

The craft of structure in R. Ellison's *invisible man*

Abstract

Ellison's advocacy of art against sociology and ideology is well-known. In his only novel, *Invisible Man*, he demonstrates that Negro writers are perfectly capable mastering the Euro-American literary tradition, and that great works of art with universal implications can be worked out of the raw material of Black life. The structure of the novel portrays a black man's renewed attempt to establish his human individuality, first within and against his Black community, and within and against American society.

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You just write for your own time, while trying to write in terms of the density of experience, knowing that life repeats itself. Even in this rapidly changing United States it repeats itself. The mystery is that while repeating itself it always manages slightly to change its mask. To be able to grasp a little of that change within continuity, to communicate it across all these divisions of background and individual experience, seems enough for me. If you're lucky of course, if you splice into one of the deeper currents of life, then you have a chance of your work lasting a little longer

Ralph Ellison

ملخص

اشتهر الروائي الزنجي الأمريكي رالف إليسون بانتصاره للفن ضد الإيديولوجيا وعلم الاجتماع، فهو يبين في روايته الوحيدة، "الرجل المخفي"، أن الروائيين الزنوج قادرون على استيعاب التقاليد الأدبية الأوروبية الأمريكية وأن حياة الزنوج الأمريكيين حقل خصب لإنتاج أعمال فنية راقية بمضامين إنسانية كونية. كما تجسد بنية الرواية محاولات لبطل الرواية المتكررة لإثبات فردانيته البشرية داخل وضد مجتمعه الزنجي أولاً، ثم على نطاق أوسع، داخل وضد المجتمع الأمريكي بصفة عامة.

Ralph Ellison is famed for having said that he is an artist, not a sociologist; and this particularly clear and somehow angry statement came mainly in response to the desire of many to see black literature confined to the social and to protesting the state of the Black community, as if aspiring to write something artistic was beyond the intellectual reach or useless, or both. Ellison's validation of this position - namely that a Negro writer is perfectly capable of writing about the varied black life and character in the US and yet produce a piece of literature where first allegiance would be to art and craft - resides especially in one major aspect of his only novel *Invisible Man*: structure. In addition, Ellison shows his craft by setting his work firmly in the tradition of the European novel; for "despite its obvious social implications, Ellison's novel is a modern gothic, a

candid-like picaresque"; its world is "at once surreal and real, comic and tragic, grotesque and normal - our world viewed in its essentials rather than its externals"¹ It is also in the "great tradition of American monologue: a tradition of anecdote and tall tale, sermon and autobiography, journals and songs of the self."² Indeed "the more thoroughly familiar one becomes with the work of Ralph Waldo Ellison the fewer are the chances of finding a major literary work published before 1950 that does not have some bearing on *Invisible Man*."³

Invisible Man presents a complex, multi-level structure. It consists of four episodes (which may aptly be termed, "at school", "at college", "at work", and "in politics") with accretion in intensity and volume from one episode to the next. Besides, the four episodes follow the same pattern: each starts with an interesting dose of hope that the hero manages to work out of the deepest core of his frail person, and which becomes more and more difficult to resurrect as the novel unfolds; but soon, faced with the experience of living in an incomprehensible world which repeatedly involves the hero in some accident or near disaster, hope is dashed and expectations shattered, and both give way to despair and disillusionment, even though Ellison, for the sake of the continuation of the story, provides a light kick-start to help his hero launch himself into the following episode of his journey. The structure is linear and chronological but at the same time circular: Ellison frames the linear story between an epilogue and a prologue, which are meant to be read where they stand, at the beginning and at the end, "although the end is in the beginning and lies far ahead"⁴. Such framing makes *Invisible Man* a self-aware novel and compels the reader to read the linear story, not in search of some secret or revelation, but simply in order to account for how the hero came to be in the cellar of the prologue; for only the motivated reader will pursue the reading of a story whose end he already knows in detail. It is even a step more complex than the opening of Joseph Conrad's *Nostramo*, where the reader is confused at first but gradually becomes aware that the first chapter of the novel is actually its end. In addition the four-episode structure is cut through by two major movements, one physical and historical, from the South to the North, and one spiritual, from innocence to experience. The movement from South to North (and the associate movement from provincial town to metropolitan city) is undertaken in the interest of the community and anchors the novel in the history of the black people, as it parallels the great migration of the turn of the century, when the much-awaited emancipation of the blacks failed to come to fruition and the Reconstruction Era failed to hold its many promises. The spiritual journey (and the associated movement from childhood to adulthood) is much more personal, even existential; it concerns the moral and intellectual tribulations of this particular young black man as he tries to come to terms with and understand the wicked ways of the world in which he has to live and find meaning for his existence. The main opponent of the hero in this journey is no other than a kind of natural naïveté, good nature, or even stupidity, morally laudable in itself, but of very little use, if not outright dangerous, when it comes to survival. So it is characterized by conflict within the individual, and it is a dimension that Ellison offers as an alternative to a great deal of protest literature where the conflict is almost always external to the black individual, usually out there in the "white racist" society. Ellison's protagonist, like his jazz musician, tries his hand at the "art of individual assertion within and against the group"⁵ i.e., his own Negro community, and against white society at large. For Ellison

