THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CASTRATION AND EMASCULATION OF
THE BLACK MALE CHARACTERS IN RALPH ELLISON'S
SHORT FICTION AND INVISIBLE MAN

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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by

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In Loving Memory of
My Grandmother
Mrs. Sarah Jane Alexander Evans
August 18, 1909 - August 3, 1971

and

My Great-Grandmother
Mrs. Sarah Merniva Alexander
October 30, 1888 - January 28, 1986
DEDICATORY REMARKS

Unless you're prepared to kill us all, we won't go away and if you come for us we won't go easy and won't go alone.

-John Edgar Wideman

Although this work is dedicated to both my grandmother and great-grandmother, it is also dedicated to the Black male who, in his struggle to simply live and exist as a human being, has been subjected to physical and psychological castration. This work is dedicated to those who have paid for this struggle with their lives and to those who may yet escape society's lynchers.
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INTRODUCTION

The publication in 1952 of *Invisible Man*, "'the most distinguished single work' published in America since 1945,"¹ established Ralph Ellison, a virtual "unknown" despite the fact that he had been publishing fiction since the latter part of the 1930's, as a major American writer. Since its publication, *Invisible Man* has elicited a myriad number of critical analyses; yet, very little of that criticism has been extended to Ellison's pre-*Invisible Man* fiction to examine parallels between his short stories and novel.

Ellison's short stories, those which were published before *Invisible Man*, have not only remained uncollected in a single volume, but have also been neglected by the bulk of Ellison critics, who have been--and perhaps still are--overwhelmed by the way the novel lends itself to various critical analyses; however, there are a few notable exceptions. Dorothea Fischer-Hornung's dissertation, *Folklore and Myth in Ralph Ellison's Early Works*;² Robert G. O'Meally's *The Craft of Ralph Ellison*;³ and Susan L. Blake's article, "Ritual and Rationalization: Black Folklore
in the Works of Ralph Ellison,4 are among the notable studies rendering analyses of Ellison's early fiction and attempting to establish connections between his short fiction and Invisible Man.

Unlike those studies which have essentially, or in large part, concentrated primarily on the political, folkloric, and/or existential aspects of Ellison's fiction, this study focuses on Ellison's use of Freudian sight symbolism as it relates to his Black male characters: their "initiation" into society's pre-established parameters of freedom (e.g., learning to live by Jim Crow laws), and their unsuccessful encounters as they attempt to transcend those parameters. Focusing on Freudian symbolism and on the male characters does not, however, exclude some discussion of political, folkloric, etc., aspects of Ellison's fiction.

This study will consist of three chapters. Chapter One will look, historically, at the literal and symbolic castration5 of the Black male, society's need to castrate him, and the "justifications" for doing so. This chapter will also serve to introduce and establish concepts to be utilized in analyzing Ellison's short stories and his novel, Invisible Man, specifically: castration, emasculation, and sight imagery, as well as Sigmund Freud's concept of
Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* as the classic example of blindness as a form of psychological castration.


Chapter Three will consist of a comparative analysis of *Invisible Man*, with particular focus on Ellison's use of Freudian concepts and "initiatory" rituals encountered earlier in his short stories.

Since a novel of the stature of *Invisible Man* is usually the result of previous literary preparation the overall objective of this study is to examine the importance of the eight short stories which predate *Invisible Man* to determine their significance to the novel and their role in Ellison's development of the Black male character who is rendered impotent by his encounter with society.
Notes


2 Dorothea Fischer-Hornung, Folklore and Myth in Ralph Ellison's Early Works (Univ. of Heidelberg dissertation, 1979).


5 Insofar as this study is concerned, "literal castration" is the actual loss of the external male genitalia. "Psychological castration" is the figurative loss of the male genitalia/manly strength or virility. "Emasculation" is the literal/figurative weakening, temporarily, of manly strength or virility.
CHAPTER I

Historical and Psychological Perspectives

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,-
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask.

-Paul Laurence Dunbar
Paul Laurence Dunbar perhaps best exemplified the circumscribed role the Black male has played in life and in American literature when he wrote "We Wear the Mask."¹ For American society, the mask became the man, and the man ceased to exist; reduced to a type and confined to a mask, and gradually to a diversity of masks, the Black male disappeared into stereotypes."² The fate of the Black male has been to be seen as the mask; the complexity of his character chiseled away to fit the stereotypical molds designated for him by society. Restricted to a "eunuch-like" existence, the Black male has had to modulate his life to conformity, relinquish his identity to stereotypes and, yet, somehow still assert beneath the mask: "I am a man, and deserve to be treated as one."

Among the various masks he has worn, the Black male has been the happy docile slave romanticized by John Pendleton Kennedy; the watermelon-eating, storytelling darkie sentimentalized by Joel Chandler Harris; and violent virile brute popularized by Richard Wright.³ Indeed, there has been a semblance of truth in the masks, for surely as Shakespeare, "wanting a buffoon went into the senate-house for that which the senate-house would certainly have afforded him,"⁴ such characters as Stowe's "Uncle Tom" or Twain's
"Nigger Jim" could be found in real life; however, to judge an entire race on a few stereotypes is not only ludicrous, but it negates natural human attributes. Nevertheless, the stereotypical masks of the Black male have prevailed and become the standards by which all Black males are measured; whether they actually apply or not.

Since his appearance in American literature, as early as the 1700's, the Black male character has worn his masks well, for this is not only the way reading audiences wanted to see him, but they also needed to see the Black male, in real life, as the scapegoat for all that was wrong and sinful in America; as the living proof, by his "nigger intellect," of white superiority, and as "The Problem" always needing a solution. From savage to slave to Sambo to symbol to shadow, the multiplicity of masks worn by the Black male character can be found in the works of numerous contemporary writers such as, Joyce Carol Oates, Alice Walker, John Edgar Wideman, and Toni Morrison. One novelist whose fiction is not only a kaleidoscope of masks-wearing characters, but also a penetrating exploration of the Black male's psyche, is Ralph Waldo Ellison. His background, both personal and literary,
provides him with the "clay" with which to shape his masks-wearing characters.

Born in Oklahoma City in 1914, Ellison, early in his life, became aware of the masks and roles society designated for Blacks; for even though Oklahoma City had "no long-standing tradition of slavery," segregation still existed. Moreover, his mother, Ida Ellison, through her efforts to change the segregated conditions imposed upon her people, instilled in her son the philosophy that although all are created equal, all are not treated equal.

While a student at Tuskegee Institute, where he studied music from 1933 to 1936, Ellison gained insight into the emasculating roles designated for Black people. Tuskegee Institute, following the doctrines of Booker T. Washington, advocated humility and restraint instead of self-assertiveness and confrontation. The years at Tuskegee offered Ellison the experience of being a Black male living in the heart of the Deep South and having to confront the customary constraints, the injustices, and most of all the rigid policies of Jim Crow. Furthermore, southern taboos, rituals, and myths--particularly those concerning the Black male--that were used to
perpetuate the subjugation of Blacks, were also at Ellison's disposal since, they, like Jim Crow, were another fact of life.

In addition to his experiences in Oklahoma and Alabama, Ellison's political interests in Marxism and Communism, as well as his involvement in the Federal Writers' Project, and his literary interests in such writers as Joyce, Hemingway, Dostoevsky, Malraux, and Eliot, combined with a grasp of such literary movements as realism (exhibited in "Slick Gonna Learn"), naturalism (the account of a lynching in "The Birthmark"), and surrealism (the hospital scene in Invisible Man), would all be vehicles for transporting his experiences to his art. Other elements such as folklore, myth, music, and history would also be incorporated in his writings. His interest in Freud and modern psychology would not only shape his art, but also enable Ellison to look beneath "Uncle Tom's" mask, or any other mask, and see the true face, to penetrate the clay mold and understand the Black male, what he actually is and what society thinks he is.

What Ellison sees is that the Black male is, and always has been, a man. For American society,
however, he has historically been perceived as something much less, more "an image drained of humanity"\(^7\) than a man, or as Alain Locke so poignantly states:

the Negro male has been more of a formula than a human being—a something to be argued about, condemned or defeated, to be "kept down," or "in his place," or "helped up," to be worried over, harassed or patronized, a social bogey or a social burden. The thinking Negro even has been induced to share this same general attitude, to focus his attention on controversial issues, to see himself in the distorted perspective of a social problem. His shadow, so to speak, has been more real to him than his personality.\(^8\)

Negated as a human being and divested of his human dignity, the Black male has been an immovable thorn in the heart of a society that seems to have almost totally dedicated itself to not only subjugating him, but also hating him. This hatred of the Black
male, as well as a large number of myths and stereotypes, has focused on his sexuality. Perhaps no one has more aptly pointed this out than James Baldwin.

As James Baldwin states in *Nobody Knows My Name*, "to be an American Negro male is also to be a kind of walking phallic symbol: which means that one pays, in one's own personality, for the sexual insecurity of others."¹⁹ Indeed, society has projected its sexual insecurities upon the Black male, and this sexual insecurity-complex has, in part, developed from the myth of the Black male's over-sized genitalia. This myth has been in existence as early as the fifteenth century when English travelers of West Africa noted the over-sized genitalia of the West Africans. In 1840, "Josiah Priest attempted to prove from the Scripture that the descendants of Ham (the Negro) had over-developed sexual organs and were guilty in ancient times of all conceivable forms of lewdness,"¹⁰ of course by the 1800's, the myth of the largeness of the Black male's genitalia had become common in America. Even today, modern studies with their "graphs, charts, and other paraphernalia, have not only sought to prove the Negro's inferiority,"¹¹ but also to substantiate the myth of the greater size
of the Black male's phallus as compared to the white man's. It seems more likely, as psychologist Gordon Allport has suggested, that it is more a question of psychological size than of actual size.\textsuperscript{12}

In addition to the myth of the size of the Black male's phallus, the stereotype which has so permeated, and to some degree continues to permeate, society is the phobia of the Black male's beastly sexual drives and his innate lustfulness, especially for the lily-white virgin. For centuries society has believed, and feared, that the Black male possessed an uncontrollable urge to have sex with or rape white women, who were unequivocally the most sacred of all taboos. The myth of "sacred white womanhood," along with the view of the Black male as a "walking phallus" lurking in the shadows to rape white women, justified for society the need to sever the Black male's penis, or at least to threaten such a separation. Thus, castration and emasculation became society's "cure" for the Black male's phallus, in order to "protect" white women, but also to continue to perpetuate the caste lines and keep the Black male in his place.

Indeed, the Black male's past, and not too distant past, has been literally "blood dripping
down through leaves, gouged-out eyeballs, the sex torn from its socket and severed with a knife, leaving behind a sexless image hanging from a tree."¹³ This aspect of white racism, castration and the threat of castration of the Black male, began more than three hundred years ago, when the first slaves were brought from Africa to America. In the 1700's castration was used legally as a punishment in the colonies, particularly in the Carolinas, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. In South Carolina, it was required that slaves running away after the third time be castrated by their masters. Jailers in North Carolina were not only authorized, but also paid to perform official castrations. In Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, castration was prescribed for Black males for the rape or attempted rape of a white woman.¹⁴ However, castration as a means of control and punishment, actually became a vogue in American society beginning around 1865 with the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan.

Like the White Citizens' Council, the Knights of the Camellias, and other such groups,—but much more notorious—the Ku Klux Klan is a secret society of white men sworn to keep Blacks servile under
white dominance. Confederate General Nathan B. Forrest, who was a former slave trader, organized the group in Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1865.\textsuperscript{15} Wearing white hoods and robes, "night riding," and burning crosses on lawns, became their trademark, along with the violence they inflicted upon Blacks: beatings, mutilations, and lynchings. Indeed, their methods of terrorism were not just limited to the usual lynching by hanging, as the rope and faggot gave way to more sadistic practices such as burning, torturing, and even removing the genitals from the body. One need only consult the numerous documented cases, such as Claude Neale (castrated and lynched in 1934 after being accused of making "passes" at a white woman), for the authenticity of such heinous acts, not just by the Klan, but also by other "parties yet unknown." Such acts of violence are perfect examples of society's belief in the Black male's innate lustfulness for white women and its preoccupation with the Black male's phallus.

Much more important to American society than the phallus-absent body of the Black male was the effect on Black personality that lynching and the threat of lynching had, as it was intended to,\textsuperscript{16} which
was the psychological castration, or at least emasculation of the Black male. As sociologist Allen D. Grimshaw states, "lynching was employed to maintain dominance whenever it suited whites to reaffirm their mastery or Blacks challenged or seemed about to test the established contours of their subordination."\(^{17}\) Castration served the need of white men who needed to "persuade themselves that they were really masters and in all ways masterful."\(^{18}\) As Calvin C. Hernton suggests in *Sex and Racism in America*:

the white man secretly worships and fears the sex image he has created in the Negro; therefore, he must destroy that image. Castration represents not only the destruction of a mythical monster, but also the partaking of that monster...In taking the black man's genitals, the hooded men in white are amputating that portion of themselves which they secretly consider vile, filthy, and most of all, inadequate...And finally, through the castration rite, white men hope to acquire the grotesque powers they have assigned to the Negro phallus, which they symbolically
extol by the act of destroying it.\textsuperscript{19}

Granted, the reasons for castration-lynchings are perhaps multifarious; still, the myths of the Black male's craving for white women and the over-endowment of his phallus served, in part, the aspirations of those who perhaps wanted--though not really needed--reasons to "legally" lynch him. As well, it became necessary for society to castrate, or at least emasculate, the Black male when he sought to affirm his manhood (e.g., slave rebellions, asserting his natural sexual desires, etc.), to test the infinite possibilities of life, to remove the masks. Society needed to keep the Black male bound to the myths, taboos, and stereotypes that have for eons imprisoned and defined him. Indeed, when the Black male "moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations."\textsuperscript{20}

Since American society, suffering immensely from Negrophobia, has sought to this day to keep the Black male in a subordinate position, prostrate under Anglo-Saxon supremacy, it is appropriate that the myths, taboos, stereotypes, and masks which the Black male has been subjected to, be reflected in American
literature. The literature that deals with lynching and/or castration reflects—as well as refutes and reinforces—the "rationale," motivation, and absurdity, for this penalty for the Black male's genitals and his testing of established parameters limiting his freedom.

