



A TEXTUAL STUDY OF RALPH ELLISON'S NOVEL INVISIBLE MAN

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Abstract

The novel *Invisible Man* has been described as a Kafkaesque novel. It has also been called a picaresque novel with has furthermore, been described as an existential novel. It contains penetrating psychological passages and a profound treatment of its theme as well as a realistic status of one of the masterpieces of American fiction and one of the greatest triumphs in the field of novel-writing in the twentieth century. Analyzing the modern novelist's task, Ellison observed that he had to find, "for himself and for his readers some new insight into the human predicament, some new facet of human possibility". The novel primarily communicated "a vision" of a particular experience that achieved "its universality, if at all, through accumulating images of reality and arranging them in patterns" of a broader experience. Ellison's central purpose in writing "Invisible Man" was to portray the black protagonist in the novel as possessing the full complex ambiguity of the human as against the stereotype image of the black man. In order to portray the Negro character possessing the full, complex ambiguity of the human, Ellison in "Invisible Man" presents what he calls the Black American experience in its widest scope and variety from the Reconstruction period to World War-II. He has compelled the white society the urgency reexamining project of "Humanism" upheld with pride since time immemorial. It was only in the 20th century there is a radical revision of "Humanism" that tried to accommodate the problems of Race, Class & Caste.

Key words: Humanity, Race, Class & Caste.

INTRODUCTION

Analyzing the modern novelist's task, Ellison observed that he had to find, "for himself and for his readers some new insight into the human predicament, some new facet of human possibility". The novel primarily communicated "a vision" of a particular experience that achieved "its universality, if at all, through accumulating images of reality and arranging them in patterns" of a broader experience. Success would represent "metaphorically for the whole" enabling the reader to form "a sense of humanity" and "conception of human value". (Going to the Territory 242-257) The *Invisible Man* has been described as a Kafkaesque novel. It has also been called a picaresque novel. The *Invisible Man* has furthermore, been described as an existential novel. It contains penetrating psychological passages and a profound treatment of its theme as well as a realistic status of one of the masterpieces of American fiction and one of the greatest triumphs in the field of novel-writing in the twentieth century. To Ellison, the specific complex experience was the life of black Americans. Ellison's central purpose in writing "Invisible Man" was to portray the black protagonist in the novel as possessing the full complex ambiguity of the human as against the stereotype image of the black man. White American fiction is a telling example of the degrading stereotype image of the black man was recorded in "Introduction to the Science of Sociology" a standard textbook that Ellison studied at the Tuskegee Institute he attended during the 1930s. "The Negro is, by natural disposition, neither an intellectual nor an idealist like the Jew, nor a brooding introspective likes the East Indian; nor a pioneer and frontiersman like the Anglo-Saxon. He is primary an artist, loving life for its own sake. His matter is expression rather than action. He is, so to speak, the lady among the races", (Shadow and Act 25-26, 307-308). In order to portray the Negro character possessing the full, complex ambiguity of the human, Ellison in "Invisible Man" presents what he calls the Black American experience in its widest scope and variety from the Reconstruction period to World War-II.

Ellison described the period as "a scant eighty years, that have sent the Negro people hurtling, without clearly defined trajectory, from slavery to emancipation, from log cabin to city tenet, from the white folk's fields and kitchens to factory assembly lines; and which, between two wars, have shattered the wholeness of its folk consciousness into a thousand writhing pieces." (Shadow and Act, 80) According to McSweeney,

the black milieu so richly depicted in *Invisible Man* is not simply décor; it is the novel's exploration of its moral and thematic interests. This is why the form of the book is episodic, allowing, for the depiction of the varied character and varied types of black- American experience. (Race and Identity, 3)

The novel presents the dynamics of black white relationships in the pre-war American south. The protagonist as a student recollects the strategy for Negro development promoted by the moderate black educationist Booker. T. Washington founder of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama which Ellison attended for three years, alluding to the Negro college that the protagonist attends and his orientation into Negro promoted Negro-white dynamics. The protagonist's migration from Alabama in the colonial South to New York in the liberal North symbolizes the large scale migration Negroes during the beginning of the twentieth century. However in this migration the protagonist loses certain significant conventional structures crucial in bolstering his personality such as consistent social order though restrictive, creating a sense of belonging, a religious base, a family structure and a tradition of folklore which provide a meaning to his very existence.

