends that the black writers' legacy from the Harlem Renaissance has persisted to the present day. (13).

In the 1920s, the Harlem Renaissance, also known as the New Negro movement, marked a shift in African American writing from an expression of the African accent to one that introduced black culture as a source of racial pride. Many publications of literature and art attempted to portray Harlem as it is in actuality during the Harlem Renaissance, when the city was the heaven, a place of self-discovery, cultural creativity, and literary innovation. Additionally, folk culture, religion, and the South became more prominent themes for writers and artists to explore in their works. The Harlem Renaissance, in Robert Wetzork's perspective, was "a movement of black self assertion against white supremacy," which also introduced and developed a more positive aspect of the act of passing among people of (mixed) African American heritage themselves (2).

The Harlem Renaissance was an intellectual movement or an attempt to form an exclusively African American-focused literary school. In addition to slavery, racism, and equality, African American literature also addressed the topic of African Americans as members of the larger American culture in oral narratives, poems, and blues.

One of the causes of the end of the Harlem awakening was the Great Depression in 1930. African American authors were compelled to modify their themes and focus on social and economic issues as a result of the economic crisis that has affected all aspects

of life. According to Robert Washington, black American literature is where the symptoms of that modernity were most pronounced within the black community. The primary writers of the first dominant black literary school were revolting against what they perceived as the falsehoods and misguided assumptions about black American society that earlier literary works had produced in their convoluted, helter-skelter ideological viewpoint.

These young black writers, as seen by Langston Hughes' brazen remark above, one of the leading lights of the new black literary school.

Due to many historical occurrences, Black American literature underwent transformation. African American literature centered on what it's like to be an African American and featured their perspective towards the issues of freedom and equality. Black people were denied imaginative access to their pre-urban homeland in Africa because the institution of slavery did everything it could to obliterate the memory of that world, according to Robert Butler and Hakutani Yoshinobu: "African American literature is to examine the historical experience of black people in America from the very beginning (11).

African Americans are credited for coining the word "Jazz" to refer to a musical style that swiftly gained popularity among middle-class Americans. According to Mitchell Matza and Peter Mancall, the jazz is "called to mind so as to numerous imagery, largely of the 1920s: the music, fashion, prohibition, movies, and the emergence of automobiles" (xii). This decade, popularly referred to as the Roaring Twenties or the Boom because it saw exceptional economic and scientific advancement, was also known as that. By the end of World War One, African Americans anticipated receiving better treatment in a society where they shared equality with white people, but they were met with a different reality. Black people's lives in America have, after all, improved, claims

Rebecca Ferguson.

African Americans were not allowed to participate in most fields at that time because of racism and segregation in the United States of America. Due to discrimination in employment and education, white business owners frequently turned away white customers. Owners of white nightclubs forbade the admission of African Americans while simultaneously relying on them to entertain their white patrons by playing jazz music for them. In many facets of American life, the Jazz Age thrived. Jazz music became ingrained in popular culture. Jazz in particular, or music in general, portrayed African Americans' aspirations for starting a new life. The attainment of these goals by society would determine whether African American art is recognized merely as art, according to Kenneth Warren.

African American literature entered the mainstream around the start of the 1970s when works by black authors consistently gained best-seller and award-winning status. Such was also the period in which African American writers' work started to be acknowledged by academia considered a valid literary subgenre in America. Because of the diversity in culture and society, The United States became known as the "country of opportunity," providing the chance for everyone to start a brand-new successful life. But this ambition was cut short by segregation and slavery.

Jim Crow laws, which were based on the idea of "separate but equal," kept blacks and whites apart and divided the country. Kenneth Warren claims that "in some ways, Jim Crow has not ended" and that "the most overt manifestations of segregation and discrimination gave way to more hidden but equally damaging manifestations of racism in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movements." (5). As a result, racism grew throughout the nation, particularly in the South, where black individuals did not have the same rights as white ones. African American literature includes poetry and slave narratives, and

many black people have attained artistic success and produced innovative works.

Because of the strong influence of African American literature, which paved the way for the emergence of Native American, Asian American, and Chicano American streams of literature, African American literature now forms the foundation of American literature and has come to be seen as an essential component of American culture. African American literature has evolved into a tool for understanding the realities of the country, giving readers the ability to research American history and rethink their opinions.

According to Paul Rosenblatt, "is it not all strange that African American novelists would write stories that included experiences with racism" (13). Only with the significant representation of African American literature does the American society stand to be freed from the issue of racial discrimination. analysed the issue of racial discrimination from all of its philosophical, existential, and epistemological perspectives, and found that it was still evolving with its subjects being intimately tied to slavery. The majority of African American authors had addressed the subject of African Americans' own culture and history through emphasising the significance of their identity. Additionally, a major topic in black writers' works that aim to mould society has always been the search for identity.

1.3.1. Identity in African American literature

Identity is defined as "the features, sentiments, or beliefs that identify persons from others: a sense of national, cultural, personal, or group identity," according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (770). Identity, then, is a sense of individuality, and it requires affiliation with the ideals of some group in order to support one's sense of self.

African American literature has placed a lot of emphasis on the idea of identity since formerly colonial countries had to repair the distorted identities that the west had imposed

on them. In the context of African American culture, with its numerous dislocations and lengthy history of destabilising social and psychological experience, Rebecca Ferguson writes that "'identity' is thus an important yet particularly elusive phrase" (14). Identity has been a hot topic for discussion on many different levels, and many African American authors have made it the main issue of their literary and creative works. Everyone wants to talk about identity, according to Kobena Mercer. A crucial term in modern politics, it carries so many varied meanings that it is sometimes evident that people are not even talking about the same thing. One thing at least is clear that identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis" (43).

African American authors attempted to resurrect academic subjects like philosophy, history, religion, and politics in order to grasp collectively the issues surrounding identity. Due to their darker pigmentation, black people suffered from marginalisation the most. Blacks were forced to identify themselves or provide terminology to define the self due to white persecution, illiteracy, and linguistic barriers.

Slavery, therefore, has been the primary cause of the black man's identity problem; the black man must pretend to be an obedient slave in order to please the whites, while while fighting against them and denying the false identity that they placed upon them. "The history of oppression which Morrison portrays frequently underlines the desire felt by so many black individuals to join in advancements going place within 'mainstream' white America, and the degree to which that will was betrayed by the reality of abiding racism," says Rebecca Ferguson (13). Racial prejudice significantly impacted blacks, who were all rendered invisible in important representational areas, and was predominantly transmitted from the Southern to the Northern states.

According to Kadiatu Kanneh, "the subjectivities we inhabit and the eras in which we live, makes strikingly clear ways in which "race" has become the founding illusion of our identities," colour has always been the cause of rejection from the racist society (vii). Black identity, particularly in the wake of the 20th century, has been the main concern as W.E. DU

BOIS expected, his famous prediction that the twentieth century would be the century of colour line. According to Kadiatu Kanneh: "W.E. DU BOIS wrote in 1903 that 'the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line'; that race and its variously linear parameters (bo) are the problem of the twentieth century.

African American writers' attempts and struggles to express their ethnic identities can be shown in paradoxical ways. Thus, ethnic identification always remains ethnic in a minimalist sense and is distinct from the normative, mainstream American identity, which has turned into a form of battle for many modern writers, according to Emmanuel Nelson. To talk about African American black identity, we must look at the voice that gave it its true meaning and position, such as slave narratives, which were better able to convey the oppressive circumstances that limit African American literature's ability to express its spiritual and physical freedom. In addition, this voice does a good job of conveying the effects of slavery on black minds. Like the slave chronicles, which criticised slavery, according to Audery Fisch

In addition to what they may teach us about African American history and literature, slave and ex-slave narratives are significant because they shed light on the nuanced interactions between whites and blacks during the past 200 years, particularly for African Americans.

"These the truth voices, these tales, are both the truth of slavery and to resolve and vanquish the sorrow of slavery for liberated slaves," according to Laura Murphy (xi).

Slave narratives served as a repository for African American history and a record of their culture, which in some ways helped to shape the black identity. Black men have experienced racism throughout history as they battled to discover their true selves in a world that judged them as undeserving of the right to exist as humans and created a place where they should be invisible.

Slave tales are essential because they serve as a reminder to society that slavery was one of the most heinous episodes in the history of humanity and that it should never be allowed to happen again. Williams According to Eric, racism developed as a result of slavery rather than the other way around (7). African Americans have faced a great deal of hardship throughout history, and they have used their writing to express the terrible things they have gone through while maintaining their faith.

Due to the fact that most editors and publishers were white, it was difficult for black individuals to have their works published. For instance, William Lloyd Garrison sought to create his own prologue to Frederick Douglass' *The Narratives of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* in order to have control over the structure and content of the narratives. "I have no correct knowledge of any age, never having seen any genuine document bearing it," wrote Frederick Douglass. "By far the majority of the slaves know as little of their years as horses know of theirs, and it is little of most masters" (7).

Frederick was regarded as an orator for black liberation; his book was a best-seller in the United States and translated into a number of languages in Europe. He also became one of the most well-known thinkers of his day, giving thousands of lectures on a variety of topics, including women's rights and Irish home rule, and leading the abolitionist movement, which fought hard to abolish slavery and saw it as anti-humanistic.