The use of castration and emasculation in literature became popular in antislavery, proslavery, southern, and Afro-American fiction, where the castration of the character is usually literal; however, in contemporary fiction, the castration and emasculation of the Black male character is, more often than not, psychological. Still, actual lynchings can be found in James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, Jean Toomer's *Cane*, Tennessee Williams' *Sweet Bird of Youth*, and William Faulkner's *Light in August*.

It is probable that actual lynchings occur in modern fiction as a result of the author's concern with this particular aspect of the Black male's past: with the fact that society felt that the "New Negro,"—in the words of Alain Locke—better educated and more aggressive, had to be taught, or
perhaps retaught, his place and reminded of his acquiescence. An actual lynching may also occur because the author views it as being more aesthetically effective than psychological castration and emasculation. However, because psychological castration and emasculation, meaning that the process is a mental and behavioral one, is a more subtle and "refined" technique than literal castration, it is more often used in modern fiction. In other words, showing the Black male as being psychologically impotent is perhaps easier for readers to digest than the graphic description of an actual castration-lynching. And it is, perhaps, for this reason, along with the rise and emergence of psychological fiction, that Ellison employed—with exceptions—psychology in his exploration and presentation of the great connoisseur of masks, the Black male.

In *Invisible Man* and eight short stories that precede it, Ellison's probing of the psychological unmanning of the Black male is usually intertwined with his use of sight imagery. Although the use of sight imagery to denote psychological castration and emasculation is not new,\textsuperscript{21} Ellison's use of sight imagery is unique in that the castration and emas-
culation associated with vision is employed only when the Black male character tests the limitations of his freedom, as prescribed to him by society, and must be reminded of his subordination. For Ellison, blind, empty, or closed eyes can symbolize castration; weak, impaired, or distorted vision can symbolize emasculation. Thus, the eyes are symbolically equated with the male's genitals, a concept established by Sigmund Freud, using Oedipus as the precursor of male characters whose vision has phallic significance.

According to Sigmund Freud, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* is the exemplar for the substitution of the eyes for the male's phallus, "establishing eye loss as a classic castration image." After discovering that the oracle had been fulfilled, that he had indeed slain his father, wed his mother, and begot children from their union, Oedipus tore the brooches from his mother-wife and gouged out his eyes. Freud states that Oedipus' "eyes are actually symbols of the genitals;" thus, the blinding of his eyes, which was really a "blinding" of his genitals, was, in effect, a castration. Since castration,—"not in the stock farmer's sense—means
the loss of the external male genitalia, particularly the penis,"\textsuperscript{24} Oedipus; self-castration is of course a symbolic one.

Because the eyes are objects which possess the ability to penetrate, they are appropriate phallic symbols, which would support Freud's concept of the eyes as the genitals. Further support of Freud's concept lies in the fact that in the play's original language, Sophocles uses the word "arthron," (Greek for articulation), "which links the pierced joints (arthra) of Oedipus' feet to the orbits (also arthora) of Oedipus' blinded eyes, leading to the interpretation of Oedipus' self-blinding as a symbolic castration."\textsuperscript{25} Moreover, "in Greek literature 'arthron,' when used alone, designates the male sexual organ," and can be substituted for Oedipus' ankles, eyes, and his genitals.\textsuperscript{26} Thus, Freud's concept, "which sees in Oedipus' mutilation the equivalent of a castration, is firmly echoed in the Greek words themselves."\textsuperscript{27}

Oedipus' self-blinding is his punishment for procurement of forbidden knowledge; in other words, "\textit{Oedipus Rex} is the story of a man whose tragedy is that he desired to know too much"\textsuperscript{28}--and in "the deepest sense it also represents a desire to return
to the darkness of the mother's womb." The reason for Oedipus' self-blinding is as pertinent as the equating of the eyes with the genitals in relation to Ellison's Black male characters in that they are also symbolically castrated for desiring to know too much; for attempting to discover some "forbidden" knowledge: that the American dream, in its purest sense (i.e., given equal opportunity), has no limitations and is not restricted by culture or race. Since the "eyes replace the penis as the true organ of genuine potency and are the emblem of the soul's quest for freedom and knowledge," it is the eyes that must be rendered "impotent" through some form of injury, and once they are injured, the quest for knowledge and freedom is either limited or ended.

In the case of Oedipus, the injury to the eyes is self-inflicted; however, for Ellison's Black male characters the injury to the eyes, or to an eye, is not self-inflicted, but rather carried out by society as a means of punishment, control, and suppression. At times, in Ellison's fiction, the injury or wound inflicted upon the eyes, or an eye--or very close to the eyes, such as an injury to the head, which ultimately affects the vision of the character--is
literal. At other times, the injury is psychological, meaning that it is a mentally, as well as, emotionally felt wound instead of an actual one; yet, the effect is the same as an actual injury to the eyes; the psychological impotence of the Black male.

The psychological injury to the eyes is unique in that it usually occurs during an initiatory ritual and is inflicted upon the Black male when he looks, or attempts to look, directly into the eyes of other characters. In some instances the injury is inflicted upon the Black male character by some form of blinding light (e.g., many of Ellison's Black male characters are psychologically unmanned by an over-powering light form: a flashlight, a car's headlights, etc, which incapacitates them). Male and female characters—and not necessarily restricted to white female characters—that the Black male encounters, represent the eyes of society and these eyes have phallic significance as well. Even the eyes of females—"especially the aggressive, so-called castrating woman"31—have a castrating or emasculating effect on Ellison's Black male characters; white females because of the taboo attached to them; Black females because they intentionally, and ironically, set out
to psychologically castrate the Black male, since Black women know the fate of aggressive and assertive Black males: literal castration, if not death.

As well, the eyes of society have a castrating effect because it has been through these eyes that the Black male has had to see himself, to see the myths, stereotypes, and masks which have served as a basis for society's perception of him, and which have also obscured the Black male's perception of himself. Thus, it is not surprising that the eyes of society provoke castration anxiety---"the fear of being punished by having the penis, the organ of pleasure, cut off or taken away."\(^{32}\)

Since Ellison's Black male characters are typically fatherless, American society becomes, symbolically, a surrogate father-figure. More specifically, many of the characters that Ellison's protagonists encounter serve as castrating father-figures. Like Oedipus' father, Laius, who in fearing the usurpation of his power, as well as his death at the hands of his son, attempts to kill him by piercing his feet,--which is also an attempt to kill him\(^{33}\)--American society, also fearing the usurpation of its power and control, castrates the Black male
for behaving as a man, for "asserting his masculine and independent character."  

What Laius fears is the prediction of the oracle that Oedipus will kill his father and wed his mother. What American society fears is somewhat the same, since the oracle which pre-empts the birth of Oedipus is similar to one of the dominant sexual myth which pre-empts the birth of all Black males in America: that at the basis of the Black male's sexuality is the desire to have sexual intercourse with a white woman and that his beastial desire will lead him to kill the father-surrogate in order to do so. Society fears that the hatred and oppression bestowed upon the Black male will be reversed and will make American society the victim. American society fears the demise of its misguided myths which advocate the inferiority of the Black male and the superiority of white society, as well as the possible manifestation of the sexual myths proliferated around the Black male.

To ensure the continuation of its dominance over the body and mind--particularly the character and personality--of the Black male, American society must restrict the world of possibility and freedom for
the Black male and confine him to his "Blackness,"
More importantly, as Laius did to Oedipus, society
must castrate him--either literally or psychologically--since the Black male, unlike Oedipus, will
not castrate himself. Therefore, to avert any
transgressions against its authority, society demands
the phallus of the Black male, for it is "the symbol
of male freedom, power, and prestige."37 Ultimately,
society demands the Black male's manhood, his identity,
and if necessary his life. As for the Black male,
he is "forced each day to snatch his manhood, his
identity, out of the fire of human cruelty that rages
to destroy it,"38 and for his survival, wear the mask
that shades his eyes and camouflages his character.

In his novel, Invisible Man, and the short
fiction which predates it, Ralph Ellison seeks to
portray the character beneath the mask and provide
an honest depiction of the Black male. In so doing,
he embraces the literal and psychological--though
emphasizing the psychological--methods by which
society renders the Black male impotent. In the
following chapters, this study will seek to illustrate
Ellison's use of sight imagery in his depiction of
the Black male character who is psychologically
castrated by society for testing the parameters of his freedom.
Notes


2 Marcus Klein, After Alienation: American Novels in Mid-Century (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1964), p. 75. [Stereotypes also apply to Black women and other minorities as it does to Black men.]

3 Kennedy, Harris, and Wright were not the creators of these particular stereotypes. See Sterling Brown, The Negro in American Fiction (Washington, D.C., 1937), and Nancy M. Tischler, Black Masks: Negro Characters in Modern Southern Fiction (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1969).


5 W. E. B. DuBois speaks to the "Negro Problem"


11 O'Meally, p. 22.


14 Jordan, pp. 154-158.

15 C. Eric Lincoln, *The Negro Pilgrimage in


18 Jordan, p. 56.


In his quest to find Laius' murderer, Oedipus discovers that he is not the son of Polybus, but was adopted. He asks the Messenger:

Oedipus: What ailed me when you took me in your arms?

Messenger: In that your ankles should be witnesses.
Oedipus' ankles ailed him because his real father, Laius, had pierced his ankles. In the Greek text, it is written as podo an artha "the articulations of the feet,"—feet meaning ankles (p. 17). Later for "eyeballs" Sophocles' phrase is arthra ton kuklon, "the articulation of the eyes;" the same word, arthra, is employed for both the feet and the eyes (p. 18).

26 Balmary, pp. 18-19.
27 Balmary, p. 18.
30 List, p. 117.
32 Friedman, p. 32.
33 Balmary, pp. 17-18.
34 Wasson, p. 207.
35 Freud states that the oracle is actually Oedipus' unconscious desire to eliminate the father and escape his castrating eyes; for Ellison's Black
male characters, the desire is also to eliminate the "father," but not necessarily in order to possess the mother--as least not consciously--but rather to be able to control their own destinies, remove the restrictions and limitations placed on their lives, and destroy the misconceptions which have characterized the lives of Black people in America.

37 Thorpe, p. 8.
38 Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name, p. 113.
CHAPTER II

Psycho-Sexual Perspectives and Ralph Ellison

Short Fiction

So, then, to every man his chance--to every man, regardless of his birth, his shining, golden opportunity--to every man the right to live, to work, to be himself, and to become whatever his manhood and his vision can combine to make him--this, seeker, is the promise of America.

-Thomas Wolf

In 1943 when the New York Post featured one of Ellison's stories, "Slick Gonna Learn," it recognized him as a short story writer. Quite appropriate since, in addition to writing literary essays and reviews, as well as essays on music, art, politics, and culture, he also wrote short stories. From 1919 to 1944, before

Many of Ellison's themes (e.g., self-discovery, racial identity), as well as his use of symbolism and surrealism, which reach fruition in Invisible Man are reflected in his eight short stories. In the stories, and in the novel, Ellison "underscores the difficulty that a Black man has in knowing his place in contemporary white society,"³ (i.e., the problem of trying to live within prescribed parameters of freedom), as well as discovering that which Henry James referred to as the "complex fate of being an American" and a Black male. These stories represent an "apprenticeship" for Ellison's use of sight imagery and Freudian concepts to probe the psychological castration and emasculation of the Black male character when he attempts to obtain what Thomas Wolf, in Look Homeward, Angel, proclaims is the promise of America: an equal opportunity at life.

Ellison's first published short story, "'Slick Gonna Learn,'" which appeared in Direction (1939), not only bears the definite influence of Hemingway, but of the Farrell, Dreiser, and especially the Wright
school of naturalism," but also shows Ellison's first use of sight imagery, as well as the Black male character who is psychologically deprived of his virility by society. Moreover, this story, which is set in the South, concentrates on the individual--so important to modern writers--particularly the Black male who is "trapped in the cul-de-sacs of the environment." 

The story centers around Slick Williams, who having been laid off his job at the Hopkins Plant, finds himself with just a few dollars in his pocket and a pregnant wife needing immediate medical attention. Hoping to earn more money for a doctor, Slick tries his hand in a crap game and loses his last two dollars. When he asks the pimp, Bostic, for a five dollar loan, Bostic tells Slick that his wife might help him earn the money since, "If it's goodnough to marry, it's goodnough to sell."

Infuriated, Slick strikes Bostic with a bottle before being knocked out himself by some onlookers. Confused from the blow he received to his head, Slick strikes a white policeman; and as a result of that action is carried off to jail and given a subsequent court date.
Once in the courtroom, Slick is subjected to numerous racial slurs and stereotypes and then released. Slick is startled, for not only has he broken a taboo by striking a white man, but more importantly he has gotten away with it (p. 11). He decides to further test the parameters of his newly acquired freedom by warning and threatening the white policeman that "Someday yuh gonna learn to leave colored folks alone. 'N if yuh take off that gun 'n star Ah'll show yuh what Ah mean, too" (p. 11).

Dissatisfied with the judge's benevolence towards Slick—which has already resulted in Slick's verbal disobedience—the police decide to take matters into their own hands and grab Slick while he is walking home. However, while they are driving towards a place called "Turner's," the policemen's plans are aborted when there is an announcement on the radio calling car eleven to the Hopkins Plant to disperse a mob of strikers threatening the factory. After an additional beating, the policemen leave Slick in a ditch dodging their bullets. As Slick is walking home in the rain, a truck driver offers him a ride. Somewhat skeptical at first, Slick accepts the ride and settles back in the seat and reflects on the events
of the day.

Ellison's use of sight imagery and Freudian concepts moves "Slick Gonna Learn" from being the simple story of a man being jailed for creating a public disturbance to the complex story of a Black man—as the title suggests—learning his place in the social structure of America. Both the subtle (as exemplified by the judge's racial slurs to Slick) and overt methods of rendering the Black male impotent are among the story's central concerns.