The protagonist's motion and life in New York City is confined to Harlem the black ghetto in Manhattan, whose segregated borders socially imprisoned the lives of four hundred thousand black Americans subjected to political and economic exploitation and alienation in the land of their birth. For many northern blacks, Harlem meant, "the desperate search for identity". (Shadow and Act 296-297). This desperate search for identity resulted in many Negroes in America turning to industrial capitalism, communism and black nationalism. Black Nationalism is represented by the character of Ras in the novel. It also incited race riots like the one that Ellison as reporter covered for the New York Post in 1943, on which the race riot at the end of the novel is dramatized. The search also led many to mental afflictions and psychiatric treatment. Ellison talked of a psychiatric clinic in a brightly lit Harlem basement which he called in "Harlem is Nowhere" alluding to the protagonist's own hideout as described in the prologue of the novel. Ellison seemed to have based his protagonist on that of Dostoyevsky's novel "Notes From Underground" where the nameless protagonist is alone in his room thinking over the events which had reduced him to his present situation and ends with an intimate talk with the reader. According to Joseph Frank,

Ellison's profound grasp of the ideological inspiration of Dostoyevski's work, and his perception of its relevance to his own creative purposes, his perception, that is, of how he could use Dostoyevski's relation to the Russian culture of his time to express his own position as an American Negro writer in relation to the dominating white culture. (New Criterion, 1983:12)

A significant element of the novel is that the protagonist is subjected to the essential influences of American arts like folklore, Jazz and the Blues. According to Ellison folklore offers, the first drawings of any groups character” and is the record of its attempts “to humanize the world.” (Shadow and Act, 7) Folklore describes those rites, manners, customs and so forth which insure the good life, or destroy it, and it describes those boundaries of feelings, thought and action which that particular group has found to be the limitation of the human condition. It projects this wisdom in symbols which express the group’s will to survive; it embodies those values by which the group lives and dies. (Shadow and Act, 7)

Ellison’s use of jazz in the novel finds its purpose in the driving motivation of the jazz musicians he knew during his growing years. The novel can be described as a literary extension of the Blues. There are several blues songs in the novel but the blues song of Louis Armstrong with its refrain,

what did I do to be so black and blue” sums up the black predicament. However the formal response of black Americans to their plight is portrayed in the several Negro spirituals and folk songs in the novel, i.e.” the old longing, resigned, transcendent emotion” (Invisible Man, chap 21)

The novel is a first person narrative. There is a clear distinction between the protagonist as narrator and character. As the narrator, the protagonist opens a dramatic monologic dialogue with the reader in the prologue to explain his intense urge to visualize his invisibility in black and white to tell his story and the events that led to his present state of hibernation in a forgotten underground basement. The rest of the novel is an autobiographical narrative of the protagonist, the character, a collection of the events from the point of his graduation from high school to the point of his going underground. The novel begins and ends with the protagonist doing an introspective comprehension of the events the protagonist as character experiences, the dynamic of black-white relationships and the maturing of the protagonist’s (character’s) ideology.

