CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES
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Ralph Ellison is not an experimental novelist like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf or William Faulkner, but he has used his own distinctive fictional and creative techniques in his short stories and Invisible Man. The present Chapter addresses itself to these creative methods of telling stories. For the sake of clarity we have divided these techniques into three well-defined groups - Language, Imagery and Symbolism and Modes of Narration. However, it should not be construed that these techniques are mutually exclusive. On the contrary there are perceptible overlappings among them and they are all collectively exhaustive. Ellison's technique of using language may get defined by his mode of narration or the mode of narration may get influenced by his use of language. Similarly there is always an entwining creative link between his language on one hand and symbolism and imagery on the other. In spite of these overlappings and interlinks we think it more convenient and clarifying to study the techniques in terms of these well defined creative norms.

A : LANGUAGE

Ralph Ellison uses his wand like a magical music composer. He has a penchant for blending lovely language, interesting thought provoking symbols, rich imagery, and, underlying these, an undercurrent of narration that appeals from different angles. His work is open to many interpretations as the imagery hints at and lures thought and provokes the mind and heart.

We see in Ellison's work a steady evolution of one central theme: if a person
becomes conscious and aware of his personal, cultural, and national history, he emerges a free person. This consciousness and awareness makes a man complete and free. The writers of his time were painting scenes that were naturalistic and depicted characters, who struggled and fought against the ruthless American environment, and ultimately succumbed to those daunting impersonal forces. Ellison was not satisfied with this; he felt there was something missing, there was a dull atmosphere in the scenario and the richness, variety and humanity of black American people was lost in the mine of oppressive depiction of American society. The blacks were shown overpowered by their situation. Ellison found literary ancestors and teachers in Richard Wright, Mark Twain, Andrew Malraux, Ernest Hemingway and T.S. Eliot. He started focusing on men and women, who by sheer power of will and character manage to endure. Robert G.O'Meally in the introduction to The Craft of Ralph Ellison says:

... we see in Ellison's work a shift in style from social realism to surrealism. His efforts to devise a language to express the mad and variegated world as seen by his self-aware characters led him to experiment with symbolic forms generally unused by the writer of hard-fact realism.¹

His short stories, "Flying Home," "King of the Bingo Game," some Hickman stories and Invisible Man employ many modern techniques - surrealism, multiple perspectives, stream of consciousness - revealing a turbulent world where passions are frayed and the world is in a tumult. The style of Ellison can be called Ellisonian as it is distinctive in its profuse imaginative use of the black American folklore. Folklore reveals the Afro-American and the American past and this is the key to Ellison's fictional world. Under the influence of the poet, T.S. Eliot, Ellison introduced folklore into his work. Folklore is both particular and universal and it

179
helped Ellison soar above realism. As Robert G.O.' Meally comments:

In Ellison's fiction, folklore, stylized and transformed by modernist techniques, gives special reference and power to his language as it frees his characters to fly towards the moon, dive unmarked into the briar patch, or become invisible and sail through the air unseen. Here the vernacular and the symbolist traditions in American literature converge. The folklore itself is heavily metaphorical. And Ellison links the central question of identity to that of history and folklore. The protagonists of several short stories and of *Invisible Man* are freed of their self alienation and blindness with the unlocking of the past. The key is folklore.  

Folklore is free from being categorized to a particular level of society or to a particular time and era. It is a dynamic current process of speaking and singing in certain circumstances. Ellison draws heavily from the Afro-American folklore that comprises sermons, tales, games, jokes and boasts. His character types are from black American life and culture and are described and maintained in highly vital and eloquent language. Folklore explains black self-awareness and endurance. Through folklore, the blacks refuse the white's ethos and world view and express themselves. Through folklore, past experiences are evaluated, analyzed, remembered, refined and celebrated. As Ellison says "In the folklore we tell what Negro experience really is ... with a complexity of vision that seldom gets into our writing ... We back away from the chaos of experience and from ourselves and we depict the humour as well as the horror of our lives." During slavery, Ellison says, folk art was "what we had in place of freedom".

Ellison says that "Great literature is erected upon this humble base of folk forms". Other writers that relied extensively on the folk forms are Mark Twain, Charles Chessnut, James Weldon Johnson, William Faulkner, Zora Neale Hurston,
Sterling A. Brown, and Langston Hughes. Ellison's use of folklore gives the "inside" view of a modern technique. The transformation from folk material to literature is complete and perfect. Ellison's language is alive with the tales, songs and games of folklore.

The work that deeply influenced Ralph Ellison was T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* of which Ellison wrote: "I was intrigued by its power to move me while excluding my understanding." He felt it was jazz like in its rhythm and allusions. *The Waste Land* compelled Ellison to read up literary references and he came to know about the importance of myth and folklore in literature. Eliot had always insisted that for a writer it was of primary importance that he knew his roots, his tradition and his culture well. Ellison, after reading Eliot himself realized that many of his ideas about life were drawn from folk rhymes, stories, music, dances and rituals. Eliot's influence pervades *Invisible Man*.

The novel is heavy with symbolism and rich in its imagery of death and rebirth, blindness and light, which are Eliotic. Eliot also relies on mythology and the Bible. Ellison makes extensive use of adjectival. His passages are very descriptive, and evoke a number of images, both beautiful and horrible. One of the most Eliotic passages in *Invisible Man* is the one in which he describes the "beautiful college" he had attended. After remembering the bright wisteria and the spirituals ringing plaintively at dusk, the narrator pauses to wonder:

What was real, what solid, what more than a pleasant, time-killing dream? For how could it have been real if now I am invisible? If real, why is it that I can recall in all that island of greenness no fountain but one that was broken, corroded and dry? And why does no rain fall through my recollections, sound through my memories, soak through the hard dry crust of the
still so recent past? Why do I recall, instead of the odour of seed bursting in spring time, only the yellow contents of the cistern spread over the lawn's dead grass? Why? And how? How and Why? ... I'm convinced it was the product of a subtle magic, the alchemy of moonlight; the school a flower-studded waste land, the rocks sunken, the dry winds hidden, the lost crickets chirping to yellow butter flies.

And oh, oh, oh, those multi millionaires. (IM, 29)

The language that is vivid and descriptive evokes myriad images, nature seems to speak, and, seems vibrant with feelings and emotions. The adjectives used have many connotations and some mysterious sad meaning in their depths.

Ellison's fiction is enriched with many jokes, rhymes and queer twists of speech which ring of his days in Oklahoma and Alabama. Other peculiarities of speech which find their way into his fiction and are drawn from notes he made while researching and interviewing in Harlem for the Federal Writers Project. Ellison not only copied folklore and presented it in his speech, but also, developed and imbied a good knowledge of Afro-American games and stories. Ellison's sensitive ears and mind understood the context in which these were to be used and he refined it further in his artistic rendering of the same in his fiction. He has a natural knack for and developed further the knowledge of the time, moments and places where the Afro-American was likely to use the stylized speech of folklore. He learnt therefore, both text and context. Thus, the folklore in his fiction is individualistic and reflective and depicts a whole lifestyle. In *Invisible Man*, the protagonist tells a black man on the street to "take it easy" and the man replies with a "boast", here serving an initiatory purpose:

Oh, I'll do that. All it takes to get along in this here man's town is a little shit, grit and mother-wit. And man, I was bawn with all three. In fact, I'm a seventh son of a seventh son bawn with a
caulover both eyes and raised on black cat bones high john the conqueror and greasy greens ... I'll verse you but I won't curse you. My name is Peter Wheatstraw I'm the devil's only son-in-law, So roll 'em.. My name is Blue and I'm coming at you with a pitchfork. Fe Fi Fo Fum. Who wants to shoot the devil one, Lord God Stingeroy! Look me up sometimes, I'm a piano player and a rounder, a whiskey drinker and a pavement pounder. I'll teach you some good bad habits. You'll need 'em (IM, 134)

On the Federal Writers Project, Ellison studied both folklore history and language and learnt the literary craft to change folklore into written literature. Language is a very important instrument to study and understand the past; it also provides man with the key to personal identity. Thus this task gave him a historical perspective and added a new dimension to his fiction. Regional differences were also observed and noted and found expression in his short stories and novel. The local tinge is present in the speech of Afro-Americans. Language also reveals the area, or the background from where a Negro comes. Ellison used a large variety of these dialects in his fiction. He felt that language is strangely characteristic of the people who use it. Ellison was also blessed with the acumen to reproduce speech patterns without resorting to obstructive phonetical transcriptions. Colloquial speech was reproduced by him in literary works with such reality that one could feel and see the character as it fumbled, and stumbled through his speech. Even this slur was presented very realistically by Ellison.

In his early stories, "The Birthmark" and "Slick Gonna Learn," Ellison uses quick, short, staccato sentences and repetitions. This heightens the impact; he also is clear and leads the reader right into the heart of the matter. The short sentences remind one of Hemingway, another of Ellison's ancestors. The short sentences make the stories tightly knit and powerful.
In the Buster and Riley stories, "Afternoon," "That I Had the Wings," and "Mister Toussan," the young boys are often found chanting rhymes and singing spirituals and also parodies of the spirituals. The rhymes they chant out all reveal the pulse of the Afro-American. Their sensibilities are very sensitively revealed through these young, free and boisterous characters. In "Afternoon," Riley's father is heard singing:

If it hadn't been
For the referee
Jack Johnson woulda killed
Jim Jefferie

and the boys think of the clever trickster, "Mister Rabbit" and recite his exploits.

The spiritual which Riley's mother sings in "Mr. Toussan" - "All God's Chillun" sets the mood of the story, and we have the two boys planning and soaring through cheerful exclamations and brags to places all over America - places where there is freedom. The historical escapade of Toussant L'Ouvertures of the Haitian revolt of 1781 inspires the two boys. The tale is told within the tale and through the clever use of language, Ellison ties up the past, present and the beckoning future into a spellbinding tale of freedom, struggle and success. The folkloric effect is emphasized by the fact that the tale begins and ends with rhymes. It opens with:

Once upon a time
The goose drink wine
Monkey chew tobacco
And he spit white lime.

and ends with Riley dancing, barefeet, with wild abandon;

Iron is iron,
And tin is tin,
And that's the way .....the story ends.

In the story, "That I Had the Wings", the boys try to make a baby bird fly. This inspires Riley into a wicked verse:

If I was the President  
Of these United States  
..... I'd swing on them White House gates.