From the beginning of the story, Ellison attempts to develop, through Slick's actions (and the results of those actions), the ways in which the Black male is psychologically deprived of his virility by society. Any type of aggressive actions (such as fighting) by a Black male is considered by society as inappropriate, unless that aggression is directed toward a member, or members of the Black race. However, in the fight between Slick and Bostic, Slick must be struck on the head to stop his aggressive—albeit it very natural—behavior not merely because his manhood has taken over his intellect and is controlling his behavior (i.e., he is thinking with his penis instead of his intellect), but more importantly, because there is
a white policeman present at the shine parlor (p. 10). Thus, the blow to the head is a blow to Slick's manhood/phallus. Since historically the Black male's survival has depended (and depends) on his being non-aggressive, the blow to Slick's head is not only an attempt (by the onlookers) to save his life, but perhaps more importantly, to preserve his manhood.

The psychological emasculation of Slick continues when Slick, confused from the blow to his head, strikes the white policeman and loses his power to act (p. 10) Slick loses his power to act not only because he has broken one of the most sacred taboos, striking a white man—and, a man who enforces the laws of white society—but more importantly because he acknowledges the taboo. In essence, he acknowledges history. Had Slick not become involved in his history, he might have run away and not been taken to jail. It should be noted that Slick is taken to jail as a result of his striking the white policeman, and not because of his fight with Bostic.

Once in the lighted courtroom—representative of the all-encompassing power and presence of white society—Slick is brought face to face with the power structure of America. The face of the judge is replete
with "its blurred blue eyes behind thick lens" (p. 10). These blue eyes, in Western culture, have historically been associated with those who have been deemed superior and who possess the power to make and enforce laws. Thus, the blue eyes are representative of the power of society's laws. The power structure, like the lens, is so thick that Slick, or any Black male, cannot overcome it.

Not only are the eyes, the lens, impenetrable, but also over-powering, so over-powering that "something inside of Slick surrenders, surrenders to the violence he knows he will receive" (p. 10). Slick's surrendering is an emasculation. For Slick is again acknowledging history, a history which states that because he has struck a white man, he must be punished, a punishment which could result in his death. The emasculating effect of the judge's eyes continues as he commands Slick to "Look at me boy!" (p. 10). By calling Slick a boy, the judge verbally reduces Slick to an undeveloped sexual being. Slick, having looked into the eyes, hangs his head. When Slick hangs his head, he is also "hanging" his phallus (placing it in a flaccid state), his manhood. And since one (his head) controls and directs the other
(his sexuality), Slick is psychologically emasculated.

Through some stroke of luck, however—or because the judge knows that Slick will be "taken care of" by the officers—Slick is released unpunished. He is also released from the judge's emasculating eyes, for when the judge exits the courtroom, it becomes dark and Slick's head (phallus) throbs—Slick regains control over both his intellect and his manhood. And because he has gotten away with striking a white man, Slick feels a surge of power ("his head felt strangely large and high" p. 11), much like Richard Wright’s character Bigger Thomas.

Bigger Thomas' act of violence (the murder and later decapitation of Mary Dalton, a white girl) gives him a sense of power and manhood because he has actively participated in the act of destroying (killing) another human being and thus, has controlled the destiny of that human being. In other words, Bigger equates the fact that he has acted with being a man. And he becomes, in his own eyes, the white man’s equal. Similarly, Slick's sense of power is derived from his asserting his manhood against a white man.

Although Slick asserts his manhood, he does not
do so wisely—Slick isn't "slick." He becomes aggressive and threatens the white policeman: "Someday yuh gonna learn to leave colored folks alone. 'N if yuh take off that gun 'n star Ah'll show yuh what Ah mean, too" (p. 11). Slick's threat is actually a challenge to the white policeman that if he would remove the official symbols of power and manhood (the policeman's "gun 'n star"), he would show the policeman that without his symbols he is not a god, but an equal.

Since the policeman's power is official, in that it, his badge of office, is given to him, its use must follow and adhere to the edicts of the law; a law controlled by white society which demands that the policeman administer lessons in submission to Black males. Philosophically, the policeman's badge of office does not make him superior, nor does it give him power over other human beings; however, because his badge allows him to treat Slick as less than a man, the badge comes to symbolize the policeman's manhood. Symbolically and psychologically, by removing the gun, the policeman removes his phallus.

For his verbal disobedience towards the law which the policeman enforces, Slick must be punished. Thus, it is appropriate that as Slick walks home, he
walks "beneath bare trees, his feet crunches in cinder" (p. 11). The scene sets the atmosphere for a lynching, which is the reason the policemen take him to "Turner's" place; however, the road to "Turner's" place is the turning point for Slick in that luck intervenes once again.

As he is approached by the policemen, shining their flashlights in his eyes, Slick tries to cover his eyes, to prevent being blinded. However, Slick is commanded to drop his arm, leaving his eyes—and his manhood—unprotected. The verbal warnings for Slick are now replaced by more overt physical actions, to teach the "nigger" his place. Slick is pushed into the front seat of the police car, kicked in his spine, and administered blows to the base of his skull bringing numbness—bringing emasculation (pp. 13-114). Fortunately, for Slick, the physical beating goes no further than this and he is left in a ditch where he listens to bullets whistle over his head, whistling a warning of what will happen if he does not learn his place in society.

The warning, however, is not over for Slick. The story's final scene (on his way home, Slick is given a ride by an Irish truck driver) serves as an-
ominous portent. Slick realizes, after meticulously studying the man's face, that the driver is an Irishman, which doesn't make Slick less uneasy--in fact, "he did not trust the white man" (p. 16). His distrust of the driver is actually an acknowledgment of history and culture. Slick knows, as history points out, that the Irish have a seemingly natural proclivity for pursuing careers in law enforcement, and that continually Black males are taught their lessons in submission by men who have supposedly sworn to uphold law and justice. It is no mere coincidence that Ellison has an Irish truck driver give Slick a ride; for if Slick does not learn that the threat of the law is ever present--in courtrooms, squad cars, and on southern highways--the next time he will not be so lucky.

Unlike in "Slick Gonna Learn," in Ellison's second short story, "The Birthmark," luck does not intervene on behalf of the lynching victim. The story is essentially about Matt and Clara's confrontation with the castration-lynching of their brother Willie, a young Black male.

When Matt and Clara are asked to come and positively identify the body of their brother lying on
on the side of a highway, they are informed that Willie was accidentally hit by a car. This explanation is not questioned until the patrolman, Turp, removes some of the newspaper—from the comic/cartoon section of the paper—covering the body and Matt observes the condition of the body. It was "hunched on one side, lying bare...the jaw hanging limply against the shoulder, the mouth gaping...the flesh was hacked and pounded as though it had been beaten with hammers."9

Because the body is so badly mutilated, Matt decides to search for Willie's birthmark, which is located below his navel. As he removes the last piece of newspaper covering Willie's body, Matt realizes that his brother has been lynched and castrated, for "where it [the birthmark] should have been was only a bloody mound of torn flesh and hair (p. 16).

For removing the newspaper without permission, Matt is struck by Turp, the patrolman. The coroner, who is also present, tells Turp to leave him (Matt) alone, and let him look at Willie's body since: "It don't make no difference" (p. 16). Clara then steps up to look at the body too. When she sees the "bloody mound of torn flesh and hair," she screams:
These here white folks come and tell us Willie was hit by a car, but didn't no car do that to him. They lynched Willie. They done lynched our brother...He was lynched, Lynched! I'm gonna tell everybody, HE WAS LYNCHED!" (pp. 16-17).

When Matt agrees, saying: "don't no car do nothing like that," Turp strikes Matt with his gun and tells him "Goddammit I said a car hit him! We don't have no lynchings in this state no more! Get up from there, nigger and shut this bitch up"--referring to Clara who is still screaming that Willie was lynched (p. 17). Turp then tells both Matt and Clara that they had better remember that a car hit Willie, "'cause a car might hit you. Understand what I mean?"" (p. 17).

Turp instructs Matt to go back to town and send someone to pick up Willie's body. As Matt leaves, he looks swiftly "over the fact of the towering patrolman, over the badge against blue shirt, the fingers crooked in the belt above the gun butt... catching sight of Willie between the white men's legs" (p. 17).

"The Birthmark" is first of all a story of initi-
ation, the initiation of a Black male, Matt, into the solidarity which exists among authority figures and the inherent consequences if any Black male challenges /questions the "truths" set forth by those authority figures. It is also a story of the psychological unmanning of the Black male character.

Both the psychological emasculation and the literal castration of the Black males in this story reveal Ellison's understanding of lynching as a physical and psychological tool of repression and subjugation of Black Americans, and as a manifestation of society's preoccupation and obsession with the Black male's masculinity and sexuality. Thus, Ellison's emphasis is not just with the actual lynching since it has already occurred when the story begins, but more with the psychological effects on the potential victims.

Matt's initiation begins with seeing the body covered with newspaper. Appropriately, the body lies "in a clearing beneath the trees, upon the pine needle ground" (p. 16). Since historically lynching victims were tied to trees and then lynched, the location of the body portends what Matt will discover: the lynched and castrated body of his brother.
It is significant that the newspaper covering the body is not from just any section of the paper, but from the "colored comic section"—as Ellison is careful to note for the reader. The newspaper covers a "mound of flesh which has been hacked, pounded, and beaten" (p. 16). In the comic strips, characters are also hacked and pounded and beaten; their bodies reduced to indistinguishable forms. The reader is supposed to find this treatment of the comic strip character humorous; and thus, this violence becomes a form of entertainment. Likewise, lynching was/is considered a form of entertainment; designed to make those participating laugh.

Since the comic section not only covers Willie's body, but more importantly covers the place where his birthmark should have been, it serves to mock his manhood, indeed his entire heritage. The implication of the comic section is that since the Black male is not recognized as a man in the eyes of society, his manhood is—for that society—a joke, a life-comedy. He becomes the comic strip character, there for the violent amusement of society.

The description of Willie's body is actually more fitting a piece of meat than a human being. As
Clara notes, the body looks "like something ain't even human" (p. 16). Willie's flesh has been hacked, pounded, and beaten in the same manner which meat is tenderized for easier ingestion. Willie's flesh has been "prepared" to serve Matt, so that he in turn will serve (i.e., obey the laws of society), and Matt must "eat" of this meal as part of his initiation. Society hopes to derive from Matt's "ingestion of Willie's flesh" (i.e., Matt seeing the condition and treatment of Willie's body), his sacrifice of any parricidal desires—that he will be content in his place. As well, society hopes that Willie's death will teach Matt the consequences if he becomes aggressive and asserts his manhood. Thus, Matt's of part of the newspaper is the beginning of the initiatory feast.

The climax of Matt's initiation occurs with the actual search for Willie's birthmark and the inevitable uncovering of the corpse and the removal of all the newspaper—in essence, the uncovering of the truth. Matt must search for Willie's birthmark in order to positively identify the mutilated body, since the birthmark proves Willie's identity and heritage. Ellison does not disclose to the reader exactly what
the birthmark is; however, it is implied, because of the location (just below the navel), that the birthmark is Willie's phallus, his manhood. And since both Willie's birthmark and phallus are absent, it would follow that Willie's birthmark portends his castration.

The removal of Willie's birthmark, of his phallus, is an attempt by society to not only remove his manhood, but to also prevent his procreation of future generations. And if society can succeed—as it has with Willie—in the continuous removal of the birthmarks of Black males, it will eventually eliminate the entire race (i.e., the genocide will be complete).

If Willie's birthmark is his phallus, then it follows that Matt also has a birthmark and that he shares with his brother the danger of having his birthmark removed, of paying for his manhood and sexuality with his life. Hence, what is passed down from generation to generation, from Black male to Black male is the threat of castration. When Matt discovers that his brother has been lynched, and sees the "mound of torn flesh and hair," Matt feels "as though he has been castrated himself" (p. 16). This effect upon Matt, the feeling of being psychologically castrated, is the aim
of Willie's lynching—and one of the aims of lynching in general, as well as to warn the potential lynchee what could and would happen to him if he challenges by "deed, word, or even thought, the ironclad system of white supremacy." Willie's lynching serves a dual purpose, as Matt's initiatory agent and as a method of controlling his future behavior. Moreover, since Willie's lynching has such long-range effects on Matt (that he will never forget what he has seen), it follows that this lynching will also effect Matt's progeny.

Matt's reaction to Willie's lynching reveals the desired product, the psychologically castrated Black male. Matt becomes psychologically impotent not by a literal castration, but through a symbolic transference, the transference of the role of the phallus to the eyes, for only after seeing his brother's body sans his phallus does Matt feel castrated. As well, when Matt attempts to remove the newspaper from Willie's body, the blows he receives to his head (one of which causes Matt to sink to his knees and distorts his vision) from Turp, are attempts to castrate him.

Matt's initiation not only reveals to him the fact that his brother has been lynched, but more impor-
tantly that as a Black male, his life is dictated by society. For Matt can only look at Willie's body when Turp permits him to look. Turp becomes a spokesman for the truth, not the actual truth, but the truth as society determines that truth to be: that Willie was hit by a car, and if Matt does not remember this fact, then a car might hit him. What is evident is that society has the power to control life and death and to make final judgment on the nature/cause of that death (by lynching or by car). With his last "sight of Willie's body between the white men's legs," Matt's initiation becomes complete (p. 17).

The position of Willie's body in respect to the white men represents the ultimate submission and subjugation of the Black male. On one hand, since the white men's position is known—in sexual lingo—as the "female superior position" (perhaps because the location allows for control over movement), it re-emphasizes the Black male's sexuality. Since the men occupy this position, they would symbolically take on the role of the female; however, because the men have amputated Willie's phallus, they symbolically acquire it: deprivation means annexation. On the hand, because the white men have amputated Willie's
phallus, they reduce him to a female, while they symbolically acquire the power of the phallus. Either way, what is important is that the role the white men occupy is a superior role. Their acquisition means that they also acquire the myth of the Black male's sexual superiority. The fact that Willie's phallus has the power to transcend death necessitates the removal of more phalluses--birthmarks--from Black males.

To protect himself from further violence and to ensure society that the expected code of behavior has been internalized, Matt must admit that he will remember Willie was hit by a car. Society will interpret his admission as evidence that Matt will remember his place and limitations within the social structure. Although the story leaves that issue (whether Matt actually believes his admission) unanswered, what is certain is that Matt is helpless against society. With Matt's forced admission his rite of passage is granted--granted with his emasculation.