The early episodes present black-white relationships in the pre-war American South. There is a description of lurid incident of white discrimination of blacks. The protagonist as a young boy is forcefully subjected to a highly inhuman ritual staged by the white society to preserve the caste lines. It is staged in the ballroom of a posh hotel in a southern town, as part of the evening’s entertainment for its wealthy white male citizens i.e. bankers, lawyers, judges, doctors, fire chiefs, teachers and merchants. A group of Negro boys including the protagonist are forced to fight each other blindfolded, to the accompaniment of a dancing naked white blonde prostitute. The protagonist ends up fighting it out with the biggest of the boys. The boys are then forced to collect coins flung on an electrified carpet which gives an unholy sadistic delight of the audience. The

brutality ends with the graduation speech of the protagonist and the crowd's hostility and displeasure at the mention of the word 'equality'. Ellison has stated that he had described the episode as "a ritual in preservation of caste lines, a keeping of taboos to appease the gods and ward off bad luck. It is also an intimation ritual to which all greenhorns are subjected". (Going to the Territory 57)

The horrific episode is followed by another important episode of the protagonist's grandfather's deathbed utterance. "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." (Invisible Man 13-14). Commenting on the grandfather's last words Ellison wrote,

There is a good deal of spite in the old man, as there comes to be in his grandson, and the strategy he advises is a kind of jujitsu of the spirit, a denial through agreement... politically weak the grandfather has learned that conformity leads to a similar end and so advises his children. Thus his mask of meekness conceals the wisdom of one who has learned the secret of saying the 'yes' which accomplishes the expressive 'no'... More important to the novel is the fact that he (the grandfather) represents the ambiguity of the past for the hero, for whom his sphinx like deathbed advise poses as a riddle which points the plot in the dual direction which the hero will follow throughout the novel. (Shadow and Act, 56)

Another important episode is the Negro Jim Trueblood's story of the circumstances which resulted in his committing incest with his daughter. Trueblood is exiled by his wife and the black community. However there is an ironically positive response from the white folks towards him to justify their racial superiority over the blacks. Assessing the outcome of his heinous act, Trueblood says, "I'm alright, such. My eyes is alright, too. And when I feel po'ly in my gut. I takes a little soda and it goes away... 'stead of things getting bad, they got better. The niggahs up at the school don't like me, but the white folks treat me fine... Gimme more help than they ever give any other coloured man, no matter how good a niggah he was (even though) I done the worse thing a man could ever do in his family (Invisible Man 52). Though Trueblood's act of incest is a result of dire poverty and extreme impoverishment and poverty which force him, his wife and daughter to huddle together for warmth, from the point of view of character, the significant aspect of Trueblood's transgression is his response to it. Joseph Frank commends Ellison's ability to portray unsparingly, "The unforgivable and redeemable, and yet [to] manage to do so in a manner that affirms the humanity of the people involved rather than negat[es] it." (New criterion, 16)

The next episode gives a madcap comical account of the hullabaloo raised by a group of mentally incapacitated black war veterans at a bar cum brothel. The episode as Mcsweeney suggests is an “Encapsulation of Freudian psychic dynamic as played out on the American socio racial scene”. (Race and Identity, 57) The episode defines Freud’s observation that, “civilizations behaves towards sexuality as a people or a stratum of its population does, which has subjected another one to its exploitation. Fear of a revolt by the suppressed elements drives it to stricter precautionary.” (Civilization and Its Discontents, 51) As one of the mentally disabled veteran says, “We’re patients here (the bar / brothel) for therapy. But they sent along an attendant, a kind of censor, to see that the therapy fails.”, Another says, “some times I get so afraid of him (Supercargo, the giant black attendant) that I feel he is inside my head” (Invisible Man, 62,65). Commenting on the raw and lurid comic episode, Ellison explained that, “a great deal of the style of American humour came out black experience... It came because we could not escape the absurdity, the philosophical absurdity of the racial arrangements within the society... but it is precisely because they (the absurd situations) are so painful that they have to be comic. The situations call forth the comedy, out of the need not to be destroyed.” (American Humour, 148-157).