was aware that "the Negro as a group is loved, hated, persecuted, feared, and envied, while as an individual he is unfelt, unheard, unseen – to all intents and purposes invisible."⁶

Ellison uses an image first in the prologue in connection with light and history: "...but that (by contradiction, I mean) is how the world moves: Not like an arrow, but a boomerang" and again in chapter one: "It took me a long time and much painful boomeranging of my expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with: that I am nobody but myself." (19) The boomerang is an instrument made of wood, cut to a particular shape and polished. Its quality is that when it is thrown properly it describes an elliptical circle and comes back to the thrower's hand. The interesting aspect of the aptitude of this image is that it seems to describe the structure of the novel: Four successive throws of the instrument, each more violent than the previous one, but it seems that the thrower metaphorically fails to catch the returning instrument and is hit on the head instead, with the last blow landing him in a coal cellar.

The four episodes share many common features; they all include some sort of violence, (from the controlled violence of the battle royal, the havoc and chaos of the Golden Day, to the all-consuming riot in Harlem. In addition, the hero faces violence as an individual, first against Tatlock, then Dr Bledsoe, then Lucius Brockway in the paint factory, and lastly with Ras the Destroyer. There are accidents as well, during the valedictorian speech, with Mr Norton and the explosion at the factory. And each time the hero goes into some close contact with another individual, especially when white, there is conflict and deep misunderstanding. In each episode the hero tries to take some initiative or make some personal choice, but only to cause disaster to himself and to his surroundings.

The first episode is rather short (one chapter) but the action is dense and packed. In tone and purport, the beginning paragraphs seem to belong to the prologue; and this is one of those moments where Marcus Klein says of the narrator and the author that "there is a constant struggle between the two, Ellison straining not to let his protagonist know too much because that will give the book away, and sometimes failing."⁷ The hero takes on the age and mind of a boy only when he starts recounting the events leading from his graduation oration:

On my graduation day I delivered an oration in which I showed that humility was the secret, indeed, the very essence of progress (....) It was a great success. Everyone praised me and I was invited to give the speech at a gathering of the town's leading white citizens (20-21).

The narrator felt superior and important and visualized himself as a potential Booker T. Washington. He is very proud that his ability and achievement have been recognized. He thinks of himself more in opposition than in unison with the other nine boys involved with him in the entertainment of the meeting: the battle royal. After all he is not really chosen for the brutish entertaining but for the quality of his speech, although the incongruity between the two begins to weigh on his mind. There are two interesting elements here, when the blindfold was put the narrator's eyes: the first is that he "felt a sudden terror" (24) and he "wanted to see, to see more desperately than ever

before."(25), and the second when "I felt the cloth pressed into place, and frowned so that it would be loosened when I relaxed."(24) This gesture marks the initial step in the narrator's spiritual journey from innocence to experience, and we may say that this is akin to an act of cheating, of trying to make the best of the situation and protecting oneself: a very long and arduous lesson for the hero to master. Only this time it will not work to his advantage, on the contrary... Because he can distinguish the forms of the other fighters on the ring the hero is now able to avoid blows, and all the time he is thinking of his speech: "How would it go? Would they recognize my ability? What would they give me?" What the narrator does not know is that it is the custom in this sort of entertainment that the last two boys left on the ring finish it in a proper fight without blindfolds. But while the hero has cheated his way through, Tatlock remains on the ring out of sheer physical strength, and will not accept any bribe from him. As the narrator is thinking whether he should go against the voice that shouts that it has its money on Tatlock, the latter knocks him out cold and put an end to his dilemma. The hero wakes up and takes part in the humiliating lunge for the money on the electrified rug. An interesting incident here shows his potential for resistance and rebellion:

I feared the rug more than I did the drunk, so I held on, surprising myself for a moment by trying to topple him upon the rug. It was such an enormous idea that I found myself actually carrying it out. (30)

It is in the midst of this violence, smoke, noise, sweat and blood that the hero is ironically called upon to deliver a speech about "humility as the very essence of progress". The narrator starts on his speech which is obviously reminiscent of Booker T. Washington, but the crowd is not really listening. When he is made to repeat the words "social responsibility" the hero suddenly says the word "equality" to the audience's dismay and anger. He is made to apologize. The hero is concerned about his mistake and expects the worst but instead he is presented with a double prize, a shiny calfskin briefcase and a scholarship to the state college for Negroes. Thus the first episode end safely for the hero and he is all too eager to attend college.

Episode Two (chapters 2-6), like the previous episode begins in the time of narration. The hero recalls the good times and souvenirs of his college days; even the language is called upon to point out his happiness and the hopes he had in getting an education. This episode comprises four major sequences: the encounter with Mr Norton, the Bostonian trustee of the college, and Jim Trueblood, the incestuous Negro sharecropper; the visit to the Golden Day; Blind Reverend Homer a. Barbee's speech on the occasion of Founder's Day; and the heated interview the hero has with Dr Bledsoe, the college president. The same pattern (hope – experience – disillusionment) characterizes this episode as well. The hero is excited at the prospect of getting a proper education. We have to remember that he has cast himself in the image of Booker T. Washington; and education, especially the technical sort leading to good jobs, is the latter's answer to the real emancipation of the Negro race. The hero is delighted to have a chance to fulfill the vision and become an active, respectable participant in the American dream and democracy. Unfortunately, the hero mishandles the assignment he has been entrusted with by the college president; he drives Mr Norton to the slave quarters where he is exposed to a terrible story of poverty, incest and guilt. And as if that were not enough, he takes the trustee to the Golden Day, a place of utter disorder and chaos. Despite Mr Norton's promise to intercede, the hero is

punished and expelled from college. As in Episode One, there is a consolation in the form of seven letters of recommendation "kindly" supplied by Dr Bledsoe.

Concerning the moral journey from innocence to experience, this episode comprises a few of its elements. Though the hero tries to convince himself that the misadventures that have beset Mr Norton are none of his responsibility, and even though we may admit that the visit to the Golden Day is somehow inevitable, yet there is no getting away from the fact that the decision to leave the main highway and head inexorably for Trueblood's shack is the hero's own: "It's too early to go in for the next session" [Mr Norton] said. "Suppose you just drive. Anywhere you like." (39) The hero is given the choice and he suggests an owner's tour of the campus but Mr Norton declined: "Anywhere else you like. The campus is part of my life and I know my life rather well." And later the hero admits his sudden decision: "We were beyond the farthest extension of the school-owned lands now and I suddenly decided to turn off the highway, down a road that seemed unfamiliar." (41) Despite these indications, the hero will insist on his innocence with Dr Bledsoe:

"But I drove him where he wanted to go, sir."

"Where was that?"

"Back of the slave quarter section," I said with dread.

"The quarters! Boy, are you a fool? Didn't you know better than to take a trustee out there?"

"He asked me to, sir" (93)

The hero is clearly learning a first lesson in pragmatism and survival; he is plainly telling a lie to save himself and his future and to avoid the humiliation of being sent home, empty handed, after having raised the hopes of his local community, whites and Negroes alike. These are the first steps to one of the greatest lessons of his life: that telling the truth does not always have its rewards and that freedom entails choice and choice responsibility, but at this stage the hero has no practice of freedom, nor of choice or responsibility.

Dr Bledsoe is genuinely disappointed by the gullibility of the hero, and takes great pains to explain to him the relationship between whites and blacks: it is all a huge exercise in pretence, hypocrisy and deceit:

"*Please* him? And here you are a junior in college! Why, the dumbest black bastard in the cotton patch knows that the only way to please a white man is to tell him a lie! What kind of education are you getting around here?..." (124)

Then, pushed to the limit, Dr Bledsoe spells it out clear to the hero:

....No, sir they [Negroes] don't control this school, nor white folk either. True they *support* it, but *I* control it. I's big and black and I say 'Yes, suh' as loudly as any burr-head when it's convenient, but I'm still the king down here. I don't care how much it appears otherwise. Power doesn't have to show off. Power is confident, self-assuring, self-starting, and self-stopping, self-warming and self-justifying...(127)

The hero is reminded of his grandfather's advice, which had become a curse, and which too is an open invitation to deceit and hypocrisy as a governing principle in white-Negro relations: ".... I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open".