Both "Slick Gonna Learn" and "The Birthmark" depict Black male characters who come up against society's rigid social structure, which places limitations on their freedom and views with hostility any
type of aggressive behavior by Black males. Their behavior as well as how they live and die is governed by society. And whenever they pose a threat to society's authority, or challenge (as does Slick) or question (as does Matt) that authority, and even when they don't, their behavior provides the impetus to being jailed, beaten, or even lynched. In order to survive, the Black male character must "subjugate himself in ritual submission--a ritual of mental castration."  

Ellison's next three short stories, "Afternoon," "Mister Toussan," and "That I Had the Wings," became known as the Buster and Riley stories. These stories center around the adventures of two Black boys, Buster and Riley, growing up in Oklahoma. Although they differ from Ellison's first two short stories because of their emphasis on folkloric elements and the minimal use of sight imagery, the Buster and Riley stories are relevant to this study in that Ellison traces the origins of such characters as Slick and Matt in order to retrospectively examine and explain the shaping of the Black male's psychology. The implication is that in order to understand their development, one must go back to the early stages of
adolescence.

The first of the stories, "Afternoon," focuses on seemingly insignificant aspects of Buster's and Riley's adventures on a particular afternoon. The story shifts, however, with Buster and Riley's arrival at Buster's house.

Once inside, Buster is reprimanded by his mother for his apparent laziness, but the reader discovers that Buster becomes the focus of his mother's anger "whenever something went wrong with her and the white folks." Her attitude essentially forces him outside and into a world of fantasizing (which he and Riley spend the remainder of the afternoon doing) about Jack Johnson.

In "Afternoon," as well as in the other Buster and Riley stories, Ellison emphasizes another factor which contributes to the Black male character's psychological impotence--the matriarchal figure. Her role is to initiate her son into his emasculated role.

Since Buster's father is absent--as are the fathers of the majority of Ellison's Black male characters--it would follow that Buster would take on the role of the father figure. However, he traditional male/female roles are reversed, and Buster
acts out the female role, doing chores (washing and cooking) traditionally and stereotypically performed by women. Buster's role then is a denial of his masculinity. Buster's mother becomes the masculinized female, taking on the role of the father—psychologically castrating the son in order to prepare him for the role he must assume as a Black male.

A tragedy (perhaps even a perversion) exists in a society that forces a parent to psychologically castrate/emasculate her son in order to preserve its myths and rituals. There is also a deeper tragedy which exists for a mother (or the matriarchal figure) who must castrate her own son, not only to better prepare him to live within the boundaries set forth by society, but also in hope that his impotent state will guarantee his survival—hence, the survival of the race. Yet, Ellison hints at another reason that the Black matriarch castrates the Black male: that she blames him for how she is treated by society. As Buster observes, she only vents her anger at him when she has problems with "the white folks."

The matriarchal figure must instill in her son the fact that if he asserts his manhood he runs the risk of physical castration and even death. In order
to survive, the Black male must remain in a perpetual state of emasculation. He must always mask his virility, even if/when his phallus and generative powers are intact. In essence, his entire life must be an embodiment of impotence.

It is rather interesting that rarely in Ellison's short stories does the father emasculate the son. The absence of the Black father/father-figure in Ellison's stories speaks not to the usual explanation of the Black male who simply abandons his family, but to a more poignant cause--the ritual disposal of the Black male (hence, the father), by physically and psychologically depriving him of his masculinity. Once deprived of his phallus, whether literally or psychologically, the Black male ceases to exist, causing his absence and resulting in the matriarchal figure taking on the role of father.

Unaware of the long range significance of the lessons taught to them by their parents, Buster and Riley still want to test the boundaries of freedom as established by society and reinforced by their parents. In the presence of restricting forces however, Buster and Riley's "testing" is confined to the world of fantasy and daydreams. They are able to transcend
their limitations only by identifying with Jack Johnson, a Black culture hero and role model for the adolescents.

Their identification with Jack Johnson is significant in that he is an embodiment of strength and rebellion for the Black race. He ignored society's restrictions and continually destroyed the myth of white supremacy and athletic superiority by defeating numerous white opponents. Johnson's fights were not just with his opponents "but also with 'race hatred,' 'prejudice,' and 'Negro Persecution.'" Just as important as Johnson's triumphs in the ring was his lifestyle: "his fast cars, fancy clothes, ready tongue, white wife (the first of three white women he married), and white mistresses." Because he defied the roles prescribed for the Black male and served as an example of how a Black male could and should live--unrestricted and undominated by other men--Johnson symbolized the dreams and hopes of his race, as well as the possibility of eradicating racial barriers. Thus, his triumphs were triumphs for his race.

Buster and Riley are not just identifying with a folk hero, but more importantly with what he represents: freedom (freedom from restrictions) and strength
(strength to overcome society and parents). Unfortunately, their identification with Jack Johnson does not alter the restrictions placed upon their lives. The harsh realities of Buster's and Riley's lives remain unchanged.

The identification with a Black folk hero also occurs in "Mister Toussan." Although the story is a celebration of folk speech and tradition, the prevailing tone is that of restraint, emphasizing the oppressive forces which shape Buster and Riley's world.

The story centers around Buster and Riley and their white neighbor, Mr. Rogan, who owns cherry trees. He has just told Buster and Riley that they cannot pick up the cherries which have fallen from his trees. As they sit on the porch and watch mockingbirds freely attack the trees, they hear Riley's mother in the background singing:

I got wings, you got wings,
All God's chillun got a-wings.
When I git to heaven gonna put on my wings
Gonna shout all ovah God's heaven.
Heab'n, heab'n
Everybody talkin' about heab'n ain't going there
Heab'n, heab'n, Ah'm gonna fly ovah God's heab'n... 15

Riley's mother's voice rises above the noise of the sewing machine and "even old Rogan stopped rocking to listen" (p. 387).

Her singing prompts Buster and Riley into a discussion of what they would do if they could fly. They decide that they would fly to Chicago, "Dee-troit," the moon, Africa, "or anywhere else colored is free" (p. 387). The mention of Africa leads them to retell the story of Toussaint L'Ouverture.

Their storytelling is brought to an abrupt end by Riley's mother, and the story ends with Buster suggesting that maybe they can sneak around Rogan's house and get some cherries.

In "Mister Toussan," flight is synonymous with freedom and manhood, 16 while the inability to fly is synonymous with oppression and emasculation. Because the mockingbirds (mocking the fact that they can eat from the tree) can fly, they are symbolic of freedom, a freedom which Buster and Riley don't have, and per-
haps never will. And since the birds can eat freely from the tree, and Buster and Riley cannot even pick up the cherries that have fallen on the ground, the birds underscore Buster and Riley's inability to fly, hence, their limited freedom.

Inherent in the words of the song is the implication that Buster and Riley (and Riley's mother are just as free as the birds, since "All God's Children Got Wings.") However, these wings (freedom) do not exist in the present, but in heaven. The song actually speaks of passive acceptance of their present situation. Riley's mother's singing is then an attempt to thwart any thoughts of rebellion on the part of Buster and Riley; in essence, the purpose is to emasculate them. She must teach her son to be content with his place by "promising" him that his wings and unlimited freedom will be granted in heaven.

It appears that she has achieved her purpose, when after she sings, both Buster's and Riley's eyes are blank, a testament to a successful emasculcation. However, her singing becomes counterproductive; it leads Buster and Riley to speculate as to what they would do if they had wings, if they were free. Unlike Riley's mother, Buster's and Riley's thoughts of free-
dom center around their present situation, in secular not sacred terms.

Buster and Riley's speculations on flight and freedom occur in the form of the "wishing game" or "playing white." It is the same game played by Bigger Thomas and his friend in the airplane scene in Wright's *Native Son*. The "wishing game" is the verbal expression of wishfulfillment and daydreaming, and by playing the game, that which is unattainable, becomes attainable.

Their daydreaming leads them to Africa, back to their ancestry and back to the stereotype of the "lazy African," (i.e., the "lazy nigger"). They realize that Black men in America could be kings and have diamonds and gold and ivory, but "white folks won't let them"—a realizations of their limitations in a predominately white world. It is appropriate that Buster's story of a slave who leads a rebellion is in direct contrast with Riley's mother's song of restraint and acceptance. The telling of the story reveals the need for Buster and Riley to identify with a Black man who challenges and overcomes the limitations imposed upon him by society. Through identifying with Toussaint they achieve a vicarious
revolution and the ensuing freedom.

Toussaint serves as an example of a virile man (as does Jack Johnson in "Afternoon"), for all of his descriptions are associated with his phallus. He is described as a "hard man" with his "sword" and "Black Cannon Balls" intact. Moreover, he is "Mister Toussan" and not "Toussan," (which would be the equivalent of "boy") and since "Napoleon ain't nothing but a man!" (p. 391), Toussaint and Napoleon are equals. Thus, Toussaint can use his "sword" and "Black Cannon Balls" to overcome Napoleon, overcome society. Since Toussaint has achieved this victory, then so can other Black men, inevitably overcoming society's power.

But men like Toussaint are a rarity since few can escape society's ritual emasculation of Black males. Such is the case with Buster and Riley. Their daydreaming (and the freedom it brings) is brought to an abrupt halt by Riley's mother and, as a result, they are brought back to reality, back to their limited freedom, as well as back to prevailing stereotypes--"white folks says we tear up the neighborhood when we move in" (p. 392). Riley's mother must intervene, for Buster and Riley have become carried away
with thoughts of unlimited freedom and overcoming society, and such thoughts are not just dangerous for Buster and Riley, but also for Riley's mother (since her "duty" is to teach them their place and keep them content). Her intervention is, in effect, an emasculation. Although Buster tries to salvage something from their imaginative freedom by suggesting that "maybe we can slip and get some cherries" (p. 392), it is gone; and even if they are successful in getting some cherries, they will have to "sneak" to do so.

In telling the story of Toussaint L'Ouverture, Buster and Riley momentarily transcend the limitations placed upon their lives; but like the protagonists in Ellison's earlier stories, the realities of white supremacy are omnipresent, reminding them of their place as Black males. Not only does society (and the matriarchal figure) remind them of their place, but the matriarchal figure (Riley's mother) must also remind Buster and Riley that even their verbal expression must be inhibited, resulting in abortive communication. Since the Black male must submit to a linguistic impotence along with his physical and psychological emasculation, he, in essence, doesn't
exist--an "invisible man."

The last Buster and Riley story, "That I Had the Wings," further develops the theme of flight and freedom Ellison explores in "Mister Toussan." This story, which marks, somewhat, Ellison's return to the use of sight imagery and Freudian symbolism, centers around Buster's and Riley's attempt to teach baby chicks how to fly.

Confined to the yard because he had been chasing pigeons and fallen off the church roof, Riley watches a young robin's first attempts at flight. The bird's success inspires a verse which Riley shares with Buster:

If I was the President
Of these United States
Said if I was the President
Of these United States
I'd eat good chocolate candy bars
An swing on the White House gates
Great-God-a-mighty, man-
I'd swing on them White House gates! 17

This song provokes Aunt Kate's wrath. She scolds
him for altering the words of the spiritual and
tells him he should be learning "some of the Lawd's
songs" (p. 32). She sings:

Sing aha-ho that
Ah had the wings of-vah dove
Ah'd fly to mah Jesus an
Be at res'...(p. 31).

When Riley attempts to sing this verse, his throat
becomes dry. But once in the back yard, away from
Aunt Kate's supervision, he is able to sing his own
version of the 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...(p. 32).

Riley then suggests that they go and take a look
at the baby chicks... But when "Ole Bill," the rooster,
attracts their attention, Riley decides to prove that
roosters can fly. In his attempt, he is attacked
and "Ole Bill" claws his eyes and face.
After the unsuccessful attempt with "Ole Bill," Buster and Riley try to teach the baby chicks to fly by making parachutes with rags and strings and dropping the chicks from the top of the chicken coop. But Aunt Kate catches Buster and Riley at the precise moment Buster drops the chicks and they fall to their deaths.

Overcome with disappointment, Riley doesn't hear or see "Ole Bill" charge, tearing Riley's leg. His only consolation is Buster murmuring, "We almost had 'em flying, We almost..." (p. 37).

"That I Had the Wings" exhibits some of the complexity of style and symbolism of the experienced Ellison. The story marks a return to the incorporation of sight imagery which Ellison used in "Slick Gonna Learn" and "The Birthmark." Sight imagery and flight are intertwined with Riley's freedom and manhood.

Riley observes the mother robin's attempt to teach the younger bird to fly, Riley's eyes are wide with excitement. He identifies with the young bird who is afraid to attempt to fly. The bird's fear becomes Riley's fear, his fear of flying, of testing the parameters of his freedom. When the bird flies so does Riley, and he feels good. The bird's flight
leads Riley to confirm his belief in his unlimited freedom, so much so that he loses himself to the dream: entertaining the possibility of becoming president.

His freedom is short lived when Aunt Kate hears his verse. She scolds Riley for even thinking about becoming president, knowing that society doesn't like it (and won't tolerate it). Besides, Riley has been taught better: that such thoughts are not just inappropriate, but also dangerous for a Black male. His talking about becoming president (of having a position of power designated for whites) could "git everybody in trouble" (p. 31). To remind him of this, Aunt Kate asks, "Whut yuh think would happen to yo po ma if the white folks wuz to hear she wuz raisin up a black Chile whuts got no better sense than to talk bout bein President?" (p. 31). The consequences could be death, not just for Riley, but also for Aunt Kate since it is the Black matriarch's duty to raise a Black male who represses all thoughts except those of remaining in his place. His dreams, thoughts, and speech must represent an impotent state.

But Riley's thoughts on becoming president represent Aunt Kate's--and society's--failure to adequately teach him the established social order.
Thus, Aunt Kate (as her duty requires) must remind Riley of what he should think and what he is to sing. And in so doing, she places limitations on his world of possibility, offering him instead the sacred world with its promise of freedom in the afterlife.