The early episodes which describe the black accommodating philosophy in the racial south and its formative influence on the psyche of the protagonist are crucial in the progress of the novel. The seemingly academic, aesthetic, civilized and humane pictirization of the Negro college which the protagonist attends is in actually a subtle atmosphere to orient the black man to conform to dictates of the white race. The college is a prototype of the black educationalist and reformer Booker. T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute in Alabama which Ellison attended for three years before he left for New York in his junior year. Washington’s doctrine of industrial education for the economic upliftment of the black people was hailed by whites in the South with the establishment of an economic and social equilibrium between the races. Southern whites appreciated Washington’s disinterest in political and civil rights for the blacks. They liked the way he expressed confidence in them regarding their humane treatment of the black people if they proved themselves to be useful law abiding citizens. In the novel the Negro college, its founder and the present president Dr. Bledsoe, function on this black moderatist philosophy. Tuskegee depended financially on funds extended by northern white patrons. Washington (half white) handpicked his successor Robert Russa Moton. In November 1933 before his retirement (Elson was a freshman) President Moton delivered a speech in the college chapel in which he recalled his last deathbed conversation with Washington. In the novel Washington’s ideology becomes the

essence of Reveren Homer. A. Barbee's speech about the founder of the college and Dr. Bledsoe his appointed successor whom Barbee praises as "The co-architect of a great and noble experiment." There is unveiling of the mask behind which Bledsoe is manipulating the racial patronage of the white benefactors of the college to serve his self oriented ideology. As Bledsoe explains his stand", - don't owe any one a thing, son. Negroes don't control this school or much of anything else-No, sir, they don't control this school, nor white folk either. True, they support it, but I control it. I's big and black and I say 'Yes, such' as loudly as any burrhead when it's convenient, but I'm still king down here... Power doesn't have to show off. Power is confident, self-assuring, self-starting and self-stopping, self-warming and self-justifying. When you have it, you know it. Those are the facts son...This is a power set-up son, and I'm at the controls," (Invisible Man 109, 110). There is a similar echo of the protagonist's grandfather's philosophy in Bledsoe's words when he says,

The white folk tell every body what think – except men like me. I tell them; that's my life, telling white folks how to think about the things I know about... well that's the way it is ... I didn't make it and I know that I can't change it. But I'll have every Negroes in the hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am... I had to be strong and purposeful to get where I am. I had to wait and plan and lick around... Yes I had to act the nigger! I'm here and I mean to stay". (Invisible Man 110)

A self confident, ambiflous and enterprising greenhorn like the protagonist is viewed as a threat to the likes of Dr. Bledsoe and what they believe in. As Bledsoe mocks him, "you go ahead, go tell your story; match your truth... (Invisible Man 111) Bledsoe therefore writes his fate which hounds the protagonist keeping him on the run, never allowing to form, and finally driving him underground. The racial slogan with it racial slur is glaingly evident in Bledsoe's punch line in the letters of introduction he gives to the protagonist while sending him on his way to New York, which amounts to saying, "Keep this nigger-boy running". In effect Bledsoe and for what all he stands is the institutionalization of the deathbed advice of the protagonist's grandfather. The conflict in the young protagonist's mind is not the end result but the means of achieving it for he too spirited to tow Bledsoe's line. But he is a novice, gullible enough to believe the false concern for his welfare and put the only sane advice he would even receive on the shelf that of the vet. The protagonist's journey to the liberal North i.e. New York has a socio-historical dimension. As the vet puts it, "Now all the little boys run down to New York, out of the fire into the melting pot". (Invisible Man 117) The migration from the rural South to the industrialized urban North marks the most significant demographic facts of the black American experience. The black population of New York chiefly concentrated in Harlem of Manhattan grew rapidly from ninety

thousand in 1920 to a staggering one million by 1950. The city held its black populace with its spell of power and mystery created by the impersonality of its inhabitants and the precarious alternatives of fantastic success stories on the one hand and the self-conscious uncertainty on the other. Overwhelmed by the city the young protagonist remarks, “This really was Harlem, and now all the stories which I had heard of the city within a city leaped alive in my mind, the vet had been right. For me this was not a city of realities but of dreams... (Invisible Man, 122)