His aunt Kate reprimands him, asking him to sing the church song, "If I Had the Wings of a Dove". Riley's naughty mood continues and he sings a parody of the church song:

If I had the wings of a dove, Aunt Kate.  
I'd eat up all the candy, Lawd,  
An' tear down the White House gate.

One parody inspires another one in Riley, and he mocks a spiritual:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound.  
A bull frog slapped my grandma down.

The story is rich in folk forms and the boys, while praising old Bill, "the tighten'est, crown'est rooster in the whole wide world", compare him to folk heroes from jazz, sports and folklore. These comparisons inspire the youthful, buoyant spirit of the boys to be as stylish, freewheeling and fearlessly masculine as the old rooster and their folk heroes.

In the short story, "In a Strange Country," Ellison shows music as a source of freedom and joy. When Parker, the hero hears some Welsh music, followed by the American national anthem, he realizes that his identity is that of a "black Yank".
belongs to America and America in his. His sense of identity is restored.

"Did You Ever Dream Lucky" is a short story that takes its title from a blues song;

Did you ever dream lucky?
Wake up cold in hand?
Did you even dream lucky?
You didn't have a dollor
To pay your house rent man?

Ellison plays on the lyric. Mary dreams lucky, but, wakes up cold. The story is about a bag - that is thrown off a truck and falls with a juggling sound making Mary dream, to be finally disappointed as the bag contains only a pair of automobile chains. The story that is told by Mary in the story also attracts attention. Mary's conversation with her guests and their argument over who is "green" is interesting. Mary's tone goes folksy and there are deep echoes of sermons and blues and trombones in her voice as she says: "What green? .....Lawd, I was green. That's what I am trying to tell you. Y'all hear me? I, Me, Mary Raaaaaam - bo, was green." Her voice casts a spell over the rest.

Ellison uses folklore and the language and the tone of speech in such a way that the tales of yore become alive with a life of their own. Folklore, that has maybe just been written down does not have much impact, but, the process and performance, the gestures, inflections, enactment and audience responses - the whole process makes the language alive and meaningful. Ellison excels in this art and one can feel that his knowledge of folklore and speech patterns and tones is not superficial, but deep and involved. Many a time his language reverberates with
ancient primal sounds, that add depth to his fiction.

Aunt Mackie is a weird character in Ellison's short story. "A Coupla Scalped Indians" which deals with adolescence desires, in which the young boys, Buster and Riley struggle and move towards manhood. In this story again there is the background music of a band playing. The boys lured by the carnival music, move towards it and tumble into the yard of the dreaded and feared Aunt Mackie. In a marvellous poetical rush of nouns and prepositional phrases, the young narrator describes the fear and terror of this woman whose mere name makes him tremble:

Ho, Aunt Mackie, talken-with-spirits, prophetess of disaster, odd-dweller alone in a riverside shack surrounded by sunflowers morning-glories, and strange magical weeds ... old Aunt Mackie, wizen-faced walker-with-a-stick, shrill-voiced ranten in the night, round-eyed malicious one, given to dramatic trances and fiery flights of rage; Aunt Mackie, preacher of wild sermons on the busy streets of the town, hot-voiced chaser of children, snuff-dipper, visionary; wearer of greasy head rags, wrinkled gingham aprons and old men's shoes; Aunt Mackie, nobody's sister but still Aunt Mackie to us all.....teller of fortunes, concocter of powerful body - rending spells.......Aunt Mackie, the remote one though always seen about us; night consulted adviser to farmers on crops and cattle ... herb-dealer, root-doctor, and town-confounding oracle to wild cat drillers seeking oil in the earth. ("A Coupla Scalped Indians")

Aunt Mackie is painted as a dream woman from an unknown land. She is full of contradictions. She is a woman in man's clothes; her face is old and wrinkled and her body is young and beautiful; she casts spells on people. Ellison's language here is mythical and he gets the desired effect and environment.

The Hickman stories have as their central character Rev. A. Zubert Hickman,
reformed jazz trombonist and the high skinned (white) orphan boy, Bliss, whom Hickman adopts and trains to give weight to his sermons. These stories are part of the second novel on which Ellison was working and it is set in the South between 1920 and 1960. In it again Ellison deals with the broad questions of identity, history, culture and politics. Ellison's use of ritual is at its peak: rituals of birth, inhibition, purification, death and rebirth abound. Ellison uses language with imagination and shows the power of language to amuse, provoke and teach. This second novel-to-be is typically rich in sermons, spirituals, blues and jokes. Hickman is a preacher and his language is rhythmical and exuberant as he preaches about accepting the call to Christ:

Yes! meaning to take up His burden ... then, Lord help us, it grows heavier with each step, we take along life's way ... come hauling it! Come dragging it! Come limping, come lame; come crying in your Jesus' name -but come! Come with your abuses but come with no excuses; Amen!

The church service builds up to a climax with the voice of the preacher raised high and long. The songs are sung and the worshippers rock in tune to the choir and to the clapping hands.

In the humorous short story, "It Always Break Out", Ellison unfolds the tale completely in the conventional mode. A group of Washington journalists, relax over drinks and talk about the Negro who burnt his Cadillac on Senator Sunraider's lawn. This was in protest of the Senator's statement that now so many Negroes owned Cadillacs that the Cadillac should be renamed "Coon Cage Eight". This topic is treated in jest. Me Gowan proves and states that "Everything the Negra does is political!" Me Intyre finds it horrible and says:"Even as I laughed I became agitated. My laughter ... it was ... hysteria ... was painful".
There is a sustained humour throughout the story. The descriptions are apt and shocking in their imagery; they produce a typical Ellisonian comic effect. The juxtaposition of statement of facts and absurd metaphors is also comic. The comic effect is heightened by the monologues that emphasize that everything the Negro does is political. The list is long and funny; the choice of words interesting; the colloquial tone bright and swift.

"Juneteenth", a lovely short story appeared in 1965. It is also part of the Hickman puzzle. Like the Trueblood and Homer Barbee episodes in Invisible Man, it is meant to be read out loudly. There is a poetic eloquence in the language used. In this short story, the senator remembers the part he had played (as Bliss) in Juneteenth. Folklore plays a very important part in this story. Hickman and Bliss tell the black people about their past and that God came and freed them. They were born again with their own language and expression. Earlier, this language had been taken away. Resurrection was a joyous moment for them. In "Juneteenth," Ellison emphasizes his point by repetitions. In the valley there is an aura of a magic chant. Many biblical tales make their appearance and find mention. Language and music are important forms of expression and find mention in the story. The passage on drums is so rhythmic that one can hear the beat of ancient primitive drums in it:

Drums that talked like a telegraph. Drums that could reach across the country like a church bell sound. Drums that told the news almost before it happened! Drums that spoke with big voices like big men! Drums like a conscience and a deep heart beat that knew right from wrong. Drums that told glad tidings! Drums that sent the news of trouble speeding home! Drums that told us our time and where we were!  

The blacks heard the word from God and woke up speaking, singing and shouting a new language. The word became a source of life and sustenance:
We were rebirthed from the earth of this land and revivified by the word .... We had to take the word for bread and meat. We had to take the word for food and shelter. We had to use the word as a rock to build up a whole new nation .... ("Juneteenth")

The rhythm and the beat of the song give the blacks a sense of identity. The beat in the hearts of the blacks binds them together: "We know who we are because we hear a different tune in our minds and in our hearts. We know who we are because when we make the beat of our rhythm to shape our day the whole land says: Amen!" It is this beat in the language of Ellison's fiction that makes it so purely Afro-American. The whole history of the Negro people is recited by Hickman in a ritual manner. It gives a poetic tilt to the language that is captivating. "Juneteenth" is a powerful story, rich in a folkloric version of the Afro-American history, answering the where, why, hows and whens of the people. Hickman's focus is on music and language when he pronounces in a rhythmical tone:

We know who we are by the way we walk, we know who we are by the way we talk. We know who we are by the way we sing. We know who we are by the way we dance. We know who we are by the way we praise the lord on high.

Throughout the novel Invisible Man, we hear the blues and folk music. Louis Armstrong's voice, singing, "What did I do to be so Black and Blue?" forms a constant background hum - it is the theme of the novel, a tragic expression of the helplessness of the blacks in the situation in which they have been placed. Music and folksongs and blues come into the novel as a soothing balm often. After the meeting with Dr. Bledsoe, when the narrator walks through the campus, knowing that he has only two days before leaving the college, the blues, playing in the distance offer him sympathy:
From somewhere across the quiet of the campus the sound of an old guitar - blues plucked from an out of tune piano drifted towards me like a lazy, shimmering wave, like the echoed whistle of a lonely train and my head went over again against a tree this time, and I could hear it splattering the flowing river. (IM, 112)

For Jim Trueblood the blues prove soothing, and give an eloquent and cathartic expression to his absurd situation (an oedipal and an existential crisis) Trueblood's heritage is rooted in the blues. The language and words and pronunciation of Trueblood are typical black. There is a rhythm and beauty in his speech. It has its own cadence, just as music has. Language and the blues provide a means of transcending his situation to Jim Trueblood, caught unknowingly in an incestuous position, hated and loathed now by both his wife and daughter and by society, both whites and co-blacks.

I think and think, until I think my brain go'n burst, 'bout how I ain't guilty. I don't eat nothin' and I don't drink nothin' and can't sleep at night. Finally, one night, way early in the mornin', I look up and see the stars and I start singin'. I don't mean to, I don't know what it was, some kinda church song, I guess. All I know is I ends up singin' the blues. I sings me some blues that might ain't never been sang before, and while I'm singin', them blues makes up my mind that I ain't nobody but myself and ain't nothin' I can do but let whatever is gonna happen, happen. (IM, 51)

Expression gives Trueblood the strength and courage to face himself, his predicament and his people. Ellison uses the dialect of the blacks - the tone, the inflection, the rhythm of the speech of the black is beautifully represented by Trueblood. Peter is another character who sings the blues with full throated ease. He sings of his ugly but loving woman - "She got feet like a monkey ....Lawd, Lawd!"
Even in Mary's house, where the invisible man lives, he hears the strains of a blues song. Mary is the invisible man's anchor to his true identity. Ellison has included spirituals and gospel music in his novel and these enrich the novel's prose. Church songs, historical references and a realization of the wisdom and beauty of his cultural heritage ultimately frees the invisible hero. There is a strange chant and beat even to Homer A. Barbee's speech when he recounts the history of the college and its founder. He recalls when the founder was ailing, a church song, a "long black song of blood and bones" was raised:

Meaning HOPE!
Of Hardship and pain;
Meaning FAITH!
Of humbleness and absurdity:
Meaning ENDURANCE!
Of ceaseless struggle. (IM, 97)

In the hospital scene as the invisible hero lies alone, his mind goes back to his childhood and he hears his grandfather singing:

Godamighty made a monkey
Godamighty made a whale
And Godamighty made a gates
With hickey all over his tail......

and again in his delirium, he hears another childhood song ringing in his ears:

Did you ever see Miss Margaret boil water?
Man, she hisses a wonderful steam,
Seventeen miles and a quarter,
Man, and you can't see her pot for the steam.