1.4. Ralph Ellison's Biography

An African American writer and literary critic named Ralph Waldo Ellison. He was born in Oklahoma City on March 1, 1914. His father, Lewis Alfred Ellison, was a construction worker who died when Ralph was three years old, and he was a grandchild of slaves. Ida Millsap, his mother, worked as a domestic helper. Ralph had a strong interest in jazz music as a child, and he studied the cornet and trumpet. He earned a scholarship to study music in the

late 1930s. As a result, he left Oklahoma to attend the Tuskegee Institute, which is now known as Tuskegee University, in Tuskegee, Alabama. The Institute was created in 1881 by Booker T. Washington, a well-known black figure in American history, and went on to become one of the most prestigious institutions in the country. Booker T. Washington, one of America's most well-known black figures, founded the Institute in 1881, and it went on to become one of the country's most important black colleges. This college was depicted as the exemplary black college that the narrator attended in Ellison's *The Invisible Man*.

In 1936, Ellison left Tuskegee and relocated to Harlem in New York City. In addition to sculpture, he studied photography. Ellison knew the most influential modernist personalities, including African American writers like Langston Hughes and Richard Wright, as well as socialist Albert Murray. Ellison's most important, challenging, and protracted connection is with novelist Richard Wright, which is regarded as the beginning of his writing career. Wright pushed Ellison to write for him by motivating and guiding him through the process.

Ellison served in the segregated army as a cook in the Merchant Marine from 1943 until 1945, when World War II broke out. At the end of the war, Ellison began composing *The Invisible Man*, and in 1946, he married Fanny McConnell, who was Ellison's greatest supporter, both materially and spiritually. Between 1937 and 1944, Ellison published over 20 book reviews, as well as short stories and articles. *Invisible Man* was released in 1952, and he received the 1953 National Book Award for Fiction the following year. Before the Communist Party's betrayal of African Americans at the start of World War II, Ellison wrote for the Communist Party. In 1955, Ellison travelled to Europe and authored his essay *A New World*. In 1958, Ellison went to the United States and began teaching American and Russian literature at Bard College, where he also began work on his second novel, *Juneteenth*. He met his friend, the writer Albert Murray, in 1950. Later, they released *Trading Twelve*, a collection of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray's letters.

At the same time as working on his novel, *Shadow, and Act*, he began teaching at Rutgers

University and Yale University in 1964. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1969. In 1975, Ellison was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and in 1984, he was awarded the Langston Hughes Medal by New York City College. He received the National Medal of Arts in 1985. His collection of essays, *going to the Territory*, was published in 1986.

Ralph Ellison died of pancreatic cancer on April 16, 1994. Many manuscripts were discovered in his residence after his death, leading to the release of *Flying Home and Other Stories* in 1996 and his novel *Juneteenth* in 1999. Modern Liberty released Ellison's final piece, *Three Days Before the Shooting*, on January 26, 2010. (Abbott, 1993; Ward, Philips, & Katie, 2002; Ward, Philips, & Katie, 2002)

CONCLUSION

In summary, this research will interpret and analyze Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* from the perspectives of New Historicism and Psychoanalytic literary criticism, in order to aid the researcher in examining the novel from several perspectives and proving his theory. *The Invisible Man*, a novel by African American writer Ralph Waldo Ellison, is considered minor literature. It was influenced by the Harlem Renaissance movement.

CHAPTER TWO

The Investigation of Political Context

INTRODUCTION

The thought that he is simply "not seen" by his oppressors can be an advantage in *Invisible Man*, allowing the protagonist to feel as though he truly exists in his own world—a realm that protects his identity.

The prologue of Ralph Ellison's story presents the idea of invisibility, allowing the reader to examine how racism has affected the protagonist's life. The protagonist describes himself as invisible and takes pleasure in his invisibility.

1.1 The Individual and the Bildungsroman

Invisible Man is not only a piercing fictionalization of the experiences of a black man living in America; it is also the actualization of a traditional Western genre, the Bildungsroman, or the coming-of-age novel. As such, the text on the one hand offers a critique of the treatment and living conditions of blacks in post-war America, but on the other also the story of an individual's search for an authentic identity. On this search, the narrator experiences many difficult moments, but in the end, he realizes that this journey is precisely that which defines him as a person.⁴ Seen through this lens, his search as presented in the novel, including all the times he has been wronged, ultimately does him good in his quest for individuation. As such, the focal point is his maturation, but the way the novel is framed leads to, as side effect, it also critiquing the social and political aspects of the society he lives in. It is thus necessary to align the narrator's narrative arc with that of the conventional coming-of-age novel, which stresses the "bourgeois education of a young man,"⁵ using a "guiding, masculine figure" (Avery, 9) and representing "buildings as centers of knowledge." (Avery, 8) The specific differences and their implications will be then inferred in the context of *Invisible Man* being a universal figure interwoven into the three layers represented across the text.

It is by now almost a cliché to compare the text's features to jazz improvisation, nonetheless in its treatment of the Bildungsroman genre the characterization is applicable. That is because like a jamming musician the author takes what tradition has to offer and appropriates it to his own unique artistic expression: "In the traditional Bildungsroman, the narrator's goal is to find a meaningful position within the production of capitalism through bourgeois employment, and adherence to the social institutions of marriage and the nuclear family." (Avery, 3) The spin *Invisible Man* puts on this is that not only does the narrator get money from odd jobs, charitable individuals, and political organizations instead of a fully-fledged "employment," but also because the social institutions such as "the family, the church, education, political organization had suppressed the individual,"⁶ which is why after the prologue he starts out devoid of agency and a sense of self. The trajectory of the narrator's "maturation" is then not becoming one with the system, as the traditional Bildungsroman would typically illustrate, but learning to both cope with and to use to his advantage his social castration and heterogeneous identity in the melting pot of America. And, through the hardships endured, he ultimately does just that: "I am not complaining, nor am I protesting either. It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves." (Ellison, 3)

"Each new experience that the narrator undergoes makes him aware of a reality which constantly reveals itself as the reverse of what it had appeared to him initially." (Ghosh, 4) He is at first a naïve, "submissive boy and aspiring student in the South"⁷ that feels completely beholden to white men for his chance at education. This naivety is first represented by the fact that even just to receive an education he had to be first injured and humiliated at the Battle Royale, and his expulsion from college is the result of conflicting orders of his superiors (Ellison, 139) – and it takes this for him to start realizing that he is being manipulated. As the narrative progresses, he gets into similar situations where he is under somebody else's authority, and receives orders conflicting either with other orders or his own morality, which always results in him getting into trouble, through which he then

reflects what had just happened and furthers his sense of self; those specific moments will be analyzed in the following sections, nonetheless what is at heart of the issue is that in this particular text the Bildungsroman trajectory intermittently requires a dynamo in the form of the individual entering liminal states of being that push him towards self-realization and maturation.

The expulsion from college is a major diversion from the Bildungsroman, even an ironizing of its conventions, because it “does not hold fast to the generic constraints of the Goethean [sic] Bildungsroman prototype of representing the bourgeois education of a young man.” (Avery, 17) An analogical inversion of the role of a Bildungsheld’s education is located in the episode that leads to Invisible Man’s expulsion – when he drives Mr. Norton, “a self-aggrandizing patriarch who sees his 'fate connected to that of the narrator’”⁸ to Trueblood. Mr. Norton is at first presented as the conventional “guiding, masculine figure attempting to mold the destiny of the young protagonist,” (Avery, 9) only to be himself taught a lesson in life from Trueblood, one he has serious problems processing. This is another instance where the narrative takes the genre’s conventions and appropriates them to question the status quo that the narrator had originally taken for granted, and it is one of the first steps in his individuation process.

Up to that point, the narrator had been brought up in the college environment with high standards on blacks. After encountering the incestuous yet fascinating farmer, (Ellison, 67) he grows to resent him; “by naming his character as Trueblood, Ellison is playing with the stereotype of a Black man with excessive sexuality” (Komal, 3) and who admits that ever since his act he has been supported by local whites, which goes completely against the expectations set by the college education. The narrator then “does not understand why the white folks treat Jim Trueblood, the sharecropper who had brought disgrace upon the black community, with compassion and sympathy,” (Ghosh, 4) and Mr. Norton even gives Trueblood a hundred-dollar bill before leaving, something seemingly out of place for a prestigious associate of the Southern college, angering the narrator. Furthermore, the

institution's headmaster Bledsoe "acts as a despot, the college's presiding tyrant known to students as 'Old Bucket-head'."9 This is another spin on Bildungsroman conventions because the genre traditionally "romanticizes buildings as centers of knowledge" (Avery, 8) yet in the novel the college is portrayed in a paradoxical manner of being run by questionable individuals and of being both the source of education and of agency-suppressing perspectives.