The vet’s advisory prescription is critically self-comprehensive based on an experimental knowledge of the world. The most important insight he passes on to the protagonist is to recognize his invisibility which would open up opportunities and possibilities. He says, For God’s sake; learn to look beneath the surface... comes out of the fog, young man. And remember you don’t have to be a complete fool in order to succeed. Play the game, but don’t believe in it... Even if it lands you in a strait jacket or a padded cell. Play the game, but play it in your own way. Play the game, but raise the ante, my boy. Learn how it operates, learn how you operate... you might even cheat the game... you’re hidden right out in the open that is you would be if you only realized it. They (the white folks, authority, the gods, fate, circumstances, the big man who’s never there when you think he is) wouldn’t see you because they don’t expect you to know anything since they believe they’ve taken care of that...” (Invisible Man, 118)

The episode describing the events of the protagonist’s brief stint as a black industrial labourer in a ‘white’ paint factory assumes importance as it brings out racism in America to the fore on the one hand and the question of the credibility and dynamics of black leadership on the other. As the white foreman Kimbro vainly boasts “White! It’s the purest white that can be found. No body makes a paint any white. This batch right here is heading for a national monument. (Invisible Man, 153) However the white paint is tinged with a clearly visible grey that puzzles the protagonist as Kimbro refuses to recognize it.

I started for about a minute, wondering if I were seeing things... All were the same, a brilliant white diffused with grey... But I had a feeling that something had gone wrong, something for more important than the paint; the either I had played on Kimbro or he like the trustees and Bledsoe was playing one on me...” (Invisible Man, 156)

The optical illusion emphasizes that the black perspective of American reality is radically different from that of the whites. The optical illusion leads to the protagonist's encounter with a group of union members. Young Negroes from the South, unfamiliar with unions and their operation were exploited by the white industrialists who use them as 'scab' labourers in their attempt to break the power of the unions. As the office boy warns the protagonist, "you new [black] guys don't know the scene... just like the union says it's the wise guys in the office [management]. They're the ones who make scabs out of you" (Invisible Man, 150). His unexpected meeting with the union members is a bitter experience because they express hostility and suspicion towards him. The indiscrimination is further intensified when he is victimized in the conflict between the black union members and black boiler room attendant Louis Brockway. The white foreman Kimbro reassigns the protagonist to Louis Brockway who is in charge of the boiler room. Brockway an uncle Tom version has been reduced to parroting the racial expectations of the white master. He harbours a deep seated resentment for both the union and southern blacks like the protagonist. In a sense he represents the exploited black labour on which American industry was built. The black versus black conflict may be interpreted as white manipulation of black relations by divide and rule policy. As one of the members of the union says, "Brother, this fellow could be a fink, even if he was hired right this minute!... may be he aint a fink... but brothers, I want to remind you that nobody knows it, and it seems to me that anybody that would work under that sonofebitchin, double-crossing. Brockway for more than fifteen minutes is just as apt as not to be naturally fink minded!" (Invisible Man, 168) Brockway's enmity towards the union is equally intense. "That damn union! They after my job! I know them after my job! For one of us to join one of them damn unions is like we was to bite the hand of the man who teached us to bathe in a bathtub! I haters it, I mean to keep one doing as I can to chase it outta the plant. They after my job, the chickens hit bastards ... the young coloured fellers up in the lab is trying to join that outfit, that's what! Here the white man alone give'em jobs... and they so ungrateful they goes and joins up with that backbiting union! I never seen such a no-good ungrateful bunch. All they doing is making things bad for the rest of us." (Invisible Man, 174) The consequences of the conflict is evident in the nearly fatal injuries caused to the protagonist by the boiler explosion engineered by Brockway and leading to his hospitalization.