As we see above, the language of Ellison often takes a poetic rhetorical turn. In his essay, "What America Would Be Like Without Blacks" published in *Going to the Territory*, Ellison's opines that the American nation is a product of the
American language, a colloquial language that was there before Africans and Europeans became Americans. The language had its roots in the king's English, but it merged and absorbed the many tongues of diverse lands; most being of the African tongue. There is therefore "the de'z and do'z of slave speech sounding in the voices of the most educated American." Whitman was impressed by the spoken idiom of the Negro Americans. He appreciated its music, rhythm, flexibility, imagery and metaphors and the free diction which were all mainly derived from Negro folklore. Ellison feels that the great nineteenth century novelists absorbed these cadences even though at the time Negroes were enslaved. Mark Twain celebrated the Negro American idiom in his novel.

The presence of blacks in America has greatly added to the language. Creative tensions arising out of the cross purposes of blacks and whites add a certain depth to the language. The Negro American jokes, tall tales, the urgency to slyly and cunningly retaliate all adds a swift pace and charge to the language. The language itself reminds us that the world is unexplored, that there is illusion in it, that there is both tragedy and comedy in life. The Negro American quality of "soul" comes into the American language and it attracts because of its mysteriousness. It expresses the diversity within the unity, the blackness within the whiteness and also shows the presence of a perpetual creative struggle against the realities of existence. It is these that can be found in the language and themes of Ralph Ellison.

Ellison himself has explicitly said that he deliberately changed the style of the book as the hero of *Invisible Man* moved from the south to the north. At first, the style is naturalistic, then expressionistic, later surrealistic. Each change expresses the hero's state of mind and the social environment through which he moves. The
change gives a suppleness to his language. As Tony Tanner says:

Ellison's prose in the novel is heavily foregrounded, demonstrating quite deliberately an ability to draw on sources as disparate as Revelations, the blues, classical literature, Dante, Southern white rhetoric, Harlem slang, and so on. This should not be seen as a wildly eclectic attempt to impart significance, but rather as a delighted display of the resonances of consciousness and imagination which he can bring to bear against the pressures of a changing environment. In such a way the American writer procures some verbal freedom from the conditioning forces which surround him.  

Ellison was filled with an urge to link all that he loved in his Afro-American community to all those other things he felt in the world beyond. Therefore an important word in his vocabulary is the conjunction "and". This "and" unites and separates, it never stops. It maintains a balance between union and division, order and disorder. As Berndt Osterdorf says:

His "ands" are dialectical, combative, anti phonal, and always dialogic. A quick look at his essay titles ought to make this clear: "The Seer and the Seen", Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke", "The World and the Jug", "Hidden Name and Complex Fate", Some Questions and Some Answers" and ultimately,"Shadow and Act". Furthermore, the blues are described as being "tragic and comic", and the protagonist of Invisible Man preaches "so I denounce and I defend, and I love and I hate" The novel begins with an "I" and ends with a "You" : hence it fills the space of the "and" between protagonist and reader; it provides the narrative linkage. 

The great linguist Otto Jesperson used to say that grammar and style are the products of generations of illiterate speakers. Ellison agrees with him, as he feels that the American vernacular is a working out of social and cultural conflicts. It is also a discovery of the American identity. The American vernacular is desperately trying to find a fit between word and thing, between the promise and the reality of
its constitution. Thus the vernacular is a moral force with particular importance in race matters. Ellison has a deep faith in the role of language in a free society. He believes in folklore and admits that he himself discovered folklore through literature. Ellison insists on the need for transcendence from the unconscious rituals of a folk world to a more generous level of individualistic American freedom.\(^9\)

Ellison felt the responsibility to create the consciousness of his oppressed nation. His concern was with experience and the shaping power of the imagination, thus he was involved in making symbolic wholes out of parts. Ellison's concern always was to discover form in diversity and confusion, in all its contexts - politically, ethically and aesthetically. This was the problem, according to him, faced by the Negro in America, the individual in a democracy and the artist faced by a flux of events. The imaginative linking of these experiences, the metaphorical yoking together of the process of invention in real life and art, is a characteristic of his artistic strategy and of his moral assumptions. Form and experience are very important to the artist. Ellison has argued "for the novelist, of any cultural and racial identity, his form is his greatest freedom and his insights are where he finds them". He also knew that form was both entrapment and release. Ellison realized this tension between chaos and form. He is both attracted to and repelled by the nervous energy of the process of coalescence. Even his prose style seems to turn around dualities that are fused by the writer, contained by the imagination and exemplified in the linguistic structure, as he believes they can be fused even beyond the page, in the real world.\(^10\)

Ellison saw the metonymic reductiveness implied in the white attempt to mythologize Negro life. He says:
the Negro stereotype is really an image of the unorganised, irrational forces of American life, forces through which, by projecting them in forms of images of an easily dominated minority, the white individual seeks to be at home in the vast unknown world of America. (SA, 41)

and again Ellison insists that without myths,

Chaos descends, faith vanishes and superstitions prowl in the mind. (SA, 41)

Ellison says that we are "language using language misusing animals - beings who by nature are vulnerable to both the negative and the positive promptings of language as symbolic action." He addresses this ambivalence in an essay, "Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity", where he suggests, "perhaps the most insidious and least understood form of segregation is that of the word. And by this I mean the word in all its complex formulations, from the proverb to the novel and stage play, the word with all its subtle power to suggest and foreshadow overt action while magically disguising the moral consequences of that action and providing it with symbolic and psychological justification. For it the word has the potency to receive and make us free, it also has the power to blind, imprison and destroy." For him "the essence of the world is its ambivalence". (SA, 24-25)

The above suspicion of ambivalence can be seen in all his works. We see it in the nonfunctional articulateness of his hero in "Flying Home"; in the deceptive speeches and dialogues of Invisible Man; on to the uncontrolled rhetoric of the hero of his later short story, "A Song of Innocence", who says:

They say that folk misuse words but I see it the other way around, words misuse people. Usually when you think you're saying what you mean you're really saying what the words want you to say ...
words are tricky ... No matter what you try to do, words can mean meaning.

As C.W.E. Bigsby says of Melville who had spoken of this same ambivalence when one tried to subordinate chaos to form. Melville felt that language was the main mechanism that helped give shape to the imagination. Ellison agrees with him and therefore he uses a quotation from *Benito Cereno* as an epigraph to his own novel:

"You are saved", cried Captain Delano
more and more astonished and pained;
"You are saved; what has cast such a shadow upon you?"

Captain Delano, in this story uses language as an agent of power and control, although the language becomes ironic because of his moral and intellectual blindness; while Benito Cereno, imprisoned by a cunning and dominant black crew, who for the most part remain potently silent, deploys a language which is willfully opaque, hinting at truths that language cannot be entrusted to reveal. Yet language is the only medium through which the novelist can reveal his own insights and truths. This was a familiar conundrum of nineteenth century American writing and one which Ellison believed in.

Ellison's quoting T.S. Eliot in the epigraph of his novel *Invisible Man*, also speak of this power of language to confuse, confound and yet reveal:

Harry : I tell you, it is not me you are looking at,
Not me you are grinning at, not me your confidential looks
Incriminate, but that other person, if person,
You thought I was: Let your necrophily
Feed upon that carcase..... (T.S.Eliot, Family Reunion)
Ellison's language at times rings with a humour that is deep, funny, ironic and meaningful. A good example in the conservation of the mad "shell shocked" veterans in the Golden Day chapter. Three black soldiers have arrived for wine and women to this saloon called the Golden Day. The dialogues among those vets is cacophonous.

The dialogues are funny and rich in comedy and meaning. They draw on all the resources of double entendre and humour associated with signifying and the blues. The veterans conversation is in the languages of various levels of society, and the meaning is often "multiple and circuitous." The language, in a humorous trend reveals the deepest truths, and sounds some of the dominant themes of his novel Invisible Man. 12

Ellison's use of language is imaginative. Though immensely gifted, Ellison is not a finished craftsman. The tempo of his book is too feverish, at times almost hysterical. Often he tries to overwhelm the reader when he should be doing something else. At times where he can simply tell, or suggest, or convince, he forces. Some passages are too descriptive and lengthy and they tend to drag. Apart from these minor shortcomings, Ellison's clarity of vision shines through brilliantly and his fiction grips the reader. His language speaks loudly through the vibrance and verbosity of his characters, who seem to be aware of the power of language. Conclusively, one can say that Ellison's use of language is a powerful vehicle for his ideas and his imagination.
B : IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM

Imagery is one of the most common terms in modern criticism, and one of the most ambiguous. It may mean many things: a mental picture, a picture made out of words, a vivid particularized description of visible objects and scenes, figurative language and so on. Thus, the context of this section spans all the images, symbols, metaphors and similes that Ellison uses descriptively to paint images with deep and varied connotations.

A symbol, on the other hand, in the broadest sense of the term, is anything which signifies something else. The words here refer to something which suggests a range of reference beyond itself. Some symbols are conventional and common like that of colours black and white, sunset and sunrise, peacocks, cages, lions, and many others. Whereas, some poets and writers use very private and personal symbols which are very elusive to the reader's interpretation. Ellison's use of symbolism is a marvellous blend of the conventional and the personal and they give depth and meaning to his work. These symbols help to broaden and heighten the perspective from which Ellison writes. An attempt has been made in this section to delve deep into and explain the various symbols and the imagery used by Ellison as a vehicle for his thoughts in his artistic endeavours.

Ellison's dominant symbols are those of colour, sight and invisibility. The names of his characters and personality types are symbolic in socio-economic, political contexts. There are many items, that though inanimate are vividly animated in their symbolic connotations. Scenes and places are also symbolically used by Ellison. Certain places and incidents symbolize historical and social incidents - they
flash across our minds and enhance the meaning of the scene. Ellison uses sight imagery, animal imagery and many new images to enliven his work. Nearly all his short stories are rich in symbolism and imagery. *Invisible Man*, his one and only novel, is a treasure house of symbols and images.