This leads into another feature of *Invisible Man* in which Bildungsroman strategies are employed ironically: in the way the narrator's inner world relates to the outer one. Traditional coming-of-age novels typically have a protagonist who is "at once ordinary and extraordinary."10 While he is ordinary in that he starts out as a conformist Afro-American fearing and following the status quo, he is also very different from many other people, which is seen not only in his capacity for delivering moving speeches, but also a more general use of language – the speech of other Afro-Americans in the novel is in marked Afro-American dialect, yet he himself speaks in the Standard American variety. Furthermore, the distinction does not end with language, but also a general good heartedness, which is displayed towards him only by the US veteran and Mary Rambo, as will be further discussed below. He is as such both ordinary and extraordinary, and it has direct implications in his attainment of identity. This is another diversion from the conventional Bildungsroman because his extraordinariness problematizes his maturation despite being an essential ingredient to it.

Although part of the narrator's maturation is learning to deliver speeches, there is also the inverted question of the effect of speeches on the narrator and his development, and here comes into play the US veteran, who "arouses the narrator to "'become his own father.' He is the one who sees through the falseness of Mr. Norton's behavior. He attempts to dismantle the narrator's acceptance of the pre-ordained role of black men," (Komal, 3) saying "come out of the fog," "play the game, but don't believe in it," "learn how it operates, learn how *you* operate." (Ellison, 149) Because this is such blatantly transgressive advice the narrator does not respond or reflect upon the words much, but they precisely foreshadow his entire individuation process, this as such being an instance of indirect meta-narration. The fog can be read as a metaphor for

the narrator's agency-suppressing upbringing, the game as life in an unjust society and the coming-of-age advice really is for him to stop helping those who keep him down. As such, it is on the one hand a person aiming to be another "guiding masculine figure" of authority in his life and one the narrator does not pay much attention to, but on the other it is advice that sums up his later development, and it aligns with the words of somebody very close to the narrator.

Earlier in the novel there is the speech of the narrator's grandfather which may have been what by a large margin had set in motion the narrator's maturation:

I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open. (Ellison, 16)

The narrator then admits that these instructions caused him "much anxiety." (Ellison, 16) It was possibly the single most transgressive approach to the status quo he has heard up to that time and coming from his grandfather the words were all the more impactful, and contributive to the narrator's self-reflection and progressive development. When seen in the context of the entire novel, he not only ends up living up to these words, but he takes their meaning to a whole new level by isolating himself from society and paving his own way. His grandfather's "advice to overturn the colonialist by the appearance of agreement" (Komal, 4) recurs several times across the narrative and *Invisible Man* learns to understand it, which is another instance when he shifts from the coming-of-age novel's conventions: the system is rigged against him, so he decides to stop playing by its rules and takes matters into his own hands.

Before managing to do that, he must first experience other difficulties. When he leaves college, he manages to get an odd job at a color plant, but after coming under conflicting orders there is an accident, and he ends up in the factory hospital. This part further illustrates the importance of his individuation:

The existential dilemmas of the typical coming-of-age genre are playfully literalised as the doctors eventually try to identify their patient. They hold up cards asking questions such as, ‘WHAT IS YOUR NAME?’, ‘WHO... ARE... YOU?’, and ‘WHO WAS BUCKEYE THE RABBIT?’ in reference to a popular children’s song. Invisible Man is left alone on his hospital bed, trapped in a daze and, ‘fretting over [his] identity’. (Avery, 13)

It is a moment of meta-narration because it reveals the narrator’s primary concern, while being asked by the tortuous medical staff, creating an ironic undertone. He is later discharged from the hospital and realizes an important thing: he is no longer afraid of important men, because he cannot expect anything of them. (Ellison, 241) This marks an important change in his attitude, because it sharply contrasts with his previous subservience. While he remains naïve, he has started to become himself and admits to his emotions flowing freer, something of great importance in the context of him having been brought up to serve others, and it took him getting injured both on the levels of his dignity and bodily health to realize this, which is another instance of a liminal state being the departure point for self-reflection and important realizations on the way to maturation.

After leaving the hospital the narrator starts coming under the influence of his Afro-American landlady, Mary Rambo, who is another ambivalent character in the novel who plays an important role in his development. She is one of those characters who in fact tell him things that are in line with his eventual personality changes, following the grandfather and the US veteran. She provides him with accommodation without asking for much in return, and is lenient with his debts towards her (Ellison, 312) – this is a rare instance of people wanting to help him, but that is not all: she keeps telling him about how the young generation have to take leadership and responsibility, (Ellison, 251) which is precisely what he later starts doing, and this qualifies as another meta-narrative foreshadowing. It is also a play on Bildungsroman conventions because here the “guiding, masculine figure” is in fact a good-hearted Afro-American woman. Nonetheless, it also demonstrates how “all along in his journey, the narrator assumes the identities that have been thrust upon him by others.” (Ghosh,

4) So while this is another instance of him being under the influence of others' wishes, it also shows that when one is with the right people, they may have things to say which are those one precisely needs to hear at a given point in life in order to advance as a person.

Another epiphany takes place when the narrator has yams from a street stall. After eating the food from his childhood, he becomes more in touch with himself. (Ellison, 256) The scene is important in that in previous chapters he would get offended by Afro-Americans not behaving as the powers would like them to (as with Trueblood), yet as he eats the messy food in the middle of the street, he realizes he is completely unashamed for enjoying this particular food due to its "swift stab of nostalgia." (Ellison, 252) Yams are considered lowly, yet he enjoys them, and decides he wants to live that way from now on. (Ellison, 256) This revelation is another moment when he sheds some of the standards, he had learned to take for his own despite them being imposed upon him by others. It is a moment of conflict between the individual and society, and a turn from the traditional Bildungsroman trajectory as he realizes he feels more authentic when he does not follow some of society's notions of decency, which seems to go quite against the "bourgeois education of a young man" (Avery, 17) of the conventional coming-of-age novel: he in fact needs to unlearn some the larger structure's standards to feel authentic.

The theme of assimilation into a larger structure is also relevant in the context of an entity that that has a huge impact on his persona after the yam scene: The Brotherhood. He first comes into contact with Brother Jack after spontaneously giving a speech during the eviction of a black family; it is not the content but the form which impresses Jack, and the scene is symbolic of the stage of his development: when violence is about to break out, it "activates" his "learned shock-absorbing phrases" (Ellison, 265) to keep chaos at bay, in the process of which he essentially takes a stand for the white evictors' cause, as "he improvises *against* the crowd's potential for action,"¹¹ but as violence inevitably happens and the blacks rush inside the house, he joins, "dashing down the steps and seizing a chair and starting back, no longer struggling against or thinking about the nature of my action." (Ellison, 271) Not only does he

go against the societal constructs that a conventional Bildungsroman protagonist would assimilate into, but it also shows the ambivalent forces inside him in conflict; furthermore, it is ironic that Jack chooses him for the organization afterwards, because the speech was against what the organization purports to stand for.

The narrator joins the Brotherhood based on it offering his dream job of being an orator as “he sets out to be a leader whose speech is action.” (Callahan, 60) Jack “recruits Invisible Man for the Brotherhood organization because he has use for the young man’s vagrant, unfocused, uncontextualized capacity for eloquence,” (Callahan, 69) but the narrator has his doubts about Jack (Ellison, 283-4) and the organization (Ellison, 323) from the beginning, as they essentially offer him everything he ever wanted, but at a cost – he has to perfectly learn their ways, politics and manners. (Ellison, 293) Since his journey is one of moving “from childhood to the age of manhood, and from the South to the North, and he is one of those heroes who move from the provinces to the capital, to the center of power, from innocence to experience,” (Klein, 109) it is a step illustrating that despite the fact that by now he has already come quite a long way from the start, he still has not completely lost his naivety, attained agency or understood identity, because he believes somebody else can imbue him with these instead of taking matters completely into his own hands.

This repeated fallacy of believing that he may attain identity through others is manifest when he is outfitted by the Brotherhood with a new name and clothing: “The new suit imparted a newness to me. It was the clothes and the new name and the circumstances. It was a newness too subtle to put into thought, but there it was. I was becoming someone else.” (Ellison, 323) It is a paradox of the individual because he feels as if he is changing because of these new things, yet he is repeating a pattern he had been falling for the whole time, and he mistakes external changes for internal ones. This shows how at this point of the narrative he is more self-aware, but his naivety, personal ambition and lack of experience still lead him to fulfilling the wishes of the Brotherhood which promises him a future. In reality, he is only being given yet another uniform of a power structure (as opposed to actually meaningful changes in his behavior

induced by dressing as Rinehart, a sovereign individual, later in the novel), but thanks to his previous experiences he at least reflects his own status within it. In fact, he frets over whether he will “become someone else,” (Ellison, 323) which in a roundabout way points to his inner desire to become himself. This is another of the ways the Brotherhood has an important impact on his personal development within the Bildungsroman.

The genre’s conventions are commented upon in another instance of meta-narration, where after his first speech for the Brotherhood he claims that “my technique was old but I was saying new things.” (Ellison, 340) It can be read as a reference to how the novel works with previous formal traditions but with different aims. The speech itself is important in the genre’s context because it is another moment when the narrator develops as a person: he improvises in the heat of the moment, and following a stream of consciousness he confesses to “feeling more human,” (Ellison, 334) having been possessed by words without exactly understanding them, as he “generates the preliminary electricity of action by virtue of his sudden authority as an articulate presence and personality.” (Callahan, 71) This moment of revelation and development is enabled by coming into contact with the community, and again it has required a liminal state, being left to his own devices in the middle of an emotional speech to realize something important for himself. Here the Brotherhood has provided him a platform for personal development, but the whole thing ultimately does turn out to be too good to be true.