Riley's parodies of Aunt Kate's songs are attempts against restraint, against impotence. He wants to "swing on the White House gates" and "tear down the White House gates" (pp. 31-32). His words represent a desire to destroy restrictions, to not conform in behavior or thought to society or to Aunt Kate. Moreover, since "gates" are symbols for the female genitals and "swinging" signifies intercourse, Riley's words also represent a desire to achieve manhood.

Riley's attempt to make "Ole Bill" fly, as well as the baby chicks, is also a desire to achieve unrestrained freedom and manhood. His initiation begins with his attempts at imposing flight on the rooster--apparently not realizing that roosters cannot fly. Just as Kate represents the old established laws and order of society; "Ole Bill" represents the old/natural order and laws of the barnyard--hence, the title "Ole." "Ole Bill" serves as an obstacle to Riley obtaining freedom and manhood vicariously
through the baby chicks; Aunt Kate serves as an obstacle by preventing Riley to obtain freedom and manhood through song or thought—or in actuality. Riley's antics in the barnyard only serve to reinforce the limitations of his life outside the barnyard.

Since the legs (because of the close proximity to the penis), the rooster's clawing at Riley's legs is actually an attempt to castrate him, not just for trying to impose flight on earth-bound birds, but also for attempting to assert himself over "Ole Bill's" authority and masculinity. However, it is not until Riley's attempts, and fails, to get the baby chicks to fly that his initiation—and his unmanning—is complete.

Riley's attempt to get the baby chicks to fly is his own attempt at flight (the baby chicks serve as the proxy for his own flight), but at the precise moment when he would have gotten the baby chicks to fly, Aunt Kate interrupts him. Her interruption is his emasculation. Riley realizes this when he says, "If I jus hadn't looked at her" (p. 37). To have averted his eyes would have meant catching the baby chicks (learning the secret of flight) and saving his manhood.
But he does look at her and the emasculation effect of the matriarchal figure's eyes causes not just his emasculation, but his blindness (castration). Riley does not see Ole Bill when he charges and wounds him on the leg. The blow he receives from Ole Bill is a blow to his manhood, and the wound, a phallic wound. The blood streaming down Riley's leg signals the completion of his initiation. In essence, Riley's initiation is his castration. He is left with the "foul odor of chicken dung" (p. 37), with the realization that Ole Bill, Aunt Kate, and society have succeeded in taking away his dreams of flight and freedom, and more importantly, his manhood.

"In a Strange Country," Ellison's sixth short story, marks a departure from the Buster and Riley stories in that Ellison focuses on an older Black male, one knowledgeable in Shakespeare and folk music. Moreover, this story, which centers around a young a young Black serviceman named Parker (stationed in Wales during World War II), is a study in perception, the Black male's perception of himself, how he is perceived by others, and how he believes he is perceived by others.

After leaving the ship to go ashore, Parker is
approached by a group of white American servicemen, who, elated by the fact that "it's a goddam nigger," beat him, injuring his eye and causing it to swell. He is rescued by some Welshmen, led by Mr. Catti who then takes him to a pub. After several rounds of ale Mr. Catti informs Parker that it is time for a concert to begin at his club and invites Parker to accompany him.

During the Welshmen's singing, Parker is not only moved by "the richness of the music and the well-blended voices" (p. 42),--seemingly displaying the people's oneness with their land--but by what he perceives to be the Welshmen's sense of unity and patriotism. However, their renditions of folk and patriotic songs remind Parker of "the familiar and hateful emotion of alienation" associated with his own country (p. 42). "If we only had some of what they have," he thinks (p. 43).

Catti enlightens Parker on the fact that the singers are of varied occupations; still, as Catti says, "when we sing, we are Welshmen" (p. 43). Although failing to understand the complexity and seriousness of Catti's statement, Parker correctly connects the welshmen's unity with the mixed jam
sessions at home and flippantly replies, "When we jam, sir, we're Jamocrats!" (p. 43).

As the concert comes to a close, the Welshmen stand to sing their national anthem and, afterwards, as a tribute to Parker they play the American National Anthem. Initially, Parker fails to recognize the melody, but when he does, he cannot help but hear beyond the music "the soldiers' voices, yelling as they had when the light struck his eyes" (p. 44). Yet, despite his mixed emotions, he finds himself singing "The Star Spangled Banner." The story ends with Parker trying to hold back the tears, unable to respond to the conductor asking him to join the club if he stays in Wales.

From the beginning of "In a Strange Country," Parker's perception is made the focal point of attention. And because one of his eyes is swollen, partially closed from the onset of the story, it signals the reader to analyze, if not question, what Parker sees or thinks he sees. More importantly, since for Ellison the eyes have phallic significance, Parker's perception is directly connected to his manhood. Thus, what affects Parker's sight (and insight) also affects his manhood.
The beating which Parker receives serves to alter his sight, to make him see what society wants him to see: that regardless of his involvement in the service—at home or abroad—or the treatment he receives from Mr. Catti and his countrymen, he is, always in the eyes of society, still less than a man. For when the white American servicemen see Parker they see him not as a serviceman or a fellow countryman, but as a "nigger;" and Parker is beaten not because of anything he says or does, but because his birthmark (his race) demands his beating—his service to his country does not allow him to be exempt from this ritualistic and traditional beating. Parker must be reminded that although in Wales he may be able to sit in a pub and drink ale, "at home he still lives in Harlem" (p. 43). Distance does not alter perception or realities.

The beating alters Parker's sight both literally, in that his eye is swollen, and psychologically, in that he grasps, at times, only a part of what is shown to him by Catti, and, as a result, he unable to penetrate the depth of this experience and distinguish the truth beneath the appearances. Indeed, when Catti tells Parker that he has much to see, Catti is not
speaking so much in terms of insight and self-perception, a lesson Parker believes he can learn from the Welsh. As Catti points out, when the men in the club sing, they are Welsh, regardless of what others may consider them to be and regardless of their various backgrounds or occupations. What is important is how they perceive themselves, and since they perceive themselves as Welshmen, they are Welshmen. But what Catti fails to point out to Parker—and Parker apparently doesn't know—is that this shared common identity is achieved only through the ritual of singing since the Welsh are considered a darker race in England, and the English look down upon them with racial stereotypes. And just as the white servicemen see Parker as a "nigger," the English also see the Welsh as "niggers." As well, perception is intricately intertwined with history, and a love of that history.

The Welsh can go outside and point to a hill or a mountain or a patch of land and tell their children and grandchildren of the days when their fathers and mothers and loved ones walked those same hills and mountains and gave their lives. It was their land, their country. It is recorded in the songs, stories, and history books. This, the coming together in battle
for one's country, is what has historically imbued countries with their greatest strength and what invokes commitment to a country: its past, present, and future. When the Welshmen sing, they may be bound by a common bond—a love-bond—but now they are a part of England. And although it may not matter that one of the singers is a miner or another a butcher, the people and the land are no longer one.

Americans are not bond by a common love-bond—perhaps because America is comprised of many cultures (a pluralistic society) alienated from each other—this now holds true for England. Parker acknowledges that he "can remember no song of ours that's of love of the soil or of country. Nor any song of battle other than those of biblical times" (p. 43). When Black Americans sing, they may be, as Parker says, "Jamocrats," but they are not fully accepted/embraced as Americans. For Blacks the dual fate of being both Americans and Negroes is ever-present, which explains, in part, why the "American" part of Parker wants to sing the words to the American National Anthem, while the "Negro" part of him hears beyond the music, "the soldiers' voices, yelling when they struck his eye" (p. 44).
The Welshmen's singing--more specifically their sense of unity--causes Parker to view them, particularly Catti, in a different light: as being capable of accepting him as a human being/as being incapable of being racists. He believes that the Welsh "had seen him for what he was and for what he should have been" (p. 43). And all along Parker has had a tendency to see Catti as someone different, possibly an exception; but Catti is at one with the city, that includes perception of everything, hence, his statement: "I'm at home. I know the city" (p. 43). And the city--as does the country, as does Catti--recognizes distinctions: for there are "Black Yanks and white,"--just as there are Englishmen and Welshmen (p. 41). And being at home--and not an American--he, Catti, has nothing to fear; he is exempt from any repercussions for befriending a "Black Yank," because he, himself, is considered to be no different from Parker in the eyes of the English. And equally important, being at home means that he is aware of what is expected of him. Parker would be wise to understand that that which he thinks he sees in Catti and the other Welshmen is not necessarily the truth; as well, the significance of Catti's name cannot be overlooked.
since much of his role in the story is "catty."

For it is Catti who leads Parker to a private club not just to hear the songs of the Welsh, but to initiate Parker into the private club, a fraternal society of castrated men. The white servicemen attempt through the use of physical violence to affect Parker's psychological castration. Catti, on the other hand, utilizes music—a more subtle, enticing approach, made even more so by the fact that Parker is quite knowledgeable in music. But Catti's motive differs from that of the white policemen; he seeks to initiate Parker into his role as a castrated man, as one of them. The Welshmen's singing and their music becomes a kind of opiate, seducing Parker into relinquishing his manhood.

As Catti guides Parker to the club, a "pale beam of a flashlight reveals the stone walk" (p. 42) and Parker hears "a group of adolescent girls singing a nostalgic Tin-Pan Alley tune" (p. 42). The beam of flashlight does not reveal the walkway to Parker's salvation, but rather to his psychological castration. And the Tin-Pan Alley tune serves as a warning that perhaps Wales is not so different from America. These two somewhat unobtrusive occurrences should
signal to Parker to be wary of outward appearances—and
to be cognizant of the treatment of "minorities" in
other countries—and to remember that he still lives in
Harlem.

When Parker enters the club it is appropriate that
what he first encounters is the presence of light, and
when his eye is exposed to this light it is "as though
it is being peeled by an invisible hand" (p. 42).
Parker is being exposed to the light: the truth of the
nature of his manhood, and the Welshmen's—that neither
are free to achieve unrestricted manhood.

In a brief introspection into his subconscious,
Parker correctly compares himself to Othello—not only
was Othello a moor, of a darker race, but there are
also references throughout Shakespeare's play to
Othello's sexual appetite—specifically, the grandiose
speeches, the lack of sight; for he relies on the
interpretation of Catti rather than on his own
analysis of what the reality of the situation is in
which he finds himself. And from his subconscious
comes the warning: "and remember what they did to
Othello" (p. 43); for there is a punishment for those
of failed sight/perception, and for Parker, his pun-
ishment is this inexorable price: the loss of his
manhood.

Ironically, Parker's response is that: "No, he did it to himself...couldn't believe in himself" (p. 43), which is precisely Parker's own problem. He believes in the Welsh,--particularly Catti--in their music, in everything, except that which would save him: belief in himself. But Parker's beating and his swollen eye, as well as, the Welshmen's ale and hospitality have contributed to his intellectual blindness, causing his self-analyzing faculties to fail him. He salutes Wales as his "fair warrior nation" (p. 43) his Desdemona so to speak, which has caused his chaos to disappear. Parker should note, however, that Othello's lack of insight towards those around him leads to his demise--as Parker's lack of insight towards the Welsh will lead to his.

Parker's subconscious cautions him to keep to the facts and to remember where he lives, that by doing so he can save the State the trouble of having to remind him of the realities of his place. Parker is urged to "put out that light" (p. 43), that is to extinguish any misconceptions about his manhood--in essence, to castrate himself. The fact that Parker's eye is "almost completely closed" (p. 43) is evidence
that light is being extinguished—with the assistance of Catti. When Catti offers to lend Parker his torch—a symbolic replacement phallus—to find his way back to the ship, Catti is well aware that when Parker leaves the club, it will be without his manhood. Parker accepts the offer, failing to realize that one must find one's own way back (i.e., one must discover the truth for himself—be his own father).

Before the completion of his initiation, Parker again glimpses at the truth beneath the appearances, a truth which manifests itself through the Welshmen's music, specifically the selection of songs they sing. As Parker observes, at the end of the concert when the Welshmen sing their National Anthem, it is not the National Anthem of England. As well, the manner in which it is sung is "strangely moving" (p. 00). However, when the Welshmen sing the National Anthem of England, "God Save the King," Parker notes that the singing "is not nearly so stirring" (p. 44). In fact, all along, the songs are only moving when they are specifically about Wales and the Welsh's past victories against the English—re-emphasizing the alienation the Welsh feel within their own country, as well as their feelings toward being a part of
England. And when the Welsh sing about Wales, the songs always remind Parker of "the familiar and hateful emotion of alienation" (p. 42) he experiences in his own country.

Parker is so engrossed in their music that when the Welsh salute him by playing the American National Anthem, initially he fails to remember the words. When he does recognize the melody, "his knees feel as if they will give away" (p. 44), thus, the beginning of the final stage of his submission. Once again, Parker looks beneath the surface, and it is appropriate that when he does, he feels:

as though he had been pushed into the horrible foreboding country of dreams and they were enticing him into some unwilled and degrading act, from which only his failure to remember the words would save him (p. 44).

And his failure to remember the words would have saved him, would have meant keeping his manhood/defying the ritual. Parker's assessment of the situation is correct: that the truth beneath the facade of Catti's
act is that he, Parker, is being pushed, enticed into joining a brotherhood of castrated men whose music unites them, but acts as a substitute for their manhood.

But in keeping with the ritual, Parker does sing--his manhood for a song--and thus, he betrays himself. By singing, Parker loses control over himself and his voice becomes "the voice of another over whom he has no control" (p. 44). But his "eye throbs and a wave of guilt shakes him" (p. 44), indicating that his manhood is not yet lost. Tragically, his sense of guilt at the loss of his manhood is but fleeting as Parker feels "a burst of relief" (p. 44) after he sings. A new self has been forged--compatible with the goals of the initiation rite--one which finds the lyrics not ironic, that the words to the National Anthem now speak for and include him and all Americans.

Parker's singing--almost against his will--signals an end to his initiation; thus, it is appropriate that he holds Catti's "flashlight like a club" (p. 44) for this becomes the superficial symbol of his manhood. His black eye serves as a symbolic wound. Psychologically divested of his manhood, Parker is reduced to silence--his loss of voice accompanying his loss
of manhood—and can not even reply to the invitation to join the club if he stays in Wales. But Parker is now a member of the club and staying in Wales would be no different from returning and living in America; in either place he is not, nor will he be, recognized as a man.