In the short story, "King of the Bingo Game," Ellison makes extensive use of symbolism. The black nameless protagonist tries to win the bingo game by pulling at the cord. According to Edward Guereschi:

> Gazing at the glittering wheel (the protagonist) is overcome by the twin desire to regard it as the twin interpreter of his fate, as well as to ascribe to it his despair. As a symbol of destiny, defining his submission, the wheel is indeed the harbinger of bitter truth......he fears to put his fortune to the test of reality by allowing the wheel to spin to a halt. Instead, he remains frozen, pressing the button mechanism that leads surrealistically to his subconscious. 13

The symbolism in this story reflects the suppression of the blacks in an indifferent white society. The bingo wheel is suggestive of the chances blacks take; it symbolizes time, destiny, the system; it shows life as a risk and a gamble; the wheel's stopping at double zero symbolizes his invisibility; the wheel also shows the helplessness of the blacks. The wheel is symbolic of the black American's destiny in an existentialist tradition enforced by a white majority. The namelessness of the hero suggests the identitylessness of the blacks.

The metaphorical title of Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man* evokes that which is very important in the black man's American experience: invisibility. The metaphor speaks of men who have been stripped of their national culture and forced to adhere to a strange foreign culture; socially it speaks of the plight of a group whose problems have been overlooked; finally invisibility shows the complicated
psychological dilemmas of men without identity, without any social identity or sympathy. It shows also the plight of a large group which has been ignored by the white American society. The opening words of Ellison's novel encapsulates the meaning and context of invisibility:

I am an invisible man ... I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.....It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearying on the nerves. Then, too, you're constantly being bumped against by those of poor vision. Or again, you often doubt if you really exist. You wonder whether you aren't simply a phantom in other people's minds. Say, a figure in a nightmare which the sleeper tries with all his strength to destroy. It's when you feel like this that, out of resentment, you begin to bump people back. (IM, 3)

The above is a description of a state and of a people to whom society is blind. Mask-wearing is another metaphor used by Ellison. What Ellison achieves in Invisible Man is a clever blend and synthesis of both these metaphors and this synthesis leads away from despair, and towards a positive or affirmative resolution of the difficulties and paradoxes involved in being an invisible man.

Mask wearing is both positive and negative; it is full of a strangely complex and ambiguous potentiality. The first character who brings the mask into the forefront is the hero's grandfather, who gives him valuable deathbed advice, saying that he has always been a traitor, putting on a guise of compliance in front of the whites:

Let 'em swallow you till they vomit or bust wide open.

The first incarnation of the grandfather's advice is Dr. Bledsoe. He works for the attainment of his objectives behind a clever manipulated mask. Bledsoe's disguise
has a strategic purpose behind it, but its effects are destructive. The mask becomes so important that the real person is lost and becomes invisible. Bledsoe has sacrificed his pride and dignity, his selfhood to invisibility and replaced them with a "power" that sadly can be used only "in the dark". Ellison's concepts of invisibility and mask wearing become one with the entry of Rinehart. The hero has been ignored throughout the novel; he has taken an identity proffered to him by many personalities. When he dons his sunglasses to mask his identity and save himself from Ras and the Brotherhood, it is the first time that he wears a mask himself: he consciously assumes a false front and becomes Rinehart. But he discovers quite quickly that the mask is many masks, and the metaphoric identities of Rinehart all lead him to the ultimate fact of Rinehart's invisibility. Rinehart's actual existence is purposely left pending and in doubt (Rinehart never appears in the novel) but to the hero he represents the opportunity of becoming a "master of chaos," lord of that realm of invisible things that lies "outside the narrow borders of what men call reality". Rinehart does not define himself, nor has any pattern to his existence, his world is a fluid one with infinite and endless possibilities. The hero, through Rinehart, discovers the vast freedom and power that lies within invisibility:

My entire body started to itch, as though I had just been removed from a plaster cast and was unused to the new freedom of movement. You could hardly make yourself anew... All boundaries down, freedom was not only the recognition of necessity, it was the recognition of possibility. And sitting there trembling I caught a brief glimpse of the possibilities posed by Rinehart's multiple personalities and turned away. It was too vast and confusing to contemplate. Then I looked at the polished lenses of the glasses and laughed. I had been trying to simply turn them into a disguise but they had become a political instrument instead; for if Rinehart could use them in his work, no doubt I could use them in mine. (IM, 376-377)
The above is a new interpretation of his grandfather's advice - a new mask.

According to Todd M. Lieber, all mask wearers have to face the ultimate question, that is implicit in Claude McKay's "Outcast" - can there be a real and substandard self, a true identity that exists away and separately from the false face, under the metamorphic external face of the mask? Does the mask wearer become just a shadow of himself, a ghostly presence, one who hardly exists and is most ineffective? Thus, Ellison feels that mask wearing is negative. Through it man evades both freedom and necessary self definition, he also shirks the responsibility, which must accompany freedom. The narrator destroys the sunglasses (that made him look like Rinehart) and then both literally and symbolically, the hero's period of rinehartism ends. He feels lost - for a while but then decisively throws the spear at Ras thinking, "it was better to live out one's own absurdity than to die for that of others......." He next goes underground into the hole. Symbolically, he goes deep down into his own self, his own being. He digs up, and contemplates his past. In that womb like warm hole there is the task of meditation and creation. He emerges, is reborn with a new insight that develops and evolves out of his consciousness of the root reasons of his invisibility. Ellison's view, expressed through his narrator is that invisibility is the result of the relationship between the two realms that he terms "chaos" and "reality". Reality is the pattern set out by society, and all that lie beyond this pattern is chaos. Ellison's insight is that these two terms are relative - one man's reality can be another's chaos. Ellison's hero remains invisible because his sense of identity and reality has no place and importance in the other realities in which he has so far lived (the south, the college, the paint factory, the brotherhood). He is responsible for his invisibility. He has refused to define himself, readily accepting the various masks or roles assigned to him. He has been like Tod Clifton's doll - a
puppet.

The narrator of *Invisible Man* comes out of his hibernation in the hole with the conviction that the creative act of writing is the means through which he can define himself. He finds that the reality he has created is full of contradictions, but through the power of the imagination he can learn to live within all these contradictions. He can conceive some form and pattern against the chaos. He finds flexibility, fluidity and possibility. In defining himself and chalking out a pattern of reality, the hero finds not only himself but discovers the socially responsible role he has to play as he is just a part of the larger whole. One cannot live within the narrow confines of a hole, or for that matter the strict rigid rules of society; one has to express his identity and reality.

Through *Invisible Man*, Ellison has brought about a synthesis of two dominant metaphors in black literature, that of mask wearing and invisibility. Ellison's achievement is that he condemns mask wearing, as negating of one's own personality and identity. He accepts the inherent unalterable invisibility which is a state that takes both blacks and others in its group. Ellison says that all men to some degree are invisible, unless their identity corresponds completely to someone else's image of reality. Thus the metaphor of invisibility expands to include the human condition. He has managed to create "music of invisibility" - the metaphor has become a vehicle for the expression, not of despair, but of affirmation and for an assertion of the possibility of true freedom, liberty and responsibility without the surrender, assimilation or destruction of his own identity. Thus, the artistic creative genius of Ellison discovers a responsible release for the black man and the modern man. Through his novel, Ellison, the man also finds expression and identity, within the
larger chaotic society of white America.

Ellison's choice of names is very symbolic. The hero is left without a name - this tactic speaks volumes about the personality, character and bearings of the hero. Dr. Bledsoe, sounds like "bled-so" and one is at once aware of the way in which Bledsoe bleeds so his own black brethren. Rinehart's name speaks of the ambiguity, confusion and chaos that Rinehart symbolises. One cannot be both "rind" and "heart" which confusingly Rinehart is. Ras means "race" and in Ras, the Exhorter turned Destroyer, one can see the violent uprising of racial feelings - he feels for Mother Africa, his people, his black brothers, his race. He cannot come to any compromise where racial differences are concerned. He brings with his name all the pagan, primitive urges of the first man, of Africa and the Negro race. Mary symbolises Mother Mary; she helps, inspires and guides the narrator. She gives him a vision to fight for; she nurses him when he's ill - she is the mother figure and her name Mary has been cleverly, aptly chosen. She is full of love, warmth and wit. Trueblood's name means that he is true to his blood. Blood means things physical, it also mean his kith and kin ... whatever he has done (incest) Trueblood comes back to his family, his blood relations and he swears to do his duty by them. Jack reminds us of Jack, the bear. He is full of cunning and moves in the dark. He works with some deep ulterior motive.

Ellison passionately believes that when one race or people treats another as an object or animal, both became bestial, and lose their humanity. The animal imagery in the Battle Royal chapter of *Invisible Man* highlights this view of Ellison. Ralph Ellison once said in an interview:

*When you begin to structure literary forms, you are going to have*
to play variations on your themes, and you are going to have to make everything vivid, so that the reader can see and hear and feel and smell, and, if you're lucky, even taste ... But ... there are things in Invisible Man ... that I can't imagine my having consciously planned. 15

So whether Ellison did it consciously or unconsciously, the animal imagery dominates his novel, and in the Battle Royal chapter we can see it holding, binding and enlivening the fabric of the chapter. Early in Invisible Man the hero overhears his grandfather teaching his father to live with his head "in the lion's mouth". The lion is the white man who roars through the novel. The "men roared" as the young boys struggle for coins on the electrified rug; the men are "roaring with laughter" and during his speech when he errs with the word "social responsibility", the room fills up "with the uproar of laughter."

The white men treat the black boys as animals and the naked blonde as an object; this makes them reduce themselves to animals. One man looks at the blonde holding his arms up "like an intoxicated panda, winding his belly in an obscene grind. The creature was completely hypnotized". The men then sink their "beefy fingers" into her flesh and "run howling after her". The invisible man has also seen them "wolfing down the buffet food". The hero imagines them as "poisonous cottonmouths" - their voice when they yell is like a "bass-voiced parrot". 206

The young black boys are treated as animals as they are "crowded together into the servants elevator" (like cattle) and "led out of the elevator". When the hero sees the naked woman his skin turns to "goose flesh". The boys are called "sonsabitches" by the men, and Tatlok calls the hero a "sonofabitch". 206
The boys are called "coons" before they fight and "crabs crouching to protect their mid-sections" as they fight their arms "testing the smoke filled air like the knobbed feelers of hypersensitive snails". The butterfly, a symbol of beauty, peace and freedom is ironically mentioned when, the hero's blood shapes "itself into a butterfly" on the canvas. When they fight for the coins, the electricity shakes the hero "like a wet rat". One of the boys is lifted up and he is "glistening with sweat like a circus seal", when he is thrown back onto the rug his muscle twitches "like the flesh of a horse stung by many flies."