With time, Invisible Man outgrows the organization as he starts realizing they are merely using him to their ends. He is first turned off by the worry of a Brotherhood member “if he is black enough” (Ellison, 291) to do his job, and the breaking point is during one meeting where he is told “you were not hired to think” (Ellison, 451) after having organized a funeral for Tod Clifton. Being scolded for doing something out of best intentions for the community lays bare the cold machinery of the organization which purports to be aiming to help the same community. At first, he was “greatly impressed,” (Ellison, 295) but this state “does not last long as he is quickly made to realize that ‘individuals don’t count for much; it’s what the group wants, what the group does. Everyone here submerges his personal ambitions for the common

achievement’.” (Ghosh, 4) Having realized this, he no longer equates his identity with the Brotherhood and is finally set to become a sovereign individual on his own terms, following the updated Bildungsroman trajectory towards his individuation.

A decisive development of his personality takes place after leaving the Brotherhood when the narrator tries on different clothes and is taken aback by how much it changes in others’ perception of his persona: after donning a hat and sunglasses he is being mistaken for the local preacher-hustler Rinehart, who “represents an alterable conception of identity in which a person’s identity is a function of a situation.” (Komal, 4) As this discovery completely changes his idea of selfhood, he decides to be more cynical, like he imagines Rinehart to be. (Ellison, 488) “By attempting to come to terms with Rinehart as a phenomenon, the hero steps toward articulating his own autonomous desire”¹² and that is the breaking point in his development, because he no longer needs to be imbued with identity and agency by others. He realizes his invisibility, later symbolically underscored in admitting to losing his identity in a crowd during a race riot, (Ellison, 530) which was initiated by one important adversary: Ras the Exhorter turned Ras the Destroyer.

Ras is a peculiar character in that he is the Afro-American stoking emotion in Harlem with powerful, emotional speeches that urge blacks to take up arms against the whites. (Ellison, 359) He is important in the context of the narrator’s development because not only is he the ideological opponent of the Brotherhood and the indirect causer of Tod Clifton’s death, but in that much of what he says makes sense to the narrator regarding the conditions of Afro-Americans in a white society, (Ellison, 358) but he is simply too much to be taken at face value. That is because he “rejects everything associated with white American culture and instead adopts an identity based on his internalized image of Africa--one that is, ironically, also determined by the white gaze.”¹³ This is symbolized in one of the final scenes where he dresses up in a Chieftain costume during the riot, wreaking havoc left and right. As such he becomes an untenable role model because he “represents complete rejection of life under the dominant white culture,” (Nyikos, 1) which is impossible given the circumstances, and his capacity for

mobilizing people is taken away from him when the narrator throws back a spear at him, piercing both his cheeks and stripping him of the instruments of his eloquence.

The final race riot fulfills the narrator's development because he recognizes the "beautiful absurdity of their American identity and mine." (Ellison, 539) It is a climactic moment because he finally sees beyond the divisive fragmentation of society and individual opinions and claims on truth. He learns the complex spirit of America and adopts it as his own in his unique way, achieving freedom. That is at heart of his trajectory; the city is a melting pot that confuses people in their perception of selfhood.

By recognizing the absurdity of society, the narrator has succeeded to a large extent in freeing himself from the prison of a reflected image formed of the stereotypes of the white imagination, reinforced, at times, by the attitudes of people like Bledsoe. His freedom to live out his own absurdity has, ultimately, enabled him to study the lesson of his own life. He has explored innumerable possibilities of carving out a meaningful existence for himself and he knows that he can only move ahead or stay underground. (Ghosh, 4)

His journey ends when he falls down a dark manhole, where he "attains symbolic freedom when during the riots he burns down all the documents to get some light." (Komal, 4) That is the conclusion to his exhilarating journey.

The question thus arises what it is exactly that Invisible Man has learned, and how he has changed. As has been discovered, he cannot live a fulfilling life when living on other people's terms:

His experiences teach him that the act of naming is linked inextricably to issues of power and control. When he attempts to live according to the dictates of others, he loses his autonomy and suffers repeated betrayals. He discovers the true meaning of his life only after he assumes responsibility for naming himself by telling his own story.¹⁴

It was his quest to interpret and integrate his grandfather's words into his experience, and the only possible way to do so is to stop reading his story as the people who only wish to dominate him have written it, and to write it himself instead. But in order to do that he needs to

learn the hard way, to temper his naivety through experience, because “each time he has met with the despair of betrayal and duplicity, he has come a step closer to recognizing his potentialities for coping with the pressures of life,” (Ghosh, 5) becoming stronger as a whole. “He is no longer blind, for he has learned to see and understand things for himself instead of blindly following the path cut out for him by others,” (Ghosh, 4) and that is the final proof of the novel’s status as an experimental Bildungsroman: when tradition and habit no longer reflect the dynamism of reality, it takes artistic reimagination to salvage what is relevant and to find new textures of difference. It has thus been shown how conventional Bildungsroman tropes are employed differently and sometimes even ironically: he cannot undergo bourgeois maturation to assimilate into the system because he is discriminated against, his state of being both ordinary and extra-ordinary problematizes his development, and the roles of masculine mentors are inverted. As such the novel is made impactful by its form and content aligning in transgression of convention, one that may help shed new light on the human condition in more contemporary times.

The stress on personal development is also what makes the narrator a timeless, universal figure. He is, after all, on a path for freedom and identity, and “these are not only Afro-American quests.”¹⁵ The narrator’s encounters with people and organizations that claim to be acting to the individual’s benefit can be read analogously to the world of mass media where one is seemingly provided with a platform to define their identity, only to later realize that the deal was too good to be true and that these same organizations are using the individual to their own economic and political benefit. Any person entering the world of today is faced with these issues and it is one of the merits of the *Invisible Man* Bildungsroman that it shows the difficulty of navigating a complex post-industrial society, and the importance of personal experience to attaining selfhood and agency.

1.2 Oppression of Society

It is by now evident that the society and the way it is organized as portrayed in *Invisible Man* is deeply flawed and set against an individual who transgresses the boundaries set by those in power. This is the moment when the angle of individual experience interacts with the one of the social as represented in the novel. This chapter thus aims to go into deeper detail in regard to the “powers that be,” how their mechanisms operate, where that leaves the individual beyond the *Bildungsroman* trajectory and how the way the society is represented in the novel shows Ellison’s criticism of its unjust conditions. Analyzing the presented layer of society will require involving more complex theory and a new linear reading of the text, focusing instead on manifestations of the other in the novel, and how the social layer of experience affects the hero: “he is thrust into a nightmare not, despite the fact that Ellison has said it, because the frustration of identity is peculiarly the American theme. He is condemned first of all because he is black.” (Klein, 83)

The very first chapter contains the Battle Royale scene during which the narrator and several of his classmates are first sexually tortured by the sight of a naked blonde and then blindfolded and sent into a ring to fight one another. (Ellison, 20) “A great part of the novel, indeed, is in that initial episode. What is revealed here is what is going to be revealed to the hero, in different circumstances, but with not much modification, in his every subsequent adventure.” (Klein, 115) This is because the blacks are given a sense of agency, but it is illusory and only works to the benefit and entertainment of the powerful, a setting indeed recurrent across the novel stemming the narrator’s naivety. It is his signature personality trait that plays an important role in his interactions with the social layer of experience: “From the start he is anxious about the battle: ‘I suspected that fighting a battle royal might detract from the dignity of my speech’,” (Jarenski, 5) and as will be later shown, the shedding of this naivety also changes his conduct during social interactions.

During the Battle Royal scene, the cruelty the powerful men project on the young black boys are three-fold: sexual, moral and economic. (Klein, 117) Sexual cruelty is manifest in the naked blonde, who is actually the precursor to the Battle Royal, functioning as an arouser of emotions in the boys as “juxtaposition of black men and white women as visual objects of America’s racial and sexual fantasies.”

(Jarenski, 2) Moral cruelty then takes place in that the whites make them the “agents of, and at the time sacrifices to, the forbidden, everything that is dark, their irrational craving for cruelty, their greed and their sex and their itch for self- destruction, the swoon of the id.”

(Klein, 117) What is happening is that the powerful men vicariously experience all these things through the blacks without partaking in the same actions, thus, effectively relieving their conscience and morality. The third form of cruelty is the economic exploitation, which is present in the blacks “being made to scramble for coins on an electrified rug”

(Klein, 116) which also has the side effect of preventing the blacks from becoming allies in the ring, as the sight of money activates their selfish impulses, and they are rendered incapable of fighting back against their common enemy. Because “power is not merely physical force but a pervasive human dynamic determining our relationships to others,”¹⁶ it can be seen how it is at play during the Battle Royale. It is used to make the black students do the bidding of the rich who use their power to force the “entertainers” into a liminal state while preventing any backlash, and this microcosmic scene can be read as a reflection of a wider image of the entire society in the novel. Furthermore, by presenting the event as a competition for a scholarship, this treatment of the marginalized also has the effect of reinforcing hegemony, which “refers to the process by which dominant culture maintains a dominant position: for example, the use of institutions to formalize power and” ... “the inculcation of the populace in the ideals of the hegemonic group through education.”