Parker's inability to speak recalls "the prohibition against speech that occurs in many primitive rites of passage;\textsuperscript{20} this prohibition can be interpreted "as death, and as a return to earliest infancy."\textsuperscript{21} For Parker it represents the death of his former self and the birth of a new self, one which accepts and embraces, psychologically, his castrated existence.

In his next story, "Flying Home," Ellison, as had in "That I Had the Wings" and "Mister Toussan," equates flight with freedom and manhood. "Flying Home" focuses on Todd, a young Black pilot, who wounds his ankle when he crashes his plane in a white man's field. His aborted flight finds its counterpart in the allegorical flight of Jefferson, an elderly Black man who rescues Todd, and who--as he maintains in a folktale--gets kicked out of heaven for flying without a harness.\textsuperscript{22}
The story begins as Todd is regaining consciousness after his crash. He becomes cognizant of faces hovering over him, but remains silent until he is able to discern their racial identities. He then informs Jefferson that he has injured his ankle. To ease the pain of Todd's broken ankle, Jefferson removes Todd's boot. Instead of allowing Jefferson to get him to a doctor or to get Mister Graves—the man who owns the land Todd has crashed on—Todd insists that Jefferson has his son, Teddy, get word back to the airfield.

While they wait for Teddy's return, Jefferson questions Todd about the crash. Upon learning that a buzzard caused Todd to crash his plane, Jefferson—on the pretense of passing the time—tells Todd two tales. The first tale is brief and involves a dead horse and buzzards—or "jimcrows as Teddy calls them." Jefferson recalls finding a horse stretched out on the ground. Unsure if the animal is actually dead, Jefferson yells for the horse to get up; instead, jimcrows come flying out of the horse's stomach. Todd doubts the veracity of the tale, but Jefferson assures him: "I saw him just like I see you" (p. 259).

Sensing that he has found some vulnerable spot
of Todd's, Jefferson proceeds to tell another tale, this one pertaining to his alleged trip to heaven. Upon his arrival in heaven, Jefferson discovers that Black angels are required to wear harnesses which prevent them from flying properly. Jefferson, ignoring this rule however, insists on flying without a harness and, as a result, is kicked out of heaven.

Todd becomes incensed at this tale--believing it to be a parody of his own situation--and slips into a semi-conscious dream-like state. In two dreams sequences which follow, Todd recalls memories of his youth, both revolving around airplanes and flight.

He remembers the first time he ever saw an airplane; it was a model airplane at the state fair. Then one day he sees a plane flying overhead, and believing it to be the same model airplane he had seen at the fair, Todd attempts to grab for the plane, but ends up falling to the ground. Afterwards, the plane haunts his dreams and in each dream, he makes futile attempts to grab for the plane.

In the second dream sequence, Todd is walking down a street with his mother as a plane begins dropping white cards with the symbol of a white hood and the advice: "Niggers Stay From the Polls" imprinted on
them. His mother attempts to hurry him along, but Todd's attention becomes transfixed on the plane.

Todd's flashbacks are interrupted by Jefferson informing him that someone is approaching. As Todd closes his eyes in relief, Dabney Graves and two hospital attendants appear and force Todd into a straight jacket. Realizing what is transpiring, Todd orders them not to touch him. His outburst—changing into hystericsshcauses a confrontation with Graves. But Graves merely orders Todd off his land, instructing Jefferson and Teddy to carry Todd off by stretcher.

"Flying Home" is based on Tuskegee Institute's pilot training program which was established in 1939, during World War II, to train Black men to be pilots—but actually to quell charges of discrimination in the Army's Air Force. The training program was criticized as being more of a symbolic gesture since the men were graduated but not allowed to fly planes in combat. It would take five years for the first graduates to receive their orders. Interestingly, Black men were supposedly kept from combat action because they were "being protected from mistreatment and discrimination and extraneous nervous strain."24

Although this story makes minimal use of sight
imagery and concentrates more on the symbolic use of folklore, Ellison emphasizes through the use of Freudian symbolism that the focus of "Flying Home" is the Black male's manhood and sexuality. Perhaps Ellison's most multi-leveled short story, "Flying Home" focuses on Todd, the older initiate,--an older Buster or Riley--whose aspirations of flight conflict with the boundaries established for Black males. And Todd's refusal to acknowledge and accept his limitations as a Black man ultimately leads to his psychological unmanning.

When Todd regains consciousness after his crash, it is appropriate that the sun's rays are so blinding that he cannot distinguish the race/color of the faces hovering over him; for this symbolically establishes the need for Todd's unmanning: for he has "blinded" himself into believing that his ability to fly planes places him on the same level as white men (i.e., that his ability to pilot a plane breaks down racial barriers and stereotypes--and separates him from such Black men as Jefferson). Ironically though, the old ingrained beliefs still operate and linger just beneath the surface as Todd fears "being touched by white hands" (p. 254). His fear constitutes a subliminal
fear of being castrated—and that to come in contact with white men, to be touched by them, is life a threat to both the Black male's life and his manhood. Ironically, as well, Jefferson and Teddy automatically assumed that the pilot of the plane was a white man. Again, an indoctrinated belief surfaces: that only white men can be pilots, can fly planes—a belief taught and accepted and passed on from one generation to another, from father to son, from mother to son.

When Todd realizes that Jefferson and Teddy are Black, he relaxes; however, their presence reminds him of his crash and the pain of his broken ankle. In essence, Jefferson and Teddy's presence—particularly Jefferson's—reminds Todd of his blackness; that he is connected to them (i.e., that despite the fact that Todd is a pilot, he is still a Black man and must live according to the laws which govern his existence). And it is Jefferson who offers Todd an important piece of advice when Todd attempts to stand on his ankle. He tells Todd that if he doesn't stop trying to use his ankle: "they have to cut your foot off" (p. 255). This sage advice and warning is wrought with sexual symbolism and overtones. Todd's broken ankle is a symbolic phallic injury—equivalent
to Oedipus' pierced ankles—his warning for attempting to fly too high, for exercising his manhood. What Jefferson warns is that Todd would be wise to understand that his attempts at flight are life threatening and could result in his castration (i.e., "cutting off his foot"); for there is a consequence for Black males who attempt to be men in a society that does not recognize their manhood.

What Todd does realize is that his ability as a pilot has significance beyond the mere fact of his being able to fly a plane. When Todd flies he represents achievement for all Black people (symbolically when he flies, he represents the procreation of the race). And when Todd fails—crashes—or makes mistakes, they are interpreted as mistakes of all Black people—and as further evidence of inferiority—and the entire race is held accountable (p. 256). And for Todd, this lack of individuality—his connection to Jefferson—is humiliating.

The only source of pride or satisfaction for Todd lies in his plane and in flying. On a psycho-sexual level, Todd's plane is his manhood and he derives sexual gratification, fulfillment from flying—from exercising his manhood. Todd's plane serves as yet
another phallic symbol. He has transferred his manhood to his plane. And because he is now separated from the plane, he feels naked (p. 256). More importantly, because his plane is damaged, Todd's manhood (i.e., his perception of himself as a man) is damaged as well. And Todd's need, desire to fly back to the airfield and his need to stand on his broken ankle represents a need to prove that his manhood is still intact.

This accounts for why Jefferson's presence is so disturbing to Todd. Jefferson's presence symbolically emasculates Todd and reminds him that his manhood is only marginal. Because Todd has not yet relinquished his manhood, he resents Jefferson and connects him with the old men who would come to "the field to watch the pilots with childish eyes" (p. 257). These men, Todd believes, only came to shame and embarrass him. But they, like Jefferson, actually serve to remind Todd of his place, of the realities of being a Black man. For Todd to accept and embrace Jefferson--and the old men at the airfield--is for Todd to accept and embrace his own Blackness and all that accompanies that: all the stereotypes and restrictions which are a part of being a Black male. And it is Jefferson
who reminds Todd of why he crashed his plane: he had been flying too high and too fast...and he let a buzzard panic him" (p. 259).

On one level Todd's collision with a buzzard represents a collision with societal rules and beliefs which state that Black men cannot fly (i.e., they don't possess the cerebral capacity to pilot planes) and that such a privilege should be reserved only for white men. If Black men are allowed to fly, they might come to believe--as Todd does--that they share the same status as white men, and ultimately, they might try to transcend their limitations.

On a psycho-sexual level, Todd's crash represents a symbolic castration, with both his ankle and his plane serving as phallic symbols; with both "injuries" serving as wounds to his manhood. Freudian symbolism recognizes planes as symbols for the male penis and makes the ability to fly analogous to virility/sexual potency. Hence, Todd's crash becomes just one more example of the failure of Black men to control their sexual appetite/manhood. As well, the crash serves as an example of what happens to Black men when they are allowed to exercise their manhood/sexuality: they "spin" out of control. And thus, for the safety of
society, they must not be allowed to fly (i.e., they must not be allowed to actually exist/live as men).

The buzzard which causes Todd to crash his plane is also symbolic and represents, on one level, Jim Crow laws, laws which Todd must now confront and come to terms with. In folklore, buzzards represent: "the black person scrounging for survival, sometimes his predators, and always the precariousness of life in a predatory society." The collision with the buzzard is, too, a collision with Todd's blackness and inability to accept the designated roles for Black men. Todd finds the buzzard repulsive just as he finds the stereotypes associated with his race repulsive—just as he finds Jefferson and the fact that because they are both Black they are a part of each other repulsive. It is appropriate that Todd feels as if "that buzzard knocked him back a hundred years" (p. 256). For Todd has crashed in the South and on a white man's land; he has symbolically crashed back in time to learn his place. And because he flies and crashes in the reverse direction of the mythic route to freedom,—South to North—his flight represents the fact that true freedom and manhood is unattainable.
When Jefferson discovers that a buzzard caused Todd to crash his plane, the revelation prompts him to tell a brief anecdote about finding a dead horse stretched out on the ground. By using this particular anecdote, Ellison utilizes yet another traditional symbol of the male penis: the horse. And since Jefferson makes Todd analogous to the horse ("I saw him just like I see you"), and since the horse is dead, it follows that Todd's penis is "dead"—that by shunning his heritage Todd has aided society in destroying his manhood. The buzzards feed off the feed off the dead horse just as Jim Crow laws feed off the supposed inferiority of Black men and society feeds off the Black male's sexuality and manhood. And Todd is "being devoured by both the Jim Crow society and his own shame [of being a Black man]." 26

Since buzzards are also associated with death, Jefferson is attempting, through this anecdote, to put into perspective for Todd, the nature of manhood for Black men: that to attempt true manhood/sexuality is to risk death. Todd may consider himself above Jefferson and other Black men--that flying elevates his manhood to a higher status--but his beliefs are delusions, for as Jefferson reminds him later: "You
black, son...You have to come by the white folks too" (p. 267).

To further illustrate to Todd the futility of his ambitions, Jefferson proceeds to tell Todd a well-known tale about an alleged trip to heaven--known as the "Colored Man in Heaven." The tale utilizes and parallels certain stereotypes of Blacks such as, never following rules and always causing a ruckus. When Jefferson gets to heaven, the first thing he does is try out his wings; but he is warned by the other Black angels that he had "better come down 'cause us colored folks have to wear a special kin' a harness when we fly" (p. 261). Jefferson ignores the warning and begins to "raise hell" and shows off his flying abilities by doing "the loop-the-loop...zooming roun' the moon" and flying "usin' but one wing" (p. 261). St. Peter warns him about flying with only one wing and flying too fast.

Jefferson then floats "roun' heaven in slow motion" (p. 262), but forgets "like colored folks will do" (p. 262) and reverts back to his previous antics. This time, St. Peter kicks him out of heaven, and Jefferson is given "a parachute and a map of the state of Alabama" (p. 262). Jefferson gets the final
word, however, and tells St. Peter: "Well, you done took my wings. And you puttin' me out. You got charge of things so's I can't do nothin' about it. but you got to admit just this: While I was up here I was the flyinest sonofabitch what ever hit heaven!" (p. 262).

The tale Jefferson tells is actually a parody of Todd's situation and serves to teach him the error of trying to fly away from the inevitable loss of his manhood. To better illustrate this fact to Todd, Jefferson adds a variation to the original version of this tale: the fact that Black angels are required to wear harnesses. As an angel, Jefferson discovers that restrictions exist even in heaven, and that even there there is a conspiracy to keep Black men from fully enjoying all freedoms which should naturally be theirs. More importantly, on a sexual level, what Jefferson actually discovers is that manhood and sexuality is denied even in heaven; that the harnesses which prevent Black angels from flying are devices meant to prevent Black men from being men in the fullest sense. Thus, Jefferson is given wings, but not allowed to fly unrestricted (i.e., cannot fully exercise his manhood).

But Jefferson refuses to wear such a restrictive
device and chooses, instead, to fly freely. Since flying is symbolic with sexual potency and virility and intercourse, Jefferson's aerial acrobatics are actually his sexual escapades. To prove his manhood—that "old Jefferson can fly as good as anyone else" (p. 265)—he "shows off" and exploits his sexual superiority by flying fast, using only one wing, and doing other various stunts. The sexual imagery implicit in Jefferson's descriptions of his feats becomes humorous; he even has to make sure that he keeps his robe around his ankles as to not be an exhibitionist (p. 261). Not only do his sexual feats "scare the devil outa some ole white angels" (p. 261), but he is informed that he even "caused a storm and a couple of lynchings down in Macon County" (p. 261).

His sexual feats finally merit a warning from St. Peter. And because, even he, admires—"since you have such a find pair of wings" (p. 261)—Jefferson's sexual exploits, St. Peter grants Jefferson a reprieve from having to wear the harness, but he is to refrain from "that there one-wing flying" (p. 261), because it allows him to fly too fast. And Jefferson tries to control himself, tries to repress his manhood, but finds that he cannot and forgets—as the stereo-
types states that "colored folks will do"--St. Peter's warning. Because he reverts back to his old flying tactics, which makes him a "danger to the heavenly community" (p. 262), Jefferson is thrown out of heaven, back to an earthly harness: segregated Alabama.