The experience of the protagonist in the factory hospital is a nightmare. The protagonist is reduced to a human guinea pig by the white doctors and is subjected to experimental surgery i.e. lobotomy. The racist design of the white doctors is evident in negative consequence of the surgery that is the alteration of the black consciousness. The machine to which the protagonist is hooked as Mc Sweeney observes, "seems designed, if not to destroy the sense of racial of American blacks, at least to neutralize it and render it powerless. (Race and Identity, 82) The hospital episode "attempts to convey in one expressive image both in a sense of the Invisible Man's psychological turmoil and an epitome of what happens to blacks in white America, more particularly, of what happens to black identity in the industrialized North." (Race and Identity, 82)

The second half of the novel revolves around the protagonist's relationship with the Brotherhood, a moderatist white led black organization leading him to grapple with serious issues like black sexuality in the context of black white social dynamics, the importance of one's roots in determining one's identity particularly in the relative context of the Southern past to the Northern present for American blacks in general and the protagonist in particular and the dynamics of black leadership as seen in the white organized Brotherhood versus Ras the extremist black leader of Harlem.

According to Houston Baker one of the aggressive issues of the novel is the myth of black male sexuality and "the black phallus as a dominant symbol in much of his ritual interaction." (To Move without Moving 832) Ellison wrote that "anyone writing from the Negro point of view... would certainly have had to write about the about the potential meaning and the effects of the relationship between black women and white men and black men and white women because this became an essence and a great part of the society was controlled by the taboos built around the fear of the white woman and the black man getting together" (Going to the Territory 61-62). Trueblood's incest with his daughter, the homosexual interest of the white Emerson's son in the protagonist, the protagonist's sexual encounter with an unnamed white admirer, Emma's sexual overtures, and Sybil's raw infatuation for him expose the stereotype of the primitive sexual potency of the black male stud, the socially elevated white woman's sexual attraction to the black male and the corrosive and dehumanized effects of the white socio-sexual syndrome. As Ellison observes, "the turgidity of their own (white)frustrated learning for emotional warmth, their capacity for sensation having been constricted by the impersonal mechanized relationships typical of bourgeois society. The Negro is idealized into a symbol of sensation, of unhampered social and sexual relationships." (Shadow and Act, 86). This beneath the surface sexuality explains a peculiarity that the protagonist discerns but cannot fathom. While speaking to his

audiences on the question of women, he observes that the women present seemed, “to expect some unnamed something whenever I appeared ... From the moment they turned their eyes upon me they seemed to undergo a strange unburdening... I didn’t get it. And my guilt was aroused... something seemed to occur that was hidden from my own consciousness.” (Invisible Man, 317) This socio sexual syndrome brazenly confronts him in a rawer and more debased form when the intoxicated sybil begs him” her black brute” to rape her.

The novel’s central theme is the growth of the protagonist from a simple greenhorn to a mature black leader in relation to the task Ellison’s mother Ida Ellison had assigned to him, that of becoming an effective leader. As Ellison recollects, his mother frequently told him that, “the hope of our group depended not on older Negroes but upon the young, upon me.” (Emergence of Genius, 26) But it is to his mother’s advice that he’s committed to as seen in the novel, to be witness and spokesman to the pain his family suffered as a consequence of their identity with a particular ethnic community what Ellison referred to in the epigraph to his unfinished second novel “That Vanished Tribe Into Which I Was Born: The American Negroes.” (Jeneteenth, 7) While Ellison’s protagonist never gives up his will to fight, he nevertheless learns that his process of disillusionment demands distancing himself from the models available to black leaders, models like Bledsoe and Ras the Exhorter. Explaining his attempt to create such a leader Ellison wrote, “it was very important for this young man (the protagonist), this would be leader to understand that all political parties are basically concerned with power and with maintaining power not with humanitarian issues in the raw and abstract state.” (Collected Essays, 538) The Brotherhood is one such political organization who with their subtle ‘scientific ideologies’ desire power, manipulating potential black leaders like Tod Clifton and the protagonist to promote their own selfish interests. As Brotherhood Jack exhorts the protagonist, “master it (the Brotherhood’s ideology) but don’t overdo it. Don’t let it master you. There is nothing to put the people to sleep like dry ideology. The ideal is to strike a medium between ideology and inspiration. Say what the people want to hear, but say it in such a way that they’ll do what we wish.” (Invisible Man, 271)

However it is Ras the Exhorter who succeeds in radically altering Clifton’s perspective about the Brotherhood when he tells him.” Look at you two and look at me – is this sanity? Standing here in three shades of blackness! Three black men fighting in the street because of the white enslaver?... Is that consciousness, scientific understanding?... Is it self respect-black against black?... what they do to you black mahn? Give them you stinking women? Goddamn mahn, is that equality?... They betray you and you betray the black people.” (Invisible Man, 280-282).