Ellison also uses verbs and nouns that are always associated with animals; this highlights his theme that both races, black and white, become animals if they refuse to treat each other as humans. As the boys fight in the ring, the hero "butts" Tatlock. One boy "whimpers" like a wounded dog. The hero collects the coins from the rug "crawling rapidly." The naked blonde is a "fair bird-girl" with eyes made up and coloured blue like a "baboon's butt". The briefcase the hero gets is a "calfskin briefcase"; the hero's blood drools on the "leather" and he can smell it. The scholarship is an official looking document probably made up of "sheepskin".

Robert G O'Meally also discusses a "folk character dating from slavery days, Brer Dog," who makes his appearance in Invisible Man. He also quotes a Count Basie and Jimmy Rushing song in which a woman has features of a monkey, a frog and a bull dog. 16

White men treat blacks not only as animals but as inanimate objects. The naked blonde in the Battle Royal scene protects and shields herself by becoming
impersonal. She is like a "kewpie doll" wearing "an abstract mask". She has a detached expression on her face. The invisible hero is compared to and compares himself to inanimate objects-"a ginger cookie", a "dish-rag" a "jack-in-the-box" and a "pocket sized dictionary"- all in the Battle Royal chapter.

The racial situation is seen as a circus and the blacks as clowns, ridiculous, ludicrous and laughable. The blonde has red lips "like a clown"; the hero calls Tatlock "a stupid clown"; the boy who is thrown up looks like a "circus seal". The hero dreams that he is "at a circus with his grand father" who "refused to laugh at the clowns no matter what they did." The black men are represented as clowns, who put on big artificial smiles to hide their humiliation, and achieve what they want. The hero is guilty of this aping as Ellison dramatizes in the Battle Royal's rug scene: "Ignoring the shock by laughing, as I brushed the coins off quickly, I discovered that I could contain the electricity - a contradiction, but it works." The hero gets the coins and absorbs the hatred of the white men, but his grandfather's words and his conscience do not let him live in peace.

Ellison uses a lot of colour symbolism. He uses mainly three colour pairs: black- white, blue - gray and gold - brass. The black- white has racial implications. In the Battle Royal chapter, "the lily- white men" smoke "black cigars;" the naked woman is white and blonde; the attendants wear "white jackets" and the briefcase is "wrapped in white tissue paper". The imagery symbolises that the white man has put a white veneer over his world, but the black boys cannot see through it as the black boys are "blindfolded with broad bands of white cloth". Later in the paint factory, the narrator has to mix ten drops of black paint to a cream coloured base to make white paint, a symbol that suggests a social truism - that racial colour is more noticeable
when contrasted. Again, it shows that a proper mixing of the whites and blacks will make America a better place. The hero goes to school with a briefcase made by Shadwhitmore - the letters rearranged mean "shad(e) more whit(e)" implying that whites get whiter if there is educational racial discrimination and segregation. The invisible man is 'ginger-coloured' and he happens to be the only one able to see through the white cloth tied over his eyes. Symbolically, it presages that the hero will be able to see through and assess his situation and find his way even in the white dominated society. The animal imagery and the use of colours adds a vitality and vividness to Ellison's narrative. The colours blue and gray dominate the battle royal scene. The room is covered with "a cloud of blue-gray smoke". When the hero gets hurt "streaks of blue light fill the black world behind the (white) blindfold". A boy faints with "bluish lips", another is so shocked he looks "gray". The boxing ring canvas and electrified rug are "gray" and "blue". The white woman calls the hero as though from a "gray and threatening sea".

The gold-brass combination foreshadows appearance versus reality. The hero fights for gold coins but they turn out to be "brass pocket tokens". In his dreams he opens many envelopes, ultimately coming to one with a message in "gold": Keep This Nigger Boy Running". The hero is very naive and so graduates from Greenwood High School. Red is another colour used by Ellison, it signifies hatred and anger. Tatlock wore "red fighting trunks", the woman has "red smiling lips", the howling men have "red faces". Highlighting the visual effect of the scene where the hero falls out, "the room went red as he fell", Ellison says:

What the unconscious mind does is to put all manners of things into juxtaposition. The conscious mind has to provide the logical structure of narrative and incident through which these unconscious patterns can be allowed to radiate by throwing them into artful
Satanic red seems to cast a weird glow in many scenes in *Invisible Man*. Needing money, the invisible hero goes to meet Jack who has offered him a job. Jack's red hair is mysterious and noticeable. Jack's offer to the invisible hero has a satanic appeal......

"You are wise to distrust me", he said, 'you don't know who I am and you don't trust me ...... but don't give up hope because some day you will look me up of your accord and it will be different, for then you will be ready. Just call this number and ask for Brother Jack. You needn't give your name, just mention our conversation." (IM, 222)

The hero responds and is invited to a party at the Chthonian, where he is shocked at the rich plush environment. This was the same world Tod had entered three years earlier. The hero goes to sleep restlessly after meeting Jack; Mary's clock seems out of harmony with the outside world where the sirens howl, which is the world of Jack. Tod is later confronted by Ras and Ras tempts Tod in much the same way as Jack had tempted the hero. The initiation scenes are very similar as there is an eerie red glow over these scenes. There is a satanic red cast in the Chthonian apartment which is created by Jack's red hair and the Italian red draperies that fall in rich folds from the ceiling. In the street where Ras confronts Tod, a red neon light glowed mysteriously, "Checks Cashed Here". Ras's eyes glow red as he tries to ask Tod Clifton to join him, reminding him that they are brothers as they're the same colour, black. Ras looks like a satanic fire spitting devil.

*In Invisible Man*, the narrator is not seen by most people he meets because the "inner eyes"of tradition, racial barriers and personal desires prevent them from
seeing him as an individual. Sight and lack of it as implied by the word "invisibility" become key images in Ellison's novel. Lack of sight in a negro makes him an Uncle Tom figure who accepts the behaviour of whites and is satisfied with it. The narrator's first confrontation with sightlessness comes when he goes to a Negro College. Here there is a statue of a kneeling slave and that of the Founder of the College who is known for his saintliness, and, is loved by both whites and blacks. In the statue the founder's eyes are empty and he bends to lift the veil of the face of the kneeling slave. What confuses the hero is that he cannot understand whether the veil is being lifted or dropped more firmly in place, to impede the slaves sight further. The matron of the College, Miss Susie Grisham, does not see clearly. She listens to Homer A. Barbee's speech with eyes closed. The speech ends in a revelation; Homer Barbee stumbles and drops his dark glasses and it is realized that he is blind. He symbolically stands for Negroes who do not see the plight of fellow blacks.

In contrast to the above, the eyes of Dr Bledsoe, the President of the Negro College are sharp and bright. His eyes are set on personal gains and he manages to fool all the whites with his sycophancy, ultimately getting what he wants, but cheating his own people. He is a shrewd ruthless character.

Once North, in the first speech for the Brotherhood the hero says: "They've dispossessed us each of one eye from the day we're born. So now we can see in only straight white lines." (IM, 260) This half-sight, therefore symbolically shows that there is an awareness of the problems faced, but no insight into how to fight them.

Half-sight is there in white men too. Jack of the Brotherhood has one glass
eye. Jack does not see clearly the way of dealing with the blacks. Instead of dealing with them as brothers his ideals are elsewhere, he actually deviates from the aims of the Brotherhood. He is ready to sacrifice the Negroes for power, as he had once sacrificed his eye for power. The moment the hero discovers Jack's false eye is a moment of revelation. It happens at a Committee meeting, where the hero has just discovered that the Brotherhood's words of brotherly love are empty promises; the Brotherhood is ready to sacrifice the Negroes for their other interests.

Blindness to the truth is seen in both white and black; it makes things easier to bear. It is a blunder when in response to Mr Norton's vague, "Let me see.......", the hero shows him Jim Trueblood, a southern Negro reality, and takes him to the Golden Day, where the shocking words of "shell-shocked veterans" causes Mr Norton to collapse.

White men's eyes fill Negroes with fear and awe. The narrator is afraid of the effect of white men's eyes on him. As he goes to meet Dr Bledsoe, he sees the moon rising and describes it as "a white man's blood shot eyes". The Liberty Paints factory's paint is Optic White -this eye white paint can cover everything, even the blackness of a lump of coal, just as the white man's power can override the negro's greatest efforts. The factory's slogan is "If its Optic White, it's the Right White" which the narrator rephrases into "If you're white, you're right", a line from an old blues song.

In the hospital after an accident in the paint factory, the first thing the hero recalls after gaining consciousness is a white doctor looking at him through a "bright third eye". He has been brought here for a lobotomy, which shall deprive him of his
personality. The most vivid memory in the hero's mind of this scene is "the bloodshot bulging eyes of the white doctor". White men's eyes are powerful and hypnotic as they symbolically show the white man's power over the black.

Dark glasses make everything appear darker but when the narrator puts on sunglasses, his sight of his people becomes clearer. He is mistaken for Rinehart who symbolically represents all that a black man is: Rinehart is the hipster, the runner, the ladies man, the numbers man, the Harlem big man, the preacher who teaches the Gospels. Rinehart is an amalgamation of all the stereotypes associated with the blacks. The hero's wearing sunglasses takes him closer to his people, he knows them better. He forgets the hollow words of the Brotherhood in which he had wrapped himself and sees the true plight of his people. Now he will try to find a way out of the labyrinth in which they are lost. Homer Barbee's dark glasses only hides his blindness, symbolically, speaking of his inability to see the true status of his people.

When there is less "white" light, the narrator's vision becomes clearer. When he falls into the coal pit, where he can neither see, nor be seen, does he realize the truth of his own invisibility and the invisibility of his Negro brethren in a white society. Yet, as the whole world needs it, the narrator too needs light, and he symbolically gets it by lighting up the ceiling and the walls of his cellar; he wants to become visible and be seen by the whites as he would want them to see him and his people. The whites must see the Negroes as human beings. As Alice Black says;

Sight imagery in Invisible Man is basic because sightlessness in others is implied in the concept of invisibility. By presenting characters in the novel as physically unable to see, the author conveys the idea that what people are really unable to see, is the
harsh reality which lurks behind the platitudes they sport.  