(Felluga, 127) As such, the white overlords have great influence across a wide array of tools to maintain their position, and this is manifest further in the fact that after the battle and his subsequent speech, the narrator receives the reward of a scholarship at a school that reinforces

the status quo via its education, in effect intertwining the social and individual layers of experience and directly invoking another association in regard to the society in *Invisible Man*.

The problem is that even had the narrator completed his education at the school, his achievements would have been alienated from him: “alienation is the process whereby workers are made to feel foreign to the products of their own labor” ... and are “alienated from their product precisely because they no longer own the product.” (Felluga, 15) Seeing as the narrator works very laboriously to attain a sense of identity, had this goal been achieved through the organizations attempting to mold him and to take away his agency, they would not allow him to harvest that fruit fully, as there would always be the threat of being punished had he stepped out of line. One such instance is the college, where the black students are taught to follow the racist status quo, and another is the Brotherhood which brainwashes its members with propaganda, also requiring that they submit their individuality to the organization and do not go beyond party policy. (Ellison, 451) In both instances the individuals trapped within the gears of the respective institutions are exploited to benefit the elements of power within the social layer that the novel represents.

The initial catalyst to the narrator’s expulsion from college were the conflicting orders, since “without considering the implicit meaning in his grandfather's message, the narrator starts believing that the only way to become a part of history is to follow the person in power,” (Komal, 2) and this naivety leads to a rude awakening. That this actually led to him being kicked out shows just how much these particular authorities are in fact oppressive and totalitarian: “The college perpetuates hierarchical ideology, where the individual talents and thinking are prohibited,” (Komal, 3) discarding those who do not produce the desired effects. As Ihab Hassan goes on to argue, “the contemporary world presents a continued affront to man, and that his response must therefore be the response of the rebel or victim, living under the shadow of death”¹⁷ and that is precisely the condition *Invisible Man*’s narrator is in. “His expectations boomerang because they are not based on reality. His inherited views of the world do not allow him to visualize the true nature of things.” (Ghosh, 4) He is constantly being

wronged across the narrative, sometimes even coming close to dying, and he ends up living inproduct precisely because they no longer own the product.” (Felluga, 15) Seeing as the narrator works very laboriously to attain a sense of identity, had this goal been achieved through the organizations attempting to mold him and to take away his agency, they would not allow him to harvest that fruit fully, as there would always be the threat of being punished had he stepped out of line. One such instance is the college, where the black students are taught to follow the racist status quo, and another is the Brotherhood which brainwashes its members with propaganda, also requiring that they submit their individuality to the organization and do not go beyond party policy. (Ellison, 451) In both instances the individuals trapped within the gears of the respective institutions are exploited to benefit the elements of power within the social layer that the novel represents.

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directly suppressed by the power embedded into the social.

The narrator's agency-suppressing upbringing is later even made into a metaphor at the Golden Day when the veteran tells him to "come out from the fog," (Ellison, 149) and the narrator's reflections of the statue by the school provide an area for further analysis of the institution as a whole:

In my mind's eye I see the bronze statue of the college Founder, the cold Father symbol, his hands outstretched in the breathtaking gesture of lifting a veil that flutters in hard, metallic folds above the face of a kneeling slave; and I am standing puzzled, unable to decide whether the veil is really being lifted, or lowered more firmly in place. (Ellison, 39)

This is a symbolical representation of how while on the one hand, the college attempts to represent itself as a structure that in some way awakens its black students, it on the other actually, makes their life a lot more difficult. As such the statue is a summarization of the dual effect institutions and power have in the novel and in the narrator's life – they present themselves as helpful, but the truth may be entirely different, the reflection on this aspect of the statue is also the literal departure point for his journey through society, as he is just leaving the South for New York. "The shift in setting in the second part to Harlem again foregrounds the motif of movement" (Komal, 4) which shows how the narrator follows the trend of American society, where "the first half of the 20th century was marked by a massive redistribution of the U.S. population, with millions leaving the rural South in favor of industrial centers in the Northeast, Midwest, and West,"¹⁹ unaware of the fact his attempt to use migration "As a mechanism for attaining higher absolute earnings or occupational status" (Flippen, 3) were undermined from the start by Bledsoe's power projected through the

envelopes he is provided.

After initial failures caused by the “recommendation letters” the narrator manages to get a job at Liberty Paints known for its Optic White paint, which is sold to the government. (Ellison, 190) The narrator learns the famed paint is made of white and one drop of black dope, and “the ironical situation is made more apparent when the narrator confides to his readers that the paint is going to be applied to a government building, envisaging the subscription of government authorities in this discriminatory practice.” (Komal, 3) And of course, it doesn’t take him long until to get into trouble again: “He is not the right dope. He is an innocent who cannot quite meet the precarious propriety established in the industrial North between black and white.” (Klein, 119) After being sent off for lunch by his superintendent he inadvertently runs into the union, for which reason the same man then threatens to kill him. However, “the hero is an innocent who in his innocence will choose neither side. He is therefore a traitor to both sides, and so he brings about an explosion” (Klein, 119) which is again a direct result of conflicting orders without him being at fault of bringing it upon himself – apart from not having yet ridded himself of naivety.

The fact that the narrator keeps running into trouble is inherently embedded into his journey because his trajectory is not, as has been asserted, of assimilating into the system, but of reaching a state of freedom and capacity to act:

These initiatory incidents season him for a
society of violently quick changes, phony
appearances, disappointments and foul caprice.

As such an incautious dupe, Invisible Man
stands in a very long line of American
innocents, earnest seekers of success who find
their faces in the dust. (O’Meally, 15-16)

The scene in the factory is another moment of alienation from other blacks and people of

similar social standing, because both of these parties were automatically hostile to him. With the union, the reason is the discord planted into the employees by their employers because “the plant has typically been hiring negroes in order to undersell its union labor,” (Klein, 119) and Brockway hates him for meeting with the union as he fears they are after his job (Ellison, 220) – which is in reality an echo of Bledsoe and the obsession with one’s standing in an oppressive institution. This is how the factory scene further illustrates the exploitation of individuals by those in power, showing how *Invisible Man* represents the difficult interactions of the social with the individual layers of experience in an unjust society.

After the explosion in the factory, he ends up in the hospital, which is another scene where the established institutions exert cruelty over the marginalized: the doctors “believe, as he is an unidentified African American male; he must be a criminal whose personality they can remold through the wonder of medical science.” (Avery, 13) They call him racist names and want to lobotomize him so he will “live as he has to live and with absolute integrity,” (Ellison, 228) which is a major diversion from what medical staff ought to be doing. This grotesque representation further develops the image of societal institutions as interwoven into the fabric of hegemonic power, because that “absolute integrity” would most likely be a state of complete empty headedness, where the affected does not reflect critically on the status quo but merely follows its whims, unable to fight or even think back. The scene illustrates how the industry, business and medical authority are in fact one intertwined racist social entity, the same Other constantly keeping the individual down. Nonetheless, it is not such a simple binary opposition. Once the narrator reaches New York he comes across the scene of an eviction of blacks from their home by white authorities (Ellison, 257) and tries to prevent violence from erupting by delivering a speech, but it ultimately ends in violence anyway and the police arrive. (Ellison, 272) The final result isn’t known as he escapes, but what is interesting, and “because his words contradict the people’s mood, his speech has briefly the effect he desires.” (Callahan, 66) This illustrates just how effectively the social has indoctrinated the individual via college, and how he in naivety unwittingly projected the will

of the very powers that oppress him. Nonetheless as the violence erupts, he joins the cause of the Afro-Americans, and as such literally becomes the epitome of the clash of authority's powerful hooks and the marginalized people's raw energy, thus reflecting a wider problem in the society in the one given scene. He then escapes the scene with the help of the Brotherhood., it is from the very beginning clear of their interaction with the narrator that they are another powerful institution that wants to use him to their ends; Jack first believes the narrator had "aroused them so quickly to action," (Ellison, 279) which shows how he because of his collectivist, scientific ideology refuses to recognize that a personal, emotional bond galvanizes Invisible Man and the other black individuals into a sense of community.

To Jack, Invisible Man is nothing more or less than a black voice worthy only to serve the Brotherhood's program. (Callahan, 69)

Furthermore, the narrator reflects that Jack "gave the impression that he understood much and spoke out of a knowledge far deeper than appeared on the surface of his words," (Ellison, 283) likely because Jack uses the "scientific" Brotherhood lingo and is in fact a propaganda machine that recruits unwitting marginalized people by promising them emancipation. That is Jack's source of power and also the means by which it reduplicates itself. And since "power is always tied to the actions of individual people as delimited by the various discourses and disciplines of a given time period" (Felluga, 121) he through his use of language attempts to give the impression of a deeper knowledge that he may in the future share with others, and when Jack is read as a metonymical part of the organization, the social here confuses the individual with signifiers convincing the less experienced into joining.