As in the first Episode, the hero is again surprised to find himself challenging Dr Bledsoe's decision, with a courage that he did not suspect he had, only his main resource was the idea that Mr Norton will do something for him; but Dr Bledsoe's speech about power and who is controlling who convinces him to make the best of a bad job and accept his punishment with dignity.

While the passage from Episode One to Episode Two happens on the positive note of recognition, reward and the possibility of higher education, the passage to Episode Three (chapters 7-13) is rather less pleasant, except for the letters of recommendation; the hopes nourished by the hero are shattered and he is about to set out for the unknown, albeit an unknown with a promise of freedom and emancipation: the North. However, the hero soon recovers his confidence, optimism and ambition:

I would work hard and serve my employer so well that he would shower Dr. Bledsoe with favorable reports. And I would save my money and return in the fall full of New York culture....The very thought of my contacts gave me a feeling of sophistication, of worldliness, which as I fingered the seven important letters in my pocket, made me feel light and expansive."(140)

Once settled at Men's House in Harlem the hero sets about distributing six of his letters of recommendation within a few days, but the promises of phone calls do not materialize. He decides to deliver the seventh letter, addressed to a Mr Emerson, personally. Mr Emerson's assistant, who turns out to be his son, tries his best to dissuade the hero from seeing his father and from going back to the south: "Why go back, fellow? There is so much you could do here where there is more freedom."(165) After trying very hard to spare the hero a huge disappointment, he gives in and shows him the content of the letter of Dr Bledsoe to his father:

The bearer of this letter is a former student of ours....who has been expelled for a most serious defection from our strictest rules of deportment....

... it is highly important that his severance with the college be executed as painlessly as possible. I beg of you, sir, to help him continue in the direction of that promise which, like the horizon, recedes ever brightly and distantly beyond the hopeful traveler. (167-8)

The hero is so terribly disillusioned that he finds himself humming an old folk song: "O well they picked poor robin clean", and so angry that, "I decided that I would go back and kill Bledsoe. Yes, I thought, I owe it to the race and to myself. I'll kill him."(171) This resolution helps him to make the best of a possibility of a job that Mr Emerson's son had mentioned, and to his surprise he gets the job at a paint factory. Unfortunately his employment is cut short by an accident, for while he is busy fighting his foreman, Lucius Brockway, pressure builds up in the paint tanks leading to a terrible explosion, which lands him in the factory hospital. When he is released from the hospital, the disillusion is complete: he is out of health, out of money, and out of employment, in New York. Thus the cycle is completed once more.

However, the hero scores a few points by way of moral education. There is no dearth of advice which he does not really understand yet. The vet, whom he meets again on the bus, in his typically cynical manner, reminiscent of his grandfather's curse, imparts to him:

Come out of the fog, young man. And remember you don't have to be a complete fool to succeed. Play the game but don't believe in it – that much you owe yourself. (137)

Be your own father, young man. And remember the world in possibility if only you'll discover it. Last of all, leave the Mr Nortons alone... (139)

Mary Rambo too tries to teach him something about New York and Harlem: "Don't let this Harlem git you. I'm in New York but New York ain't in me, understand what I mean? Don't git corrupted." (139) Crenshaw, the vet's minder on the voyage to Washington D.C., sums up the hero's state of mind when he says "Hearing ain't 'speriencing", an idea that will be crucial in the hero's quest for his place in his own community and in the American society at large.