When one thinks of blacks and slavery, one naturally thinks of Abraham Lincoln, the emancipator. In his poem, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," Walt Whitman, the bard of modern America, measures poetic acumen within the framework of Lincoln's shocking and untimely death. In his novel *Invisible Man* Ellison uses many of Whitman's symbols - the lilac, the thrush, the bells, the train; yet he uses them in a very new and different mode. According to Marvin E. Mengeling,

he uses these same symbols of the lilac, star and thrush to measure the great irony and bitter disillusion of racial betrayal brought about after the death of another great fighter for emancipation, the beloved Founder- Ellison's picture of a black and mythical Lincoln.  

Homer A. Barbee is blind physically and much more blind actually as he does not see the truth of his words, nor the emptiness of the platitudes he heaps on Bledsoe. Homer, as his ancient namesake is truly blind. Barbee's speech about the Founder of the Negro College rings with the imagery from Whitman's poem, and with Abraham Lincoln. The martyred Founder has done much for the blacks:

I'm sure you've heard it time and again; of this godly man's labors, his great humility and his undiminishing vision, the fruits of which you enjoy today; concrete, made flesh; his dreams, conceived in the starkness and darkness of slavery, fulfilled now even in the air you breathe, in the sweet harmonies of your blended voices, in the knowledge which each of you - daughter and grand daughter, sons and grandsons, of slaves - all of you partaking of it in bright and well-equipped class rooms.....this story of rich implications, this living parable of proven glory and humble nobility - and it, as I say, has made you free (IM,93)
The founder also like Lincoln had to face a fatal volley that creased his skull and left him limp; yet he unlike Lincoln recovered, only to die later by a "mysterious sickness" on the train which became his hearse. Ellison changes the power and priority of the story. The story leaves the narrator with awe, disillusionment and restlessness- a weird and painful combination. The lilacs of Whitman's poem and the greenness of spring are there, yet in Ellison's fictitious College, the air was "restless with scents of lilacs", the sound of vespers beckons to him, as "somber chapel bells" which are doom like and lead the reader to sad thoughts of Whitman's "tolling, tolling bells".

The thrush sings through Whitman's poem. In the chapel of Ellison's college, a girl sings a beautiful song that seems very private for her, and she seems filled with "nostalgia, regret and repentance". The hero does not feel the sorrow and beauty of the song, but is shocked into an unease and a restlessness when the whole scene strikes him as an unnatural facade of some eerie scheme; the irony of the entire convocation leaves him numb. The young hero hurriedly leaves the hall and goes out into the night. Then as though to emphasize his thoughts, he hears the trilling of a mockingbird "from where it perched upon the hand of the Founder, flapping its moon-mad tail above the head of the eternally kneeling slave" (IM, 104) As Lincoln's successors were unfit, so was Bledsoe, one who had no vision but was only interested in selfish power. The narrator is full of disillusionment when he catches a brief glimpse of the reality behind the facade.

Whitman had expressed faith in the power of the unknown future, but in Invisible Man, we have the hero, Ellison's spokesperson, speaking for the experience and knowledge of the author who has seen what he considers the original promise.
of freedom, liberty and equality turn into a terribly ugly and grotesque joke. Ellison bitterly says that all promises are vague and therefore not worthy of praise, or acceptance.

Floyd Horowitz has discovered the novel's use of patterns from the Brer Rabbit and Brer Bear cycle of black American folk stories. The invisible hero of Invisible Man is constantly cast in the role of the thick headed Brer Bear, stumbling time and again into traps deftly set by Brer Rabbit in his various aliases: Bledsoe, Norton, Emerson, Brockway and Jack. We see that at times the invisible hero does play the role of the swift and smart rabbit, outrunning the field at the end. The invisible hero does manage to overpower his so called accomplices, like Jack, and come into his own at the end. He adopts Rinehartism, that is full of cunning, sly cleverness; it also has the wit and swiftness of the rabbit.

Many objects in Invisible Man have distinct symbolic messages. Brother Tarp gives the hero a leg chain, from slavery days - it has the clear marks of a struggle on it that show that pains had been taken to file it away, symbolically suggesting the difficulties faced while rising out of slavery. When the hero gets it, he feels that Brother Tarp is parting with something that is deep and meaningful, which a father gives his son - he is reminding the young hero of his past, which indirectly hints towards his actions in the future. Dr Bledsoe also shows the hero a leg shackle from slavery days - it is a glistening and well polished piece. Bledsoe says that it is a symbol of his progress and the progress of the black people. It is polished as Bledsoe polishes the whites to get their favour; the polish he puts on of obsequiousness that the whites like, and that helps Bledsoe to draw power cunningly out of their hands into his own. Dr. Bledsoe, as the hero discovers, is not what he
appears to be - this is a shocking discovery for the naive hero. One has to see through the polish to come to see the real being. Tod Clifton, when disillusioned by the Brotherhood, and rattled out of his false identity by the touchingly true words of Ras, the Exhorter, is seen selling Sambo dolls. These dolls become mocking pictures of the blacks; they symbolically show the ugly, grotesque image of the blacks, that image which dominates the white psyche. The dolls can be manipulated and moved as one wishes; symbolically this is the state of the blacks, who are cleverly mishandled and manipulated by the whites. The blacks are helpless and succumb to this manipulation, like the puppet dolls. The dolls have wide grinning faces and are dressed garishly. The grins are the masks that the blacks put on to make life easier.

Another object of symbolic significance is the coin bank that the narrator finds in the room in which he stays at Mary's. The object fills the hero with distaste; it upsets and infuriates him and he violently throws it down making it go to pieces. It is,

The cast iron figure of a very black, red-lipped and wide-mouthed Negro, whose white eyes stared up at me from the floor, his face an enormous grin, his single large black hand held palm up, before his chest. It was a bank, a piece of early Americana, the kind of bank which, if a coin is placed in the hand and a lever pressed upon the back, will raise its arm and flip the coin into the grinning mouth. (IM, 242)

The reaction of the Negro protagonist is violent; he is "enraged by the tolerance or lack of discrimination", that made Mary keep such a "self mocking image". The narrator breaks the piece, but hearing Mary coming collects the coins and the broken pieces into a packet. The piece, the old cast iron bank, is a representative of the blacks past; it cannot be got rid of. Though the hero breaks
the piece he cannot get rid of the pieces. He puts it in his briefcase, and though he tries thrice he cannot throw it. Right till the end, when he ends up in a coal cellar, the bank remains with him in his briefcase.

The briefcase that the protagonist carries through the novel is symbolic of all that the deluded hero holds dear. The briefcase in one aspect is like a shield that protects him; and, is again like a mask as it gives him self-importance. In it he carries his high school diploma, the scholarship papers, Tod Clifton's sambo doll, the paper giving him the new Brotherhood name and the anonymous warning letter. What the invisible hero realizes at the end is that all these were identities thrust upon him, they took him deeper into an illusory world. It is at the end of the novel when he burns each of these things to light his way in the darkness, that symbolically, enlightenment dawns upon him. It is with destroying their identities that he is freed of his illusions and emerges as a person in his own right and being. The scene where he burns all these things, symbolically reminds one of the phoenix. Out of the ashes, the invisible man rises with an insight into himself and a new enlightened perspective with which to view the world, which he had earlier called "chaos".

In the epilogue, we have the hero speak vibrantly and vividly about all that he has been through. The imagery of the words expresses the torment and turmoil he has suffered, in trying to be what others wished him to be:

But here was the rub: Too often in order to justify them, I had to take myself by the throat and choke myself until my eyes bulged and my tongue hung out and wagged like the door of an empty house in a high wind. Oh yes, it made them happy and it made me sick. So I became ill of affirmation, of saying yes against the nay saying of my stomach not to mention my brain. (IM, 432)
The hospital scene of *Invisible Man* is an example of excellent imagery and symbolism. It is written in the realistic-naturalistic mode used by Ellison; it contains socio-historic relevance. After the accident at the Liberty Paints Factory, the invisible hero loses consciousness, to regain it and find himself in a machine. Impersonal white doctors are there in the room. He twists and manages to free one hand from the machine, and though he is apprehensive, nobody notices it. He is filled with rage as he grasps the paradox that "I really was no freer than before - simply because they refused to acknowledge my freedom. They had locked me in their eyes like a tadpole in a jug." He finds Mary familiar, when she comes there but cannot recognize her. He is obsessed with his identity; the whole scene shows the mind of the hero through distorted hallucinations. The machine into which he is put is both like a womb, and like the melting pot into which the vet had said he would fall when he reached the North. The machine seems designed, if not to destroy the sense of racial identity of American blacks, at least to neutralize it and render it powerless. An astonishingly morbid and comic conversation follows in which the doctors decide to perform a lobotomy on him, which would result in a complete personality change, but would leave the patient physically and neurally whole. As these are discussed, with "castration" also coming into the conversation, the hero's mind fills with images from his past life in the South. When the hero is asked who his mother is, he has no answer. When the hero is freed from the machine the last item to be detached is an umbilical cord-like cord "attached to the stomach node", which strangely gives the impression of rebirth. The hero symbolically becomes free, but, yet does not know who he is, this shows that he is a "walking zombie" as the vet had called him; one who can feel the effect of the brutality of black American life but cannot understand it.
The invisible hero's meeting with Emerson leads to his opening Dr. Bledsoe's letter only to discover it to be an extension of the "Keep This Nigger Boy Running" syndrome. As the hero leaves Emerson's office, he takes a bus and finds himself sitting behind a man who is whistling an old jingle about a bare rumpled robin, "They Picked Poor Robin". The song is a mock funeral dirge to the invisible hero's deception by Dr. Bledsoe. Ellison himself comments:

Back in the thirties members of the old Blue Devil Orchestra celebrated a certain robin by playing a lugubrious little tune called "They Picked Poor Robin" ..... Poor Robin was picked again and again and his pluckers were ever unnamed and mysterious. Yet the tune was inevitably productive of laughter - even when we ourselves were its object. For each of us recognized that his fate was somehow our own. Our defects and failures - even our final defeat by death - were loaded upon his back and given ironic significance and thus made more bearable. (SA, 231)

The paint factory episode in which we have the paint mixing scene is the most artistically satisfying and richly suggestive fusion of the novel's literal and symbolic levels. The paint factory is so big "it looks like a small city" - it represents America, mainly white American society. The company motto is "Keep America Pure with Liberty Paints". The motto has distinct metaphorical overtones as for moral purity and racial purity. The company trademark is a screaming eagle - it is the same as the insignia of the United States of America. The paint is "as white as George Washington's Sunday-go-to-meeting wig and as sound as the mighty dollar!" and again it can "cover just about anything". The metaphorical implications of these statements are evident enough. The invisible man is told to add ten drops of black to make the white paint whiter. It seems therefore that American purity is intensified by the admixture of a strictly controlled amount of black - ten drops per bucket. One remembers here that the black population of America is ten percent of
the total. One faintly remembers here the ten black boys who had been pushed into
fight in the white man's smoker in the Battle Royal chapter.