Jefferson in this tale, however, gets the last word, a testament to his flying ability. He tells St. Peter who has, by the way, humiliated Jefferson by taking away his wings--his manhood--in front of all the white angels, that even St. Peter would have to admit that while Jefferson was in heaven, he was the "flyinest sonofabitch what ever hit heaven" (p. 262)! Sexually speaking, Jefferson's statement implies that that while he exercised his manhood, his sexuality/virility reached epic proportions. The clipping of Jefferson's wings amounts to a symbolic castration; with his manhood taken away from him, Jefferson is better able to live within the confines of segregated Alabama--he is better prepared for his emasculated existence as a Black man.

Like Jefferson with his heavenly ambitions, Todd is also attempting to fly, to be man. He believes, as did Jefferson, that because he has been given wings that he can fly unrestricted--that he can exercise his
manhood in any way he chooses. What Todd must come to realize is that he too must wear a harness: that he can train to be a pilot, but he will not be allowed to actually utilize that training, nor will he be recognized as a pilot. He will always be a trainer, "an Advanced Trainer" (p. 257), and barred from actual combat duty. As a Black man, Todd will not be allowed to exist as a man, instead he will be forced to exist as a "manchild." Because Todd has flown too fast and too high, he has had his "wings clipped:" he has crashed his plane and wounded his ankle.

Because of the obvious reference to him in this tale, Todd becomes incensed at Jefferson and wants to strangle him—to kill this would be father-figure who is attempting to show Todd, through the use of folktales, the reality of manhood for the Black male. The pain in his ankle along with his anger at Jefferson, as well as the fact that he has grasped the hidden meaning in Jefferson's tale, causes Todd's "vision to waver" (p. 263), and he slips into a semi-conscious state, recalling memories of his youth which center around flight and manhood.

The purpose of the first recollection of Todd's is to remind him not only of the beginning of his
obsession with flying, but more importantly to remind him of his early teachings regarding that obsession. Todd's desire to fly and to own a plane reveals his initial desire at achieving manhood, as well as, his desire to have over his own manhood—he wants to own plane. Just seeing this symbol of manhood and sexuality (a model airplane) is enough for Todd to begin to desire to achieve manhood.

In Todd's recollection, Ellison points out the early efforts by the matriarch and matriarchal figure to emasculate the Black male. Both Todd's mother and grandmother attempt to instill in Todd, at an early age, that flying, that achieving true unrestricted manhood, is not within his grasp. It is from his mother that Todd learns that planes "can only be owned by rich little white boys" (p. 264). Thus, Todd begins to believe that planes are the property and sole privilege of whites and he immediately assumes that the real plane he sees belongs to a white boy. Still, Todd attempts to grab for the plane. By attempting to acquire the plane, Todd is attempting to acquire the same status as the white boy. And this defiance/disregard for societal rules must be dealt with by the matriarch.
Todd's obsession with planes is viewed by his mother as a mental defect, something which, if continued, needs to be corrected. She even asks the doctor if perhaps there isn't something wrong with Todd's mind (p. 266). His mother accomplishes her task by telling him that this obsession with planes is mere foolishness. As well, when Todd dreams of the plane he has seen, the refrain which he hears is his grandmothers:

Young man, young man,
Ye' arms too short
To box with God...(p. 266).

This refrain, actually a warning, emphasizes that Todd is powerless against society, powerless to change the "rules of possession." On a sexual level, the refrain emphasizes the fact that Todd's manhood is "too short" (i.e., not match for society), and he has no chance "boxing" (i.e., fighting for his manhood) in this society. These attempts by the matriarchal figures, however, have failed somehow for Todd has attempted to transcend his limitations as a Black man.

Todd's recollection is interrupted by Jefferson
who begins a conversation about Dabney Graves. When Jefferson remarks that Graves is well-known to Blacks because "he done killed enough of us" (p. 267), Todd considers the fact that he is now on Graves' land and Todd has "the sensation of being caught in a white neighborhood after dark" (p. 267). When Todd ventures to ask why Graves killed the men, he is told that they were killed because they "thought they was men" (p. 267). And this is what Todd must learn, what Jefferson has been trying to tell him: that to attempt to be a man is to risk death, literally as the men Graves killed, or, as in Jefferson's case, psychologically. It is appropriate, then, that the discussion of Graves—the overtones of death implicit in his name—precedes Todd's final recollection and his actual confrontation with Graves.

As Todd begins to slip, once again, into a dream-like state, he thinks that the closer he spins toward earth the blacker he becomes (p. 268). Sweat runs in his eyes and when he looks at Jefferson, he discovers that Jefferson is holding another little Jefferson who is laughing hysterically as the other one looks on with detachment (p. 268).

This pre-recollection serves as an ominous
portent. The little Jefferson which Todd imagines Jefferson is holding is actually a symbolic representation of Todd himself, for Todd will become a "little Jefferson"--he will become a younger castrated Black male. As well, when he does, his castration will be indicated by a bout of hysterical laughter, resembling that of the little Jefferson. The real Jefferson looks on with detachment because he has already anticipated Todd's unmanning and, as a man who has not only seen this before, but who has also experienced it himself, he is not surprised.

Todd's final recollection is set historically during the time when scare-tactics were being used, by such organizations as the Klu Klux Klan, to keep Blacks from the voting booths, hence, the message written on the cards: "Niggers Stay From the Polls" (p. 268). The fact that the cards have the "eyeless sockets of a white hood" imprinted on them implies that the cards are indeed from the Klan. The eyeless sockets serve a dual function, representing both the organization of eyeless, castrated, authority figures, and the consequences for not heedng their warning: castration. The fact that these cards are dropped from an airplane, that
object which epitomizes manhood for Todd, suggests
the danger in Todd's aspirations of manhood. As well,
when Todd looks at the plane, it looks "like a fiery
sword" (p. 268). The sword imagery reinforces the
phallic symbolism and implies castration--sword as
castration knife--and appropriately precedes Todd's
psychological castration.

When Todd is informed that someone is approaching,
he closes his eyes in relief. The closing of his eyes
is, in effect, the beginning of his psychological
castration, as is the fact that when he is forced into
the straitjacket, pain blazes in his eyes (p. 269).
Sight imagery continues as Todd focuses his total
energies on his eyes, for to focus his eyes is to
keep his manhood intact. For Todd has come face-to-
face with his castrator, Dabney Graves. Graves
becomes for Todd the embodiment of "all the unnamed
horrors and obscenities he has ever imagined" (p. 269).

When the attendants attempt to carry Todd off on
the stretcher, Todd asserts his manhood and tells
them not to touch him. The men are stunned, for Todd
has spoken to them as only another white man can do.
Because Todd has overstepped his limitations, Graves
must remind Todd of his place. Todd realizes, after
his outburst, that his manhood is in danger. He thinks "that Graves' foot is aimed at his [Todd's] head," aimed at his manhood (p. 269). Instead, Graves' foot lands on Todd's chest and he can barely breathe. When he looks at Graves' face and sees "Graves' lips stretch taut over his yellow teeth" (p. 269), Todd tries to shift his head, to protect his manhood. But the baring of Graves' teeth represents the realization of castration for Todd and seeing Graves' teeth results in hysterics and causes "his eyes to pop and he feels as if the veins in his neck will burst (pp. 269-270). Todd's hysteria and the popping of his eyes symbolizes his psychological castration. Now Todd can search for Jefferson's face—he can now accept Jefferson, accept the limitations of being a Black man. And "a new current of communication can flow between" (p. 270) Jefferson and Todd.

The final act in Todd's psychological castration is the fact that Todd's plane—a symbol of his manhood and sexuality—remains on Graves' land, on his property. In effect, the plane, and Todd's manhood, becomes Graves' property. As he is being carried off of Graves' land, Todd looks up and sees a buzzard
"poised unmoving in space" (p. 270). The buzzard symbolizes the death of Todd's manhood and the triumph of Jim Crow laws. This story becomes, then, a tale of the consequences of taking the wishing-game too far, that of a Black man trying to achieve autonomy and manhood.

The last story Ellison wrote before the publication of *Invisible Man*, "King of the Bingo Game," is his finest, reflecting the complexity of style and technical artistry characteristic of his novel--as such, it anticipates the novel. The story focuses on a nameless protagonist who (like Slick in "Slick Gonna Learn") is unemployed and whose wife is dying and in need of medical attention. His desperation for money leads him to a movie theatre to play the bingo game.

Once at the theatre, the protagonist drifts off to sleep while watching the featured movie which, to his dismay, he has already seem three times before. While asleep he dreams that he is a boy again "walking down a railroad track in the South."30 Barely escaping an on-coming train, the protagonist looks back only to find that the train has jumped the track and is pursuing him down the street. The people, all of whom
are white, who are standing along watching, laugh as runs down the street screaming.

His unconscious screaming overlaps into reality and the protagonist is awakened by a man sitting next to him who offers him a swallow of his whiskey. The whiskey "reawakens" his senses and focuses once again on his purpose for coming: to play the bingo game.

Amidst the frustration of playing five bingo cards and thinking about his wife, Laura, the protagonist suddenly realizes that he has won the bingo game and rushes onto the stage. The emcee informs him that he will get the chance to spin the bingo wheel and win the jackpot.

As he presses the button to make the bingo wheel spin, the protagonist fears that he will not let the wheel spin long enough and continues to grip the button, refusing to release it despite the outcries from the audience. In the process of spinning the wheel, the protagonist forgets his name. Undaunted by his failure to remember, he merely forges a new identity, becoming "The-man-who-pressed-the-button-who-held-the-prize-who-was-the-King-of-Bingo" (p. 277).

The newly born King, still gripping the button, concentrates on Laura and begins to imagine that he
is running, with Laura in his arms, down the tracks of a subway. If he stops, the train will crush him and if he attempts to go across the other tracks, he will hit a hot rail the height of his waist. While he is pondering this dilemma, the audience begins to sing and clap their hands and the King becomes conscious of his surroundings again. He notices two men in uniforms approaching and he tries to run with the button. In order to subdue him, the men strike the King on his head. Just before the final blow is administered, he looks up in time to see the wheel land at double zero and the King realizes that his luck has run out on the stage.

With "King of the Bingo Game," Ellison's short fiction has come full circle from Slick to the King, two protagonist whose desperation for money provides the impetus for challenging society. "King of the Bingo Game" focuses on a Black man who attempts to control and change the course of his fate by controlling a bingo wheel, and in so doing, avoid losing his manhood.

The featured movie which the protagonist watches establishes, early on, the predestinarian nature of the protagonist's life. His life and the course of
life as a Black man is, like the movie, is "fixed," it never changes nor alters (p. 272). Despite the fact that he has seen a bedbug on a lady's neck the previous day, despite occurrences to the contrary, nothing has changes. When he "explores his thigh through a hole in his pocket" (p. 272), the protagonist finds goose pimples and the same old scars. The protagonist knows, however, that if everything was not "fixed," if the guy in the movie was allowed to act on his natural biological desires--"started taking off his own clothes" (p. 272)--the movie attendants would go crazy.

It is appropriate that scene in movie in which the girl "is tied to the bed, her legs and arms spread wide" (p. 272), precedes the protagonist's semi-conscious dream of being pursued by a train. His dream, replete with Freudian symbols, is a sexual one; one which allows the protagonist to attempt in dream that which is denied in life and that which he would not dare attempt in life.

Walking along the railroad trestle represents sexual intercourse, a desire to achieve orgasm. The train not only serves as a symbol of the penis, in that there is "the idea of an urgent forward
advance with a force that cannot be checked”31 but also as a symbol of the male power of the father. By walking along the trestle, the protagonist attempts to transcend his sexual limitations, exercise his natural biological desires, and usurp the power of the father. The train leaving the tracks and pursuing the protagonist is a symbolic castration attempt. The protagonist screaming equates to hysteria—a fear of being castrated. And the people, all of whom are white, laugh at him for his foolish attempt at male superiority. The protagonist is "saved," awakened from his dream, by a man sitting next to him who offers him a sip of whiskey.

The protagonist wins the bingo game and thus, the stage is set for his symbolic rebirth and psychological death and castration. It is important to note that Ellison informs the reader in the beginning of the story that the protagonist does not have a birth certificate (p. 271); that the protagonist has not been properly born since he believes that he, as a Black man, can win at the game life, symbolized by the playing of the bingo game. Ellison's use of sight imagery signals the beginning of the protagonist's rebirth and death.
When the protagonist stumbles onto the stage, he steps into "a light so sharp and bright" that it blinds him temporarily (p. 273). He is momentarily emasculated by the power of the light—which represents the all-encompassing power of society. The emasculating feeling continues as the protagonist's knees tremble and he feels faint (p. 273).

White society is also represented by the emcee who "places the possibility of 'wealth' (the paltry sum of $36.90) within the protagonist's reach in a ritualized game of chance." The possibility, not the actualization, of wealth has always been--and is now--just beyond the grasp of Black Americans. This holds especially true for the Black male who finds himself unable to provide basic necessities, such as medical care, for his family. The protagonist knows that his life has been governed by this game, that the spinning of the bingo wheel, the playing of the game of chance, is passed down from generation to generation. It was there for his mother and father as it will be there for his children. It is a cycle he is helpless to change or escape. And although the protagonist is aware of this, he has convinced himself that this time it will be different, that
this time he can actually win.

Once on stage, the protagonist is compared to the Biblical Moses; the emcee tells him that he is "one of the chosen people" (p. 273), and that "he has come down off a mountain" (p. 274). The somewhat subtle comparison to Moses is appropriate in that Moses, at Kadesh, usurped the power of God. Because the people he sought to free, the Israelites, threatened to rebel against his authority as they leader, Moses defied God's command and provided water for the Israelites who had been wandering in the desert. Freud sees this act (Moses strikes a rock with his staff to provide water for the Israelites) as one of rebellion against God. Moses attempts to assert his sexual authority/manhood--by grabbing his rod--over the Father and thus, pits his staff/rod against God's. For this act, God denies Moses access to the Promise Land; he may see it but not enter.

The protagonist also attempts to usurp the power of "God"--society--by attempting to control the bingo wheel; as well, by recreating his identity and by proclaiming himself "King," the protagonist is attempting to be the father. The audience, his people, rebel against him, calling for the police
because they think he is crazy. And like Moses, the protagonist is also punished and denied the promise of his dreams: winning the bingo game.