An issue that arises from the narrator entering the organization are his motives. His mental process regarding joining is "if I refused to join them, where would I go – to a job as

porter at the railroad station? At least here was a chance to speak,” (Ellison, 296) where he “Defines his freedom and ambition in terms of public speaking but leaves others to define language, leadership and power.” (Callahan, 69) This is a problematic attitude associated with his naivety which tends to get him into trouble, and he did at first intend to refuse the job (Ellison, 284) – but then there returns a familiar issue when he smells Mary Rambo preparing cabbage again: “this was the third time within the week, and it dawned on me that Mary must be short of money. And here I’ve been congratulating myself for refusing a job, I thought, when I don’t even know how much money I owe her.” (Ellison, 285) His sense of morality is disturbed as he realizes joining the Brotherhood would provide him with the necessary finances to pay off his debts. So even though he had been set on not joining, the economic issue is the deciding factor, and it is another way in which Ellison represents how the established social power structures exploit the individual to do their bidding.

Once he is officially part of the Brotherhood, he is invited to a dinner party to be presented to the rest of the organization, (Ellison, 287) whose real workings become even more clear.

He is stunned to hear this and thinks in silence by the window: “Who is she anyway, Brother Jack’s wife, his girlfriend? Maybe she wants to see me sweat coal tar, ink, shoe polish, graphite. What was I, a man or a natural resource?” (Ellison, 292) This is a fitting contemplation because he likens how people exploit him the way capitalism exploits nature, a man-made construct draining something innocent of energy. It also illustrates how full of empty promises and superficiality the organization really is. However, he does not bring the racist remarks up and continues conversing with the others.

It is during the party that he starts being brainwashed by this power structure, and it is through Jack: “Did you study economics?’ ‘Some.’ ‘Sociology?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Well, let me advise you to forget it. You’ll be given books to read along with some material that explains our program in detail.” (Ellison, 293) This is precisely how the organization instills its power over

him – by means of inculcating the “scientific” approach to society and their view of the world. It is another instance where the narrator falls for a party attempting to use him to their goal, yet here the implications are even bigger than with some of the previous instances, because here he starts getting involved in politics and adjusts his language and method according to the Brotherhood’s expectations. He is then even given a new name – however, “the fact that the narrator is given a new identity while joining indicates that the organization does not commemorate his individuality” (Komal, 3-4) and is only trying to exploit his talents in their pursuits – another illustration of how power embedded into the social layer in the novel directly works against the individual.

The purported aim of the Brotherhood is “working for a better world for all people. It’s that simple. Too many have been dispossessed of their heritage, and we have banded together in brotherhood to do something about it.” (Ellison, 292-3) That is however a very general ambition that is to be achieved by “moving them to action just as you did this morning” (Ellison, 293) – which, as has been ascertained, was a complete misrepresentation on Jack’s part. Even though the narrator later manages to effectively raise the crowd’s emotions to Jack’s satisfaction, “the pure ideologues resist Jack’s non sequitur and accuse Invisible Man of a ‘Wild, hysterical, politically irresponsible and dangerous speech’ antithetical to the Brotherhood’s ideology,” (Callahan, 71) because he wasn’t yet too familiar with the pamphlets.

This goes on to show how the organization has inner struggles because even the “scientific methods” seem to vary from member to member, and it reveals how ultimately the organization is not as unified as it presents itself, which is a foreshadowing of the internal issues that in the end cause the narrator to outgrow the Brotherhood.

In concluding the question of the effects of society on the narrator, it is necessary to intertwine the social layer with that of the individual as presented in the novel: the social institutions in *Invisible Man* torture marginalized people through sexuality, morals and economic status. They inculcate beliefs via education in a manner that benefits them, not the

educated, and alienate individuals from their achievements or punish them if they step out of line. This often leads to shock in the narrator because “he does not realize that there is a gaping breach, most particularly for blacks, dividing American’s ideals or ‘sacred documents’” ... “From the way people really treat one another.” (O’Meally, 15) It is within this difficult environment that he must learn that “by viewing the world comically, not only can Invisible Man ‘grin ‘em to death’, but he can also nurture his own life, taking all things, however absurdly baffling, as they come.” (O’Meally, 18) As such, humor is an important bridging element which he learns to use to his advantage in interacting with the social layer, and is a way in which the individual finally goes against the sharp angle of the social, having made these important realizations and lost his naivety.

As Sigmund Freud writes in *Civilization and its Discontents*, “the urge for freedom is directed against particular forms and demands of civilization, or against it altogether.”²⁰ This is particularly palpable in *Invisible Man* because as has been shown, the particular demands of civilization are that the narrator stays in line and does not overstep the position he has been designed by the society, which inherently clashes with his desire for freedom. By isolating himself underground and by coming to terms with his grandfather’s advice he shifts his rebellious position from that of trying to find his identity within the society’s paradigm to one of realizing his identity cannot come from within the outside, because such self-definition is associated with eventual alienation from the products of said labor. He must abolish his attempts to negotiate with civilization to finalize his individual development. “He rejects, thereby, the definitions imposed on him by his social environment,” (Ghosh, 6) which is a radical shift in the relationship between the individual and the society he lives in.

It is because, as has been shown, the interactions of the social and individual layers as presented in the novel show a deeply problematic environment suffused with racism and injustice projected by those in power in order to fortify their hegemony. “A good part of the struggles of mankind center round the single task of finding an expedient accommodation ...

between this claim of the individual and the cultural claims of the group” (Freud, 43) – and Invisible Man shows that in the context of marginalized groups whose education is based around maintaining the status quo, the conflict is all the more heated because the collective will seems intensively poised against the desire for freedom of those who stand at the other side of the barrier – “and no society can tolerate a position of real desire without its structures of exploitation, servitude, and hierarchy being compromised.”²¹ This chapter has thus shown the problematics of the interactions between the individual and social layers in the novel, and the interplay shows Ellison’s criticism of the societal arrangement without turning the text into an overt protest novel. In dealing with the difficult society the narrator “moves, moreover, through what seems at all points a linear exploration of the “Negro problem,” through ideologies by which it might be approached.” (Klein, 108) This leads into the third layer of experience that the novel explores: politics.

1.3 The Investigation of Political Context, Concept, and Ideology

Even though the actual political stances of the two ideologies used to approach the race question in Invisible Man are not explicitly stated, the perspectives and manners of speaking that the Brotherhood and Ras display can be analyzed in order to ascertain their political stances on the Left-Right continuum, and how they retroactively interact with the individual and social layers of experience in the novel. “The narrator’s deep sense of commitment to the cause of the underprivileged” (Ghosh, 4) is the reason why he gets involved in politics and it is the conduit to the novel treating the issue. It is thus the goal of this chapter to discuss the represented ideologies that compete for Harlem’s following, what means they use to gain it, and how the way the political layer of experience is represented in Invisible Man shows Ellison’s covert criticism of radical politics. It will be illustrated how the parties operate to gain members, how they influence the narrator, and how he creates his politics after having experienced public political life.

As the previous chapters have demonstrated, the powers and institutions in the novel marginalize and exploit particular groups and individuals. It can be thus argued that racism is one of the aspects of the dominant ideology. To define the term, “ideology functions as the superstructure of a civilization: the conventions and culture that make up the dominant ideas of a society.” (Felluga, 146) However, in essence the novel presents a clash of ideologies, or, a hegemonic one colliding with alternative ideologies, and the narrator partakes in the attempt to restructure society by participating in the Brotherhood’s political activity. As has been shown, he initially does not take the political level of experience into consideration as having a major impact on his life, but after meeting Brother Jack he becomes a prominent speaker of the organization, and everything changes quickly.

In defining this layer of experience, “politics is viewed as a struggle for power, between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it.”²² That both the Brotherhood and Ras are engaged in politics is thus visible in the fact that both parties compete for the following of Harlemites via various means, offering alternatives to the hegemonic ideology. “On the other hand, politics is viewed as cooperation” (Chilton, 3) and this is present in the novel in that the Brotherhood holds meetings and actively communicates in their pursuit of power. The group around Ras has similar strategies in that they work together to organize riots, even though in the novel it is primarily Ras who represents his organization as the narrator does not cooperate with his side. Neither of the two parties is involved in the political process by means of legislation or elections as they both primarily strive to gain new members for their cause. And because this process is enabled via persuasion, the importance of language is a common denominator for both factions.

As Chilton goes to argue, “the political process typically involves persuasion and bargaining.” (Chilton, 4) This is exactly what happens on a micro-level when Jack convinces the narrator to join the Brotherhood, (Ellison, 274) offering him the position of a speaker. His persuasion tactics involve the invoking of historical figures like “Jefferson, Jackson, Pulaski, Garibaldi, Booker T. Washington, Sun Yat-sen, Danny O’Connell, Abraham Lincoln”

(Ellison, 295) and applying the Brotherhood lingo to create a sense of inevitability in the narrator: “I can’t say too emphatically that we stand at a terminal point in history, at a moment of supreme world crisis. Destruction lies ahead unless things are changed. And things must be changed.” (Ellison, 295) By combining those two approaches Jack appeals to the narrator’s reason and sentiment, and indeed the narrator admits to being “greatly impressed.” (Ellison, 295) Furthermore, as has been ascertained in the previous chapter, the economical motive also plays a large role in convincing Invisible Man to join this organization, which affirms the bargaining nature of politics in the novel; he later undergoes further training, not unlike brainwashing, to become a real member.