The addition of black to make the white whiter is a very thought provoking
proposition. One wonders what it means on the symbolic level. Do the ten black
drops stand for that percent of the blacks who emulate white values and aspirations,
in the process making the white American way stronger? Booker T. Washington is
one example of these blacks; so it is quite intentionally that Ellison here makes the
invisible hero wonder whether the college he had attended was also painted with
Liberty Paints. The white financial support did help the college function. Mr. Norton,
a white philanthropist made himself feel morally purer and whiter by patronizing the
blacks and making himself sentimentally attached to their destiny.

The addition of ten black drops to make the white paint whiter could also mean
those Negroes who had been cleverly manipulated to maintain and intensify the
whiteness of white society. One remembers the words of the vet at the Golden Day
who spoke of "that great false wisdom taught slaves and pragmatists alike, that
white is right". An example is Lucius Brockway, an Uncle Tom figure whose
relationship with the white owner of Liberty Paints is one of willing exploitation.
Brockway also stands for that group of underpaid and uneducated substratum of
black labour on which industrialized America is based.

The invisible man makes a blunder in the mixing which leads to the paint
having a faint gray tinge, which is visible to the invisible hero, but which Kimbro
fails to notice. The hero stares in disbelief when Kimbro does not see the gray tinge
that is very clear to him. The fact that both see the same colour differently suggests
that at one level the paint and the uses to which it is put, is an optical illusion. The paint is to go to cover a national monument which suggests a national whitewash, planned to absorb black Americans into a pure history of American life - to cover the black truth with a glossy white - the mythology, the screaming eagles, George Washington at prayer and the ideal of material affluence represented by the almighty dollar. Lucius Brockway boasts that the paint is "so white you can paint a chunka coal and you'd have to crack it open with a sledge hammer to prove it wasn't white clean through". The so called purity of American society, symbolised by the whitewash of the national monument, has one justification: the exclusion of the blacks from the economic and other opportunities of the American way of life.

When the invisible hero is left on his own, he makes the paint that has a gray tinge: this suggests that when left on his own or not controlled by the whites, blacks will begin to make their presence visible in America. The careful calculation of adding ten drops to make the white paint whiter suggests that clever expert manipulation is needed to make the American whitewash of its black component effective. Kimbro's failure to notice the gray tinge in the paint, which is very clearly visible to the black invisible hero suggests that one of the two is experiencing an optical illusion, and, also that the American reality appears different to blacks and whites. Again Kimbro's failure to notice the gray tinge suggests that for the whites, the blacks are invisible, as has been insisted from the first line of the novel, and, later insisted on by the vet at the Golden Day. Thus the paint factory chapter of *Invisible Man* is one of the richest on the symbolic level. It brings back to memory and echoes other scenes and themes of the novel.
Invisible Man, a novel of titanic proportions where symbolism is concerned is mainly dependent on the metaphor of invisibility. Other symbols too abound in the novel. The play on names, the depth of meaning given to some objects, all use symbolism as a technique. The novel is rich in imagery. The Ellisonian style is full of long descriptive passages that make one visualize what the hero experiences. The College scenes, the Trueblood episode, the paint factory episode and many other scenes are rich in images. An attempt to catalogue and analyse all the imagery and symbols used by Ellison would be an impossible task. An attempt has been made in the above section that is quite exhaustive, and most of the dominant symbols used in the Ellisonian technique of narration have been dealt with. To end this section, some light must be thrown on the enormity of this task of attempting to analyse Ellison's use of symbols and images:

For Richard Chase, writing in the Kenyon Review, the theme of Invisible Man was "the classic novelistic theme: the search of an innocent hero for knowledge of reality, self, and society." Chase was wary of the symbols with which the novel was "rather thickly endowed" and of "its tendency toward surrealism and jazz culture" by "the profound underlying metaphor of invisibility which not only contained social commentary but which had metaphorical, psychological, and moral dimensions."

C: MODES OF NARRATION

Henry James says, "The author makes his readers, just as he makes his characters." Trollope opines, "It is the first necessity of the novelist's position that he make himself pleasant." So, a pleasant exchange of views and ideas takes place between the author and the reader. This exchange becomes a memorable and unique experience if the mode of narration employed is viable. The author himself creates
his audience as his characters reveal their feelings and emotions, causing a sympathetic and warm response in the reader. The reader, to an extent, feels himself a part of the story and shares the experiences of the characters in the novel. If an author is able to create this cosy and ambient atmosphere between his characters, himself and his readers, one has to applaud his narrative skills. The modes of narration hold a very important place in the technique used by the writers of fiction.

There are innumerable techniques of narration in fiction. There is a difference in writers who "tell" and others that "show". When a writer expressively shows what he wants he gets a response from the reader and he is therefore better than the writers who "tell". Realistic narration is again a style employed in fiction. Realism gives the work a lot of intensity that manages to ring a chord in the reader's mind. Whether a novelist should be objective or subjective is a debatable issue. Like in a debate, both have their justification. An objective narration keeps the author neutral and impartial whereas subjective mode brings in closeness and intensity.

In Invisible Man, we have an example of a typical heroic narrative. The protagonist of Invisible Man discovers his destiny during a trip that takes him underground to a place which is out of the sphere of time, a place where he gets information about the future that enables him to come to terms with and accept his past, and, take heart in the present. One is reminded here of the demoralized Aeneas, who directed by the Sybil, visits his father in Hades in the sixth book of the Aeneid, to make such a discovery. The invisible man's trip underground gives him a slightly different sense of time .... Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those
points where time stands still or from where it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around." \textit{(IM, 7)}

The hero is led here by an ugly and intoxicated woman named Sybil, passing through the hellish scenes of the riots of Harlem, and terrible frightening dreams of murder and castration. After this horrible trip through hell, he finally receives and understands his grandfather's message. There is a difference here from Virgil, who could set the revelation of Aeneas's future in the past. In \textit{Invisible Man} the message through the novel remains tentative, exploring and ambiguous. The narrator and the author did not know what was to come. It was through looking into his past that his fate could be revealed, that he could be shown to emerge.

The art of fiction employs various techniques. At times in the novel \textit{Invisible Man}, the hero speaks in such a manner that our mind and memory flash with the similarity to other American heroes and leaders. The hero echoes Washington; Homer Barbee's speech in the Southern college the protagonist attends, reminds one of Abraham Lincoln in the parallels in life and activities that are shown in the character and life of the Founder of the college. Such a mode of narration where the speakers echo real life characters gives a wider connotation to the narration and fills it with deeper meaning.

Ellison's narrator thoroughly subscribes to the Booker T. Washington ethic. When he is called to give his valedictory speech at high school, he echoes Washington's idea and rhetoric. He tells his classmates to cultivate friendly and congenial relationship with their white neighbours. The young hero also quotes the key line of Washington's \textit{Atlanta Proclamation Address}, "Cast down your bucket
where you are" and the implication here is that if the coloured southerners look for water elsewhere, they may die of thirst. The hero also uses Washington's important phrase "Social responsibility" to outline the role that a Negro should play in the South. The narrator hopes and dreams that after his graduation he can rise through this Washington Southern system and code to become like his idol, an educational leader, or if not that, at least a lawyer or a doctor in the Negro South.

Washington's politics have embedded themselves in the mind of the narrator. Washington advocated that the southern Negroes should remain in the South; he wanted the Negroes to make themselves appealing to the whites by their personal cleanliness and hygiene, industrious labour, by being respectful in their dealings with the whites, and by feeling a responsibility towards the society and community. The Negro should for his own success, learn not to challenge white supremacy. Washington's pet phrase was that the Negro should campaign for "responsibility" not "equality". The Negro's success would be measured by tokens from white society, not in terms of respect from his people.

All the above mentioned ideas make up our young narrator at the beginning of Invisible Man. It is only towards the end of the novel and his experience that he has his own insight and learns to place himself in a chaotic society. In the Battle Royal chapter after the struggle of black boys for the coins (which ultimately are discovered to be just tokens) on the electrified rug (which made them appear ridiculous and debarred their humanity) the other nine boys are giving their pittances (whites reward blacks after they publicly debase themselves), the narrator is asked to deliver a speech. The protagonist, steeped in Washington's philosophy, voices the platitudes of Booker T. Washington, feigning the air of sincerity and accents of emphasis.
When he mentions the phrase "social responsibility", they ask him to repeat it again and again, until in a moment of mental exhaustion he substitutes the word "equality". Challenged by the audience he quickly reverts to the traditional unrevolutionary phrase. In the second sequence of the novel, at the southern college where he goes on a scholarship, he learns the kinds of Negroes who receive rewards totally disproportionate to their work. As a student, the narrator is asked to chauffeur a white trustee, Mr. Norton (whose name echoes "northern" and Charles Eliot Norton, the first professor of ancient history at Harvard and heir to a certain kind of New England Brahmin liberalism). The hero takes Mr. Norton, at his command, to the Negro log cabin of Trueblood (who as his name suggests represents the primitive, uneducated Negro unaffected by the values of white culture) Trueblood has impregnated his daughter. Norton rewards Trueblood, and, Trueblood uncomprehendingly recounts how whites have been coming to him and offering him money, after they heard of the incest. He is bewildered but says that he had never had it so good as he has now with the whites trooping in, questioning him and then rewarding him. Whites reward the Negro's debasement.