Clifton's clean break with the Brotherhood, Clifton's attempt to step "outside history", his senseless death at the hands of a gun toting white policeman who is unregretful of his inhuman act and the white Brotherhood's refusal to condemn Clifton's killing and their denouncement of the protagonist's act or organizing Clifton's funeral endorsees the need for a 'true leader' to step out of white manipulated history. As the protagonist reflects, "Clifton had chosen to plunge of history and, except for the picture it make in my mind's eye, only the plunge was recorded, and that was the only important thing." (Invisible Man, 337)

Ras the Exhorter fails to realize that though he prides himself for negating 'white' manipulating of history with black nationalism and extremist acts of violence against the whites, he was in fact fulfilling the imperialistic design of the White Brotherhood that the black man is racially inferior and therefore needed be conditioned before assimilation into mainstream American society. As the protagonist sums up the outcome, "And that I, a little black man in his hatred and confusion over the nature of a reality that seemed controlled solely by white men whom I knew to be as blind as he m was just too much, too outrageously absurd. And I knew that it was better to live out one's own absurdity than to die for that of others whether for Ras's or Jack's". (Invisible Man, 422).use a nigger to catch a nigger would sum up the Brotherhood's successful manipulation. The Brotherhood's calculation of the protagonist is cold bloodedly simple "Keep This Nigger-Boy Running".

CONCLUSION:

Johan Howard Griffin's Black Like Me is an account of White man becoming a Black Man through medication. The epidermalisation of identity has led to the historical attempt of Howard Griffin's physical metamorphosis. This has remained as an exemplary action of the White man's attitude towards understanding the problems of Black Man. The very action of Howard Griffin is understood to have been inspired by the moral indictment that Ralph Ellison has carried in Invisible Man. Ellison has compelled the white society the urgency reexamining project of "Humanism" upheld with pride since time immemorial. It was only in the 20th century there is a radical revision of "Humanism" that tried to accommodate the problems of Race, Class & Caste.

Particularly the issue of “Race” has received tremendous concentration and critical attention from every dimension of knowledge. Literature that addressed the problems of “Race” has become the alternative History and Discourse. Particularly African writers and Afro American writers have acquired tremendous significance worldwide. African Literature with Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, Dennis Brutus etc., dismantled the hegemony of British Literature. Afro American writings deriving inspiration from African writings created a cultural awakening and consciousness. Harlem Renaissance created a space of its own within the framework of American Literature and succeeded in drawing the attention of the whole world towards realizing the importance of the problem of “Race”. The creativity and the articulation exerted by Afro American Literature has influenced the evolution of American society significantly. It is pertinent to observe that every Afro American writer evolved his own approach in the light of their experiences. There are writers who subscribed to militant literary nationalism with the aim of discontinuing from the so called accommodative spirit of Americanism.

There are also writers who adopted a low profile compromising attitude. Apart from these literary congregations, theorists like W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, and Richard Wright argued for a cultural transformation. Ellison for his complex philosophical theme of “Invisibility” is disowned by Blacks and the White Society. Though the novel is misconstrued during the times of its publication, eventually it has gained intellectual and philosophical acceptance of the White Society and Black Society. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that the advent of recent cultural and critical literary theory has further illustrated and consolidated the perspective of Ellison. Failure to understand the concept of “Invisibility” in its true and complete sense in the way that Ellison wants it to be understood still haunts the American Society. It should also be well remembered that the absence of “Intellectuality” in the Black world is totally challenged and fulfilled with Ellison’s “Invisible” representation. So, Ellison cuts above all the Afro American writers in representing the issues of Race and in bringing everlasting pride for Black culture and identity.

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