The hero makes a few moves, with varying degrees of success, that denote his slow passage from innocence to experience. First, he begins to be inquisitive and suspicious, both attitudes being of great help if he is really, as the vet says, to look beneath the surface of things. He thinks of opening the letters and had he done so he might have spared himself a great deal of pain. Then, he takes a huge step when he decides to use Mr Emerson's name, without the latter's permission, to get the job, and to his surprise it works: "But no, they wouldn't catch me again. This time I had made the move. (171) This is a crucial point; for the first time the hero plucks courage to make his own move. He is also more apt to fend for himself and shows it when he challenges Mr Emerson's son, and even more so when he fights Brockway. He at last takes his revenge on Dr Bledsoe symbolically (for he gets the wrong person) by emptying the contents of a spittoon on his bold head at men's House. He develops an obsession with his identity, especially since leaving the campus: "A remote explosion had occurred somewhere, perhaps back at Emerson's or that night in Bledsoe's office." (226) Eating a hot yam on the street gives him a deep sense of freedom and he resolves never to be ashamed of what he likes. The progress of the hero is summed up when he thinks: "What and how much had I lost by trying to do only what was expected of me instead of what I myself had wished to do?" (231) and a bit further, "I had never formed a personal attitude towards so much. I had accepted the accepted attitudes and it had made life seem easy..." (232)

The speech in Episode Three, like that of the battle royal, is made by the hero when he comes upon the eviction of an old Negro couple from their apartment. The hero is moved and improvises an eloquent speech which arouses the crowd to action, and would have led to a riot had not the police intervened quickly. Episode Four (chapters 13-25) begins when the hero, as a consequence of his oratorical prowess, comes to the attention of a political organization, the Brotherhood, and is offered a job as a speaker.

Though this offer be a life line for the hero, his first reaction is to refuse out of distrust; but soon, remembering that he owes Mary, he begins to convince himself and rekindle his hopes: "As I walked I became enthusiastic. It was, after all, a job that promised to exercise my talent for public speaking" (258). At his test speech, with very little indication, the hero improvises: "I feel, I feel suddenly that I have become more human... Not that I have become a man for I was born a man ... I feel strong, I feel able to get things done I feel the urge to affirm my feelings." (300) Unfortunately, meeting some influential Brotherhood members are dissatisfied with his speech and destructive criticism floods in: "In my opinion, the speech was wild, hysterical,

politically irresponsible and dangerous"; "I think the brother's speech was backward and reactionary"; "I am of the opinion that it was a mistake"(303) Only Brother Jack is unfaltering in his support but has to agree that the speaker needs training and sends him to the Brotherhood's guru, Hambro, for four months of indoctrination.

The hero, however, remains positive and is happy with the way he has handled himself and of the response of the audience. He intimates to the audience the sincerity of his words: "For now I realized that I meant everything I had said to the audience.... What had come out was completely uncalculated as though another self within me had taken over and held forth."(306) However, the hero senses the Brotherhood's aversion to the individual and preference for the group: Brother Jack advises, "you mustn't waste your emotions on individuals"(252) and demands of the hero that he set aside his past and cease to write to relatives for a while.(268) The hero himself observes of the Brotherhood that "They usually think in terms of 'we' while I have always tended to think in terms of 'me'..."(274) But he sees a positive side to it: "As a Brotherhood spokesman I would represent not only my own group but one that was much larger. The audience was mixed, their claims broader than race."(306) For the first time, he "could glimpse the possibility of being more than a member of a race."(308) Even after receiving an anonymous note warning him of danger if he continues on the same pace, he seems to internalize the Brotherhood's negation of the individual when he replies to a news reporter who wants to interview him: "Individuals don't count for much; it's what the group wants, what the group does. Everyone here submerges his personal ambitions for the common achievement."(344)

But when the hero is accused of opportunism, individualism and dictatorship, he becomes more concerned as Brother McAfee goes: "we are forced to think of the organization at the expense of our personal feelings. The Brotherhood is bigger than all of us. None of us as individuals count if its safety is questioned."(351) Suddenly his freedom and his humanity are under threat, and this constitutes his first disappointment as the Brotherhood committee decides to send him downtown to lecture on the Woman question while it investigates the charges brought against him. After a few months he is called back to headquarters to find, to his disillusionment, that there has been a change of strategy from local to national and international issues.