Ellison's narrator in *Invisible Man* is an unusual picaresque narrator. Ellison makes extensive use of dreams and hallucinations and therefore as Robert E. Abraham says the "orientation in time and space become problematic". It is important that the chronology of *Invisible Man* is set, only then can the Prologue-Body-Epilogue design be understood. The narrator keeps bouncing between the past and the present so it is important to understand the date of the fictive present. Early in the novel, the hero makes an allusion that settles the year in which he is narrating his memoir. He says that his grand parents were freed from slavery "about eighty-five years ago" (IM, 13) The emancipation proclamation was
In 1863. In chapter 1, the narrator says that he is taking us back "some twenty years", thus that sets the year at 1928, when his adventures begin. The Prologue and the Epilogue are set in the fictive present (1948) and the actor in the body of the novel begins when he leaves high school and goes to college. (1928) when he is about eighteen years of age. Two years later he is expelled in the spring of 1930, and at once leaves for New York, seven weeks before his twentieth birthday. He spends about fifteen months above ground in New York. In Chapter Eight, he feels lonely and homesick but reminds himself that "it was less than a month" that he has been here. After many episodes he announces that he "awoke one morning to find that my first Northern winter has set in". (IM, 226)

So this becomes the winter of 1930, and it is here and now that he gets involved with the Communist Brotherhood. At the beginning of Chapter Seventeen, the invisible hero tells us that a few months have passed but the weather is still cold, so that becomes the early spring of 1931. Then there occurs a specific reference to the "hot dry August night" just before the Harlem riot scene which drives him underground. Thus, we know that his hibernation begins in August, 1931.

Therefore the main body of the novel, about 70% covers less than four years - from late spring 1928 to late summer 1931; from his high school graduation to his going underground. Extrapolating from this chronology, we learn that the invisible hero has inhabited his dark hole for about seventeen years, from 1931 to 1948 (which is the fictive present, as proved earlier). The actual historical period he describes is the early years of the Great Depression. So he has, as he says hibernated like a bear and slept through the most traumatic year in modern history - he has missed the latter part of the Depression, the Civil Rights legislation of the New Deal, World War II,
the beginning of the nuclear age and the beginning of the cold war. Thus this picaro narrator has been removed from the historical reality by disappearing underground. He is not therefore a very reliable spokesman for his age. He is a peculiar man who hides for seventeen years in a hole, stealing electricity and counting his 1,369 bulbs. He is irrational. Like America what he historically was (compassionate, idealistic) is no guide to what he is today (disillusioned, violent). Maybe it is this irrationality that makes Ellison withdraw himself from his narrator. Ellison told Allen Geller, "it is his book, not mine, and the writing and publication of his experience is an act of (his) self definition." The narrative chronology, the experiences of the hero and his self definition, make the hero an unusual picaresque narrator. Chronology plays a very important part in any mode of narration. It is when we put a narrator against the canvas of history and the tempo of the age in which he lives that the narration deepens in meaning.

Yvonne Fonteneau opines in her essay, "Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man: A Critical Re-evaluation":

.... Henry Louis Gates reads Invisible Man as a narrative of signifying tropes turning on "repetitive formal structures and their differences" .... Ellison himself tends to discount Gates's earlier claim that Invisible Man "embodies and transcends almost two centuries of repeated black narrative strategies" .... anyone who has read Invisible Man finds that, whether intentional or not, the "slave narrative" as strategy is in place as "prologue" to Invisible Man. To subject and text, the slave narrative is essential to our understanding of how the protagonist recreates himself. 

As the narrator of Invisible Man grows and develops and recreates himself, the position of women becomes very important. The narrative goes back down a historical line, lives in the present and extends forward into the future. This historical
line is encoded with women who bear witness to the "beingness" of the invisible hero, and, work as metaphors of cultural consciousness. They nurture him and give him sustenance during the dizzy spells in the street and during the dream sequence that gives a vivid explanation of the mystery of being a black, and, surviving in this world.

In *Invisible Man*, women come and go but do not express their inner selves, struggles or violation. The only female character who can name the source of her (indirect) violation is Kate -: "I done warn you Jim". The narrator feels like Trueblood and the sight of Kate hanging the washing reminds him of his mother. Ellison is of the opinion that women occupy the site from which the wars of humanity and inhumanity are launched. The women in the novel are one dimensional and help the narrator in his path to freedom. According to Claudia Tate these "teachers" force him to recognize their common plight. To quote Yvonne Fonteneau:

> The circle as rhetorical and metaphorical emblem is associated with the mother, regression, and recreation of the self. The violent process by which the recreation of self takes place occurs in what Robert O'Meally calls "an absurdly disjointed space". The invisible man a scapegoat of violence moving in this absurdly disjointed space, is hurtled into a "gaping breach" where he confronts our "whole culture" as a sieve of hoaxes and contradictions. The Invisible Man occupies the gaping breach not as a sexualized being but as a eunuch. 26

The slave narrative is seen clearly in the dream sequence at the beginning of the novel. We meet the black mother of the Reconstruction who has survived the gaze of the auction block, the sexual desire of the slave master and his empty promises of freedom. The protagonist's desire is to know himself but her desire is for freedom. She testifies that freedom lies in loving. She fulfills the traditional role
given to her of the black preacher. She preaches Christian love and cleverly justifies murdering the slave master to save her children. The master's sons were ready to kill and castrate their father; they are ready to do the same with the invisible hero when he asks a question about freedom. These are the sons of the old South and repression; their mother a slave / concubine, implies that freedom is knowing how to say what "I got up in my head" (IM, 9)

That freedom from slavery is inextricably bound to sexual freedom, and freedom from sexual violence in the text of the Invisible Man's summarizing as he tenderly asks the reader to "bear witness" with him at the end of the prologue. His voice takes over the voice of the concubine, who preaches by testifying. The concubine / slave sits on the traditional "mourner's bench" reserved for the "mother's of the church". She has earned the right to preach by testifying. 27

Ellison sees black women not as castrators but as "circumcisers". Kate symbolically circumcises Trueblood when she falls him with an axe. Mary Rambo is used as a circumciser by Ellison in helping the invisible man ask the right questions of himself. Acting like a man for the hero, meant leaving Mary for the Brotherhood. Mary augurs the minor figures of black womanhood that the invisible hero meets on the streets of Harlem. After the riot scene he sees these "level headed woman" carrying home food for their loved ones, these women struggle against poverty and dispossession. In contrast the hero is forced into castrating relations with all the white women he meets. Emma wants him to dance; the nameless seducer hears "tom toms" in his voice; Sybil wants him to be her "big black bruiser". These white women, as pawns of western ideology, are foils to the black women who relate to the protagonist in non sexual terms. Even the prostitutes at the Golden Day ignore the protagonist as a potential customer. Thus the novelist uses women as a narrative mode.
Ellison is deeply involved in craft and in his essays collected in *Shadow and Act* and *Going to the Territory* and in other interviews he recounts his thoughts and views on modes of narration. Ellison has spoken about the link between the actions and scenes in the narrative. For him and for all novelists, for that matter, this link or continuity is very important. He says:

I realized even then that it was not enough for me simply to be angry; or simply to present horrendous events or ironic events. I would have to do what every novelist does - tell my tale and make it believable, at least for as long as it engaged the attention of the reader, I could not violate the reader's sense of reality, his sense of the way things were done, at least on the surface. My task would be to give him the surface and then try to take him into the internalities, take him below the level of racial structuring and down into those areas where we are simply men and women, human beings living on this blue orb, and not always living so well. (*GT*, 53)

The technicalities follow the above decision. Ellison says that next one is faced with the problem of presenting values, a beginning, the end, the irony, the events, the characters and so on. The novelist is again burdened by the great literature that has gone before him and he must not tell a story in such a way that it embarrasses the great novelists of the past. The novelist struggles to project his own deep values to the reader at the same time involving the reader's sense of morality. The novelist has to be armed with a certain amount of "arrogance" because it helps him:

in attacking the enormity of his task, which is that of reducing a society - and through the agency of mere words - to manageable proportions; to proportions which will reflect one man's vision, one man's sense of the human condition, and in such volatile and eloquent ways that each rhythm, each nuance of character and mood, indeed each punctuation mark, becomes expressive of his sense of life and, by extension, that of the reader. (*GT*, 54)
Ellison says that Americans function best when they are conscious of who they are, as then, they become conscious of their national ideals, their history, the present and the American people in their wholeness. He goes on to say:

Related to this is a discovery which I think most American writers must make before they are through: it is that each writer has a triple responsibility - to himself, to his immediate group, and to his region. He must convey each of these aspects of his own experience as he knows them. And he must convey them not only in such a manner that members of his own particular group can became aware of what has been happening in the flux and flow ......... All this so that readers may become more conscious of themselves and more aware of the complex unity and diversity not only of Americans but of all human life. Here the movement is from the specifically imagined individual to the group, to the nation, and it is hoped, to the universe. (GT, 54)

Thus Ellison sought a means of narration that would spread from the particular to the general. It would be an experience within, which would overflow to encompass all people, not only of the group to which the writer belonged but to all groups, of all races, of all nations; to the whole humanity. For this Ellison used such modes of narration in his fiction that allowed him to express the universality of the individual's experience without violating the specific particularity of the particular individual in his fiction.

Ellison's novel has been called episodic, as the novel is made up of a series of new beginnings and new places. His character moves from the South, to the Southern college, to New York, to Liberty Paints Factory, to the Brotherhood, to Harlem and ultimately to an underground world. Each of these places is associated with a particular episode. His high school graduation and the Battle Royal initiation occur in the South; next comes the scholarship and his entry into a Southern college where
he has experience of characters like Dr. Bledsoe, Homer A. Barbee, Mr. Norton and the primitive black Trueblood. Then follows his expulsion from college and entry into the North, the dream place of freedom for a Southern black. He struggles here and stumbles on to a job at the Liberty Paint Factory, where he is again initiated into the working of industrialized America and meets men like Lucius Brockway, who enjoys his exploitation and accepts slavery like an inherited cloak. From here, the hero goes on to the Brotherhood and into the intricacies of a communist organization.

Next, he goes to Harlem and is confronted with a different world altogether. He meets Ras and Rinehart and understands the disillusionment of Tod Clifton. A terrible riot, set in Harlem, reminiscent of the historic Harlem riots, forces him underground where he hibernates and is ultimately enlightened. His enlightenment comes when he stops looking elsewhere but looks within himself for an understanding of his predicament and search for an identity. In his black hole lighted up by 1,379 bulbs, he understands himself.

As the book is written in the first person singular, Ellison cannot maintain any distance between his hero and himself, or between the matured "I" who relates his story and the "I" who is the victim of all the circumstances the hero goes through. The narration of the Brotherhood seems to be full of bitter cynicism. The so called Stalinists do not seem dangerous, but are reduced to clowns because of the way they are caricatured. Many minor characters come through more clearly than the hero. Yet, this may also be a part of the strategy to create a feeling that the hero is a very complex being. Apart from these minor failings, Ellison proves himself to be a successful craftsman.

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234
CHAPTER IV - REFERENCES

2. Ibid, 2.
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4. Ibid, 21
8. Ibid, 151.
9. Ibid, 158.
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236