A salient feature for analysis of the Brotherhood is their language, which is presented as standing beyond casual discourse – it is supposedly scientific: “I wish only to point out that a scientific terminology exists’ the man said, emphasizing his words with his pipe. ‘After all, we call ourselves scientists here. Let us speak as scientists.” (Ellison, 295) The reason for this approach is because “Political discourse involves, among other things, the promotion of representations, and a pervasive feature of representation is the evident need for political speakers to imbue their utterances with evidence, authority and truth.” (Chilton, 23) The use of “scientific language” in the context of gaining new members and establishing a foothold in New York may increase the authority and truthful appearance of the organization. That is because by attempting scientific discourse they are attempting objective truth. This is another method the Brotherhood uses to convince non-members of its legitimacy.

Despite the relatively quick process of absorbing the narrator into the organization, he doubts the Brotherhood from the beginning, as the previous chapters have argued. He even finds their methodology funny: “Suddenly I felt laughter bubbling inside me. I’d have to catch up with this science of history business.” (Ellison, 299) At this point he keeps an ironic distance towards the organization, yet he also aims to become a fully-fledged member, as “the episode of joining the Brotherhood not just provides him with an opportunity to dwell deeper into his quest for identity. He also utilizes this to scrutinize certain political alternatives

available to Blacks,” (Komal, 3) but things do not develop smoothly and even after effective speeches his method is criticized as “wild, hysterical, politically irresponsible and dangerous.” (Callahan, 71) This shows that they are a rigidly organized group with high ambitions, and a crossroads of the layers of the narrator’s individual, social and political experience.

The Brotherhood’s aims are presented as “working for a better world for all people” (Ellison, 292) through “moving them to action.” (Ellison, 293) Their grand scheme requires sacrifice (Ellison, 484) “until a new society is formed.” (Ellison, 484) And since “it is shared perceptions of values that defines political associations,” (Chilton, 5) the narrator joins as he identifies with the ideal to change society for the better, and he studies their objective methodology. This retroactively confirms his naivety and optimism, which, as has been shown before, often lead him into trouble. Nonetheless, these are precisely the character traits which, in combination with his growing capacity to critically assess how he is often being taken advantage of (Ellison, 292) and how “with all people I’ll have to be careful” (Ellison, 292) later lead to him discovering some unpleasant truths about the organization.

The Brotherhood’s method of a scientific molding of history is paradoxical, because “history as a discipline began as a confrontation with war propaganda”²³, yet their propaganda is based upon claiming they are at a “terminal point in history” (Ellison, 295) and claim only they know how to mold it; furthermore, the objective attitude ultimately proves their greatest weakness, because “objectivity is a way of speaking in which the bond of solidarity is broken and whose most effective form is the concentration camp. To a man of objectivity, the representant of the ‘thing in itself’, solidarity is only a temptation he must learn to avoid.”²⁴ This becomes particularly palpable later in the story, after the narrator gains a foothold in Harlem and becomes the spokesman for the community, and the Brotherhood in their grand scientism decide to stop focusing on the district and its inhabitants (Ellison, 482) which is the moment Invisible Man becomes completely disillusioned with the organization as the ideals of building a better society for all people crumbles under behind-the-door decisions. That is a

defining moment for both the narrator's development and the organization itself, because it reveals the other side of the scientific attitude: it is a cold and detached apparatus, and this further problematizes the interactions between the novel's individual and political layers.

Hanzi Freinacht argues that "the Left somehow believes, in a subtle but pervasive manner, that solidarity is the highest truth."²⁵ As solidarity and compassion are completely omitted in the Brotherhood, the only thing that is left is their power-mongering and striving for a revolution. That too can be seen from brother Jack's reaction to the galvanized crowds after Invisible Man's speech: "'Listen to them,' he said. 'Just waiting to be told what to do!'" (Ellison, 335) It can be thus argued that the Brotherhood are radical leftists, e.g., communists, because "communist groups believe that a social revolution is necessary to create the idealized state"²⁶ and that is what the Brotherhood is ultimately after all along. This is underpinned by the ascertained mechanisms and behavior of its leading member.

Those effects encourage the narrator to leave. The sterile, radical and detached attitude is something he no longer identifies with as "his questioning of the authorities is a pathway towards achieving higher goals." (Komal, 4) Furthermore "human linguistic and social abilities are not a straitjacket; rather language is linked to the human cognitive ability to engage in free critique and criticism," (Chilton, 29) but the organization is too caught up in inner arguments on proper policy instead of genuinely working towards their professed goal of making a better world for everyone, showing Ellison's criticism of leftist radical politics. Even their political gains seem to evaporate because "by pulling its organizers out of Harlem during growing unrest, the Brotherhood has allowed the black Nationalists to redirect energies of Harlemites from forceful political agitation to fruitless violence." (Jackson, 71) This turns the topic to the opposing faction, Ras the Exhorter, later dubbed Destroyer.

As presented in *Invisible Man*, the alternative to communism in regard to Afro-American rights is Ras, whose name phonetically resembles 'race the destroyer', stands for Black Nationalism in the novel. Ellison underlines the irony in the agenda of nationalism by stating that Ras considers Blacks as a category like 'The Brotherhood'. Ras attains power by adhering

to the prescribed identities weaved by others. He even propels people to follow it and thereby hampers the progress and empowerment of the Black community. (Komal, 4)

His method of gaining political power and followers is by means of a rhetoric that confuses even the brainwashed Tod Clifton and narrator. (Ellison, 358) This is a different take on using the power of language from that of the Brotherhood, nonetheless since “the doing of politics is predominantly constituted in language” (Chilton, 6) it is effective in its own right. His stated political aim is that blacks should stick together for the sake of their race, and to not collaborate with whites at all, (Ellison, 357) and that the use of violence is a legitimate means of achieving political goals: “It's three hundred years of black blood to build this white mahn's civilization and wahn't be wiped out in a minute. Blood calls for blood! You remember that.” (Ellison, 362) By using this language, Ras appeals primarily to emotion, and not to reason, as he invokes feelings of pride and injustice in the black men.

As such, Ras's construction of political identity is primarily achieved by defining and making acute the binary opposition between black and white, and he advocates a race war. “The conservative and the fascist believe in their hearts that fierce competition” ... “ultimately defines social reality.”²⁷ Ras with his raw violence, powerful rhetoric and advocating of violence against whites thus represents the binary opposition to the communist Brotherhood and its scientific, scheming approach to politics, and the narrator navigates between the two poles. To reiterate, “political actors recognize the role of language because its use has effects, and because politics is very largely the use of language,” (Chilton, 14) and *Invisible Man* makes this very palpable – Tod Clifton is ultimately torn apart by the powerful polarities as he decides to leave the Brotherhood, “plunge outside history” (Ellison, 364) and is later shot dead during a riot selling dolls that symbolically represent how blacks are manipulated by the Brotherhood, a feature of the novel's political layer directly affecting that of the individual.

As Timothy Snyder argues in his 2019 *The Road to Unfreedom*, “fascism of the 1920s and 1930s, Ilyin's era, had three core features: it celebrated will and violence over reason and law;

it proposed a leader with a mystical connection to his people; and it characterized globalization as a conspiracy rather than a set of problems.” (Snyder, 16) As has been previously shown, Ras indeed prioritizes will and violence over reason and law in the struggle of Afro-Americans against the whites. Furthermore, his epitomizing of racial stereotypes and donning of a chieftain costume during the final riot can be read as him attempting to invoke a mystical connection with the blacks. And, finally, he does make a statement bordering on defining a white conspiracy against the blacks: “So now he uses the dregs and want you black young men to do his dirty work. They betray you and you betray the black people. They are tricking you, mahn.” (Ellison, 359) And even though on one level he is right in that in the novel the white establishment exploits Afro-Americans, it still also proves that Ras fulfills the criteria to be considered a fascist because he uses these methods to further his political cause. This proves that the two ideologies used to approach the race question in *Invisible Man* are extremist by nature, which then has the result of the narrator leaving political life and hiding underground.