After Tod Clifton's death and the funeral organized for him by the hero, the committee is more dissatisfied than ever before; and now not only the individual but the group, the Negro race and its aspirations and grievances have to be sacrificed for a greater "unknown" good. There ensues an intellectual fight between the hero and the committee, this time with Brother Jack leading the main attack, where he learns that "such crowds are the raw materials, one of the raw materials to be shaped to our program."(408) And when the hero tries to speak of what the community expects from the Brotherhood, Brother Jack replies: "Very well, so now hear this: We do not shape our policies to the mistaken and infantile notions of the man in the street. Our job is not to *ask* them what they think but to *tell* them."(408) Brother Hambro, in utter philosophical coldness, completes the lesson: "It's unfortunate, Brother, but your members will have to be sacrificed ... It's simple, Brother,... We are making temporary alliances with other political groups and the interests of one group of brothers must be sacrificed to that of the whole."(433) Brother Hambro leaves the hero with a notion to

puzzle over for days: "That it is impossible *not* to take advantage of the people... The trick is to take advantage of them in their own best interest." (436) The hero is once again boomeranged into consciousness, into reality.

The moral education of the hero continues. He has again failed to look beneath the surface, through the veil, and he has been taken advantage of again. His involvement with the Brotherhood was an illusion; the black-white fraternity was an illusion. He has had inklings and hints but has failed to pick up the trail. The encounter with Ras is particularly eye-opening, but the hero was not only invisible but blind. Ras addresses the hero and Clifton and his speech fires doubt into their convictions; Clifton changes utterly and loses his bearings and provokes a policeman into killing him, a sort of suicide. But the hero plods on, affected: "He was an exhorter, all right, and I was caught in the crude, insane eloquence of his plea." (324) He is aware of coming asunder of his own self; now he is two selves:

...there were two of me: the old self that slept a few hours at night and dreamed sometimes of my grandfather and Bledsoe and Brockway and Mary, the self that flew without wings and plunged from great heights; and the new public self that spoke for the Brotherhood and was becoming more important than the other that I seemed to run a foot race against myself." (330)

The hero feels guilty; after all Clifton may have interpreted his absence from Harlem as a "sell out". Not only that but he has failed to lead Clifton away from the circumstances that have led to his death. The hero decides to take personal responsibility and organize a funeral for the only friend he had in the Brotherhood. This, like many acts in the previous episodes, is an act of affirmation of himself, of his individuality, even an act of defiance in the face of what has become an opponent. What did the Negro community mean to the Brotherhood, "except that [they] numbered so many, worked on certain jobs, offered so many votes, and provided so many marchers for some protest parade of theirs?"(438-9) A further step comes when the hero translates his disappointment and anger into a strategy: to counter deceit with deceit. He decides to adopt his grandfather's attitude: "For now I saw that I could agree with Jack without agreeing, and I could tell Harlem to have hope when there was no hope."(438) He even hatches the vain idea to use a woman to spy on the Brotherhood. So he carries his plan out and supplies the committee with fake information stating that the street has accepted Clifton's death and that the anger is ebbing and danger is receding, while in actual fact the situation is simmering to a boil. But he soon realizes yet again that the riot was not suicide, but murder. The committee had planned it. And I had helped, had been a tool. A tool just at the very moment I had thought myself free. By pretending to agree I had indeed agreed, had made myself responsible for...all the others whom now the night was making ripe for death".(478)

Even deceit does not work. It has been cared for, instrumentalized by the Brotherhood. What use is resistance or rebellion? What can a cog do in a machine but put itself in its service? such is the state of the individual in social formations and political organizations.

Through its structure, *Invisible Man* dramatizes the individual's predicament. Four times the hero tries to participate, and four times he fails utterly, with hope ebbing and disillusion flowing; but the lesson is in trying, not so much in succeeding. The hero emerges a wiser man, with a more enhanced understanding of his plight. He is apart but

his different parts are falling into place, into a whole, may be not a very positive whole, but one all the same:

And now all past humiliations became precious parts of my experience, and for the first time...I began to accept my past and, as I accepted it, I felt memories welling up with me.... Images of past humiliations flickered through my head and I saw that they were more than separate experiences; they were me; they defined me. I was my experiences and my experiences were me, and no blind men, no matter how powerful they became, even if they conquered the world, could take that, or change one single itch, taunt, laugh, cry, scar, ache, rage or pain of it"(439)

When the hero tries to get rid of the bits of the demeaning money bank that he has broken at Mary's, they symbolically refuse to go and he is compelled to put them in his calfskin briefcase; when he stumbles into a manhole and is engulfed in total darkness, he is able to know his place by lighting the contents of the briefcase, which are his experiences, his self, his identity, his life..

A black man sitting on a pile of coal in a pitch dark cellar: very hard to see indeed, and this raises a major question about the hero's invisibility. Has he done enough to be seen? Will he learn to use the background to his advantage?

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