Looking back at the socio-political system in *Invisible Man*, “their society is one that tells them they must play certain racial stereotypes, advocating oppressive white capitalist ideology, violent black nationalism, or radical leftism.” (Avery, 2) The narrator navigates through these in the span of his narration and to various degrees identifies with them. His involvement in them is mediated via language, but he never fully identifies with any party. “Humans do not always, or are not always able, to resist the constraints of social conventions or political ideologies for the use of language, the ready-made molds for the thinking of thoughts” (Chilton, 27) and the narrator is the exception to this rule, because since he is constantly in motion forward due to the *Bildungsroman* dynamic, he overcomes these constraints and social conventions, showing how the individual in the novel is larger than the social or political in his own right. It is ultimately the pure chaos of Rinehartism that serves as the catalyst for him leaving public political life and to a forging of a personal politics. It is during the final visit to Brother Hambro that the narrator realizes he can no longer

identify with the ideology: “I could feel some deep change. It was as though my discovery of Rinehart had opened a gulf between us over which, though we sat within touching distance, our voices barely carried and then fell flat, without an echo.” (Ellison, 482) It is the tipping point for his final disillusionment with public politics, because after “becoming Rinehart” he realizes how Rinehart is myth and dash, being and non-being, a well-known Harlemites who experiences life in competing modalities, a man who crosses boundaries sacred and secular, an image of confrontation and reserve, a man whose life is a continuum of intensity. He holds the offices of numbers runner, pimp, gambler, preacher, nurturer of the spiritual and material comfort, arbiter of dreams. (Jackson, 14)

Contemplating Rinehart further, he figures out that “his world was possibility, and he knew it. He was years ahead of me and I was a fool.” ... “The world in which we lived was without boundaries. A vast seething, hot world of fluidity, and Rine the rascal was at home.” (Ellison, 479) He discovers the world beyond the discourse of politics, a world of genuine agency and thus freedom. That is to become his personal politics, and it is genuine because he had come into close contact with the other available options yet not a single one of them would affirm him as a person, thus transcending the limited realms of binary politics in an unjust society and achieving essentially infinite possibility within the realm of the individual. To conclude the system of politics in the novel, the way it is presented lends credit to the reading of it being a layer of experience intimately interwoven with the layer of the society, but it ultimately cannot accommodate the variegated inner experience of an individual. It is Ellison’s critique of radical politics which present themselves as emancipatory, but which in reality are mere means for manipulating the masses or instigating senseless violence. “The narrator’s stance, therefore, is not indicative of a politics of retreat but of the politics of affirming, perhaps as a spokesman, the identity which he comes to be increasingly aware of during his long voyage of self-discovery.” (Ghosh, 6) It is because the available options are too radical and requiring a loss of individuality that the narrator comes to realize he cannot genuinely solve the burning questions of his time through them. On the backdrop of the

complex interaction of the individual and political layers, Ellison uses a show-don't-tell manner to answer the narrator's question "could politics ever be an expression of love?" (Ellison, 435) by illustrating how the individual cannot trust the political, because the political is only manipulating him while being inherently embedded into the social, which, as has been shown, is also poised against the individual.

Conclusion

To sum up this chapter addressed and explored the individual and the bildungsroman of the invisible man. The oppression of society and the investigation of political context, concept and ideology in the novel

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The novel was interpreted and critically examined from the perspectives of New Historicism and Psychoanalytic literary criticism, which helped the researcher to support his claim. The juxtaposition of the novel's happenings with racism's historical facts demonstrates how well the book captures that era's occurrences; it does so by treating racism as a social phenomena that affected American society from an aesthetic literary perspective.

The narrator is like many others who struggle with self-identification in racist countries. All African American minorities who have experienced racism and segregation are referred to by him. This literary work serves as more than just a record of the author's life and times. but his upbringing, ideas, and prejudices also have an impact. The protagonist, growing up in the South and moving to North America, escapes from the restrictive bonds of the South to the greater flexibility of the North in Harlem, and he refers to the Great Migration of African Americans from the south to north America, when he was a young man. The protagonist's flashbacks, memories, and dreams reflect the real circumstances, beliefs, and prejudices of that time.

Unfortunately, all of these dreams came true. The protagonist's desire to play a significant role in society, specifically in the Brotherhood, as well as the surrealist environment where he smoked dope and listened to Jazz music are all reflected in the Invisible Man's nightmares. They all embody the aspirations of all African Americans during the Jazz Age, when jazz music was immensely popular and the Harlem Renaissance began. This enabled African Americans to defend their rights and live fulfilling lives free from the negative stereotypes that white people had about them.

Consequently, Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* shows how the author was

impacted by the events of the novel's time period. History actually influenced literature (1920- 1930). When African American literary works addressed issues affecting minorities, they shared specific themes about African American minorities and the pursuit of their rights and equality with whites through the experience of black people in American society, like the black protagonist in *The Invisible Man*. The novel adopted these themes. *The Brotherhood* serves as a metaphor of Ralph Ellison's attitude toward the communist party at the time; he condemned the party with reference to the book when the party betrays the African Americans.

Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* was influenced and affected by actual historical events that took place during the time of the novel; as a result, literature is not only a reflection of history and real events, but it is also a tool that writers use to spread their messages and defend their own rights as well as the rights of their people.

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المخلص

الرجل الخفي هي رواية خيالية للمؤلف الأمريكي رالف إليسون ، نشرت لأول مرة في عام 1952 خلال الفترة الأدبية للحداثة والخيال الأمريكي بعد الحرب . ولد رالف إليسون في 1 مارس 1914 في أوكلاهوما سيتي ، وسميت إليسون على اسم صحفي وشاعر رالف والدو إمرسون لأن والده أراده أن يصبح شاعرا مشهورا. عندما كان إليسون يبلغ من العمر ثلاث سنوات، توفي والده من حادث متعلق بالعمل أثناء تسليم الجليد والفحم، وعانت عائلته ماليا بعد وفاة والده. استمتع إليسون بالقراءة في سن مبكرة، وكانت والدته تعيد له دائما الكتب والمجلات من المنازل التي نظفتها. بدأ العزف على البوق عندما كان عمره 8 سنوات وانضم إلى العديد من الحفلات الموسيقية والمسيرات والفرق الموسيقية في المدينة. كان حلمه في ذلك الوقت أن يصبح ملحنا سيمفونيا ؛ لذلك درس الموسيقى في توسكيجي. بسبب المشاكل المالية انتقل إلى نيويورك وعمل كباحث وكاتب لبرنامج الكتاب الفيدرالي في نيويورك. التقى بكتاب مشهورين مثل ريتشارد رايت ولانغستون هيويز وآلان لوك الذين ساهموا جميعا في بداية مهنة إليسون. كان إليسون متورطا في السياسة الشيوعية وربما أعطاه هذا القواعد لتصوير الإخوان على غرار الحزب الشيوعي. الراوي في الرجل الخفي هو شاب أسود مجهول الاسم وهذا ما يضيف المزيد من الفضول، لأن الأشخاص الذين يواجهونهم لا يرون سوى محيطي، أنفسهم، أو نسج خيالهم، إنه غير مرئي بشكل فعال. الخفي إليسون بطل الرواية هو حول الخفي الهوية-قبل كل شيء، ما يعنيه أن يكون رجل أسود-وأقنعة المختلفة، مواجهة كل من تجربة شخصية وقوة الأوهام الاجتماعية. الرواية هي نوعية خاصة مزيجها الماهر من التحقيق الوجودي في الهوية على هذا النحو- ما يعنيه أن تكون غير مرئي اجتماعيا أو عنصريا- مع المزيد من الرموز الاجتماعية والسياسية لتاريخ التجربة الأمريكية الأفريقية في أمريكا في هذه العملية، يقدم إليسون انتقادات متعاطفة ولكنها شديدة للموارد الأيديولوجية للثقافة السوداء مثل الدين والموسيقى بالإضافة إلى أن إليسون لهجة تمزج بين التعابير والسجلات المختلفة لإنتاج تحقيق حماسي في سياسية الوجود. في 16 أبريل 1994 ، توفي رالف إليسون من سرطان البنكرياس في مدينة نيويورك. ومع ذلك ، فإن الرجل الخفي لم يموت منه. لا تزال تعتبر واحدة من أكثر الأعمال التي تحظى بتقدير كبير في الأدب الأمريكي .

المصطلحات الرئيسية :

الخفي ، الهوية ، أمريكا السوداء ، العنصرية ، العبودية ، التمييز ، البيض ، الرؤية

Résumé

Quand Ellison avait trois ans, son père est décédé d'un accident de travail alors qu'il était ouvrier spécialisé dans la glace et le charbon, et sa famille a eu des difficultés financières après la mort de son père. Ellison aimait lire dès son plus jeune âge, et sa mère lui rapportait toujours des livres et des magazines des maisons qu'elle nettoyait. Il a rencontré des écrivains célèbres tels que Richard Wright, Langston Hughes et Alan Locke qui ont tous contribué au début de la carrière d'Ellison. Ellison était impliqué dans la politique communiste et cela lui a probablement donné les bases pour dépendre la confrérie similaire au Parti communiste.

The invisibility of Ellison protagoniste parle de l'invisibilité de l'identité - surtout de ce que signifie être un homme noir-et de ses différents masques , confrontant à la fois l'expérience personnelle et la force des illusions sociales. Le roman est spécial pour sa combinaison habile d'enquête existentielle sur l'identité en tant que telle-ce que signifie être socialement ou racialement invisible- avec plus d'allégorie sociopolitique de l'histoire de l'expérience afro-américaine en Amérique Dans le processus, Ellison propose des critiques sympathiques mais sévères des ressources idéologiques de la culture noire telles que la religion et la musique. En plus de cela, Ellison mélange divers idiomes et registres pour produire une enquête passionnée sur le politique de l'être. Le 16 avril 1994 , Ralph Ellison est décédé d'un cancer du pancréas à New York .

Termes clés

Invisibilité, Identité, Amérique Noire, Racisme, Esclavage, Discrimination, Les blancs, visibilité