The protagonist gets carried away in the act of spinning the bingo wheel—in the act of attempting to control the power he has discovered in spinning the wheel—and in so doing, loses his old identity and forgets his name (p. 277). But spinning the bingo wheel gives him a sense of power; he is reborn and becomes "The-man-who-pressed-the-button-who-held-the-prize-who-was-the-King-of-Bingo" (p. 277). He believes that this power to rename himself also gives him the power to let Laura live. Only by controlling the power—by continuing to press the button and make the bingo wheel spin—which controls him can he win the bingo game and keep Laura alive.

There is, however, a punishment for attempting to usurp the power and authority of "God," of society. For believing that he can control his own fate—and Laura's—be a man, the King must be symbolically castrated. When the King screams for Laura to live, the "screams tear from his very guts" (p. 277). And it is appropriate that the King feels as though "the rush of blood to his head will burst out in
baseball seams of small red droplets, like a head beaten by police clubs" (p. 277), for later the King will be beat on his head with police clubs. The blood which drips from the King's nose symbolizes the beginning of his castration. The image he forms in his mind of "running with Laura in his arms down the tracks of the subway just ahead of an A train" (p. 277) symbolizes his suicidal actions and the inevitable loss of his manhood. And the fact that in this image of running with Laura the King is blinded by sparks until he can hardly see further attests to his journey towards castration (p. 278).

When the men in uniform arrive, the King, even in the face of death and castration, refuses to release the button. He threatens the men with castration: "fixing them with his eyes as his lips stretched over his teeth in a tight, fixed grin" (p. 278). And the King wrestles with them, fighting to hold on to his life and to his manhood—-and to the power which controls both.

The King's success is, however, short-lived as one of men uses his foot to crush the King's wrist (p. 279). Still refusing to release the button, the King is struck on his head; he will receive,
despite the fact that the wheel lands at double-zero, what those who attempt to usurp society's authority receive: the loss of his manhood. And the King realizes, before he loses consciousness from the final blow to his skull, that he has paid, with his manhood—and possibly with his life—the price for attempting to gain an equal opportunity at wealth and at life and for asserting his own identity, for being a man.

The Black male characters in Ellison's pre-
Invisible Man fiction all learn that their attempts to achieve manhood on their own terms are met with both physical and psychological violence. And their experiences serve as the basis for the experiences of Ellison's protagonist in Invisible Man.
Notes


2 Before the publication of *Invisible Man*, Ellison wrote a short story entitled "Invisible Man." It was published in *Horizon*, 23 October 1947, pp. 104-107. It was later published as the "Battle Royal" episode in *Invisible Man* (1952).


4 O'Meally, p. 57.

5 O'Meally, p. 60.

6 Ralph Ellison, "Slick Gonna Learn," *Direction*, 2 September 1939, p. 10. Subsequent references to the story will appear within the text.

7 The new edition of Richard Wright's *Native Son* restores expurgated passages and makes the sexual themes clearer in the novel.

8 Ellison does not inform the reader as to what
type of place "Turner's" place is, but it is implied that this is a usual lynching location.

9 Ralph Ellison, "The Birthmark," New Masses, 2 July 1940, p. 16. Subsequent references to the story will appear within the text.

10 Dorothea Fischer-Hornung, Folklore and Myth in Ralph Ellison's Early Work (Univ. of Heidelberg dissertation, 1979), pp. 150-151.

11 Fischer-Hornung, p. 166.


14 Levine, p. 432.


This story was originally published in The New Masses, 41 (Nov. 4, 1941), pp. 19-20.

16 Fight is a common motif in Black/African
American folklore. For further discussion see Lawrence W. Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*.

17 Ralph Ellison, "That I Had the Wings," *Common Ground*, Summer 1943, p. 30. Subsequent references to the story will appear within the text.

18 Ralph Ellison, "In A Strange Country," *Tomorrow*, July 1944, p. 41. Subsequent references to the story will appear within the text.


21 Eliade, pp. 127-128.


24 Fischer-Hornung, pp. 199-200. For further


26 Blake, p. 84.

27 The practice of poking fun at stereotypes is common in Black American folklore.

28 For a discussion of sexual symbolism in folktales see Lawrence W. Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness.


30 Ralph Ellison, "King of the Bingo Game," Black Writers of America: A Comprehensive Anthology, ed. Richard Barksdale and Kenneth Kinnamon (New York:
Macmillan, 1972), p. 272. This story was originally published in *Tomorrow*, 4 November 1944, pp. 29-33.


CHAPTER III

THE INTER-RELATIONSHIPS AND DEVELOPMENT OF ELLISON'S EARLY THEMES IN INVISIBLE MAN

...madness does not represent the absolute form of contradiction, but instead a minority status, an aspect of itself that does not have the right to autonomy and can live only grafted into the world of unreason... Everything was organized so that the madman would recognize himself in a world of judgment that enveloped him on all sides; he must know that he is judged, watched, condemned; from transgression to punishment, the transgression must be evident as a guilt recognized by all.

-Michel Foucault

With his earlier short fiction providing the foundations, Ellison began to focus his attention on
further illuminating the psychological and historical perspectives he had previously explored. The result of these "apprentice" years was his masterpiece, and only novel to date, *Invisible Man*.

*Invisible Man* is an episodic picaresque novel, one in which a nameless protagonist is propelled through a series of initiatory rites, each serving as a variation of the previous one and each leading toward forms of castration. The protagonist's experiences, which he recounts through a flashback, chronicle prominent stages in his life: his high school graduation, college years, work experience, political affiliation, and inevitable descent underground. His experiences, all initiations into the repertoire of roles--roles which deny the right to autonomy--the Black male must play in life, leave him both unnamed and unmanned.

The protagonist begins his story from his place of hibernation: a forgotten, underground basement/cell on the outskirts of Harlem. Influenced by a dope dream and Louis Armstrong's blues song which asks: "What Did I Do To Be So Black and Blue?," the protagonist recounts the events which have led to his descent underground.

The novel proper begins with the "battle royal" scene--the protagonist's first confrontation with
society's ritualistic expectations of the Black male—which sets the tone for *Invisible Man*. The protagonist is invited to deliver his high school valedictory speech, at a smoker, in front of the town's most prominent white citizens—pillars of the community. Before he can deliver his speech, however, the protagonist is informed that he, along with nine of his classmates, must participate in a "battle royal."¹

They are first forced to watch as a "stark naked blonde," with a tattoo of the American flag on her stomach, dances before them (p. 16). Afterwards, they are blindfolded and made to fight each other in the ring, as the onlooking crowd shouts obscenities at them. As a "reward" for the exhibition, they are allowed to grab for coins placed on an electrified rug.

After this final act of degradation, the hero, swallowing his blood, is allowed to deliver his speech. His speech, an elaboration on Booker T. Washington's writings and theories, is virtually ignored until his inadvertent slip of the tongue: "social equality" for "social responsibility" arouses the crowd. As a result of his slip, the hero is given a warning to remember his place. He is told: "We mean to do
right by you, but you've got to know your place at all times" (p. 25).

Despite his carelessness (his inadvertent slip of the tongue), the hero is awarded a scholarship to a Negro college and given a briefcase, "a badge of office," to hold all the important papers he will acquire in life and which will help shape the destiny of his people.

Following the night's events, the protagonist has a dream in which he and his grandfather are at a circus watching the clowns perform. His grandfather refuses to laugh at the clowns, but later when he has the protagonist to open his briefcase-now filled with envelopes inside of envelopes--and read the message inscribed on one of the documents: "To Whom It May Concern Keep This Nigger Boy Running," his grandfather burst into laughter (p. 26).

The "battle royal" episode epitomizes the symbolic attempt "to define the sexual and economic limits of Black males and to perversely and vicariously project white sexual urges onto them;" in essence, it is a "ritual through which important social [and sexual] values are projected and reinforced." It is, foremost, an initiation rite--one which will be
repeated in various forms throughout the protagonist's life—used to define racial divisions and behavior. The boys become pawns in a perverted perception of stereotypical myths which cause the town's leading citizens to vicariously castrate them, signaling the boys' exit from a child's world into an adult world.

It is at the "battle royal" the protagonist becomes cognizant of the all-encompassing power and presence of white society. The participants at the smoker ("bankers, judges, doctors, fire chiefs, teachers, merchants, and even one of the more fashionable pastors" p. 15) are indeed a microcosm of a country and a decadent history. These men, actually castrating fathers, uphold society's rigidly defined laws of expected behavior, and initiate the protagonist into his role as a Black male. It is interesting to note, that as in Ellison's earlier short fiction (notably "The Birthmark" and "Slick Gonna Learn"), those who teach the protagonist his role are authority figures, those in which law and justice—as well as human recognition—should be their oath of duty. Tragically, it is only these authority-father-figures the protagonist feels can truly judge his ability and worth as a person (p. 20). Hence, signaling the
beginning of the psychological emasculation of the protagonist; in which he begins to judge himself according to the standards of a society which will never regard him as human being; and these standards he will pass on to his progeny, continuing the psychological and historical emasculation of the Black male.

The protagonist must first learn society's desired response from the Black male in the presence of a white woman, not to mention a nude white woman. The protagonist and the other Black males in the boxing ring must look without seeing; they must suppress their natural manly desires and responses (i.e., a man responding to a woman). Their situation becomes a Catch-22: if they look at the blonde dancer, they break one of society's most sacred taboos: miscegenation; if they avert their eyes, they admit to one of society's most perpetuated stereotypes of the Black male "his bestial and insatiable sexual appetite."

The protagonist struggles with his natural manly desires; yet, he must look at the dancer. He knows that even if "the price of looking had been blindness, he would have looked" (p. 16). Ironically, this
(blindness) is the price for looking. And it is appropriate that the protagonist notes that the eyes of the dancer are hollow (effeminate); for he must learn, as must his classmates, --as all Black males must--that the white woman, even if she dances in front of him stark-naked, it not to be seen as woman, but as a symbol of his undoing, indeed as a symbol of his death. The "battle royal" is "designed to implant in the [minds of] the young men the reality of castration for any actual--or even assumed--sexual contact between Black men and white women." Thus, it establishes the sexual terms by which the Black male must live and govern himself by if he is to survive.

The protagonist and his classmates' experience with the blonde dancer also speaks to the white men's own lustful/perverted desires. These men are:

enjoying the violation of their own most religiously upheld taboo, in a controlled ritual situation without risk. To them, the exposure of white woman, any white woman, naked to the eyes of Black boys is the equivalent of rape, and if anything approaching such action were to be initi-

ated by the boys themselves their fate would be that of Emmett Till.

The "battle royal" allows these impotent men (the white men present at the smoker) to enjoy the convulsions of a sexual climax. The men are able to participate in a type of mass communal orgy. Through the Black boys the white men are able to deal death throes without the literal threat of death and make the boys serve as scapegoats for their guilt.

The boxing ring itself is symbolic in that because it is roped in and set apart from the rest of the ballroom, the ring symbolizes the established limitations of freedom for the Black male. His place in life, as in the ring, is roped off--to the amusement of society. Present all around the boxing ring is white society to teach the protagonist not only the parameters dictating his growth and aspirations but also, to teach him what he can aspire to be. As a Black man he is destined to find himself in situations that enable society to play out their distorted and perverted sense of history.

Because the boxing ring is separated from the rest of the ballroom, it also represents the fact
that as Black men they will forever find themselves segregated from the larger society—and alienated from each other—and always confronting forms of segregation.⁵ And despite the fact that the protagonist feels superior to his classmates, the "battle royal" is also a rite of exclusion, in that it is designed to teach the protagonist and his classmates that as Black men they are excluded from the larger society and that are all the same—inferior—in the eyes of society.

Most importantly, the "battle royal" scene is a castration rite designed to render the protagonist impotent before he ventures out into the world (i.e., society demands that the protagonist's phallus, his manhood, be taken away from him). Throughout the episode, Ellison makes use of eye-imagery equated with blindness to show the protagonist's psychological and symbolic loss of his manhood.

It is appropriate that from the onset of the fighting, the protagonist, along with his classmates, is blindfolded, representing a type of emasculation—as well as society's desire to keep them in the dark—an imposed form of impotence since the boys' actions within the ring, as they will always
be in life, are limited and restrained. Indeed, the protagonist even notes that "blindfolded he could no longer control his motions...like a baby or a drunken man" (p. 18).

The protagonist's symbolic castration begins, in the boxing ring, with blows to his "head," actually blows to his manhood. As the blows to his head increase, blood fills his mouth (from his phallic wound). With one eyes partially opened, he attempts--perhaps unconsciously--to avoid more blows to his head; to somehow escape castration, to direct the blows to the other boys--also being dealt symbolic phallic blows and suffering phallic wounds.

After the fighting has ceased, the protagonist's eye is swollen; his mouth is filled with blood, but his rite is still unfinished. He then experiences a modern-day lynching in the form of an electrified rug. It is here that Ellison's imagery transcends the classical scene/image of a lynching to reveal a more modern-day one, with the electrical mat replacing the rope and faggot. The description of one of the boys can be equated with the description of a lynching ending in the burning of the victim's body:
the protagonist heard him yell and saw him literally dance upon his back...his muscles twitching like the flesh of a horse stung by many flies. When he finally rolled off, his face was gray (p. 22).

Even the protagonist feels as though he has been "rolled through a bed of hot coals," and his back as though it had been beaten with wires (p. 23).

After this exhibition the protagonist is allowed to deliver his speech. Before he begins, his "mouth is dry and eye throbs"—indicating an emasculate state, but his manhood is still intact (p. 23). However, as he proceeds with his speech on humility, his mouth fills up with blood to the point of strangling him, but he swallows it and continues. It should be noted that as long as the protagonist continues his speech on humility—a manifesto on accepting inferiority—his phallic wound becomes more pronounced and he must swallow more of his blood in order to continue speaking. Not until his "mistake," a slip of the tongue, "social equality" for "social responsibility," that his eyes are wide open again—it is the veracity of the statement that causes his eye
to open, denoting a chance to retain his manhood. It is at that price of surrendering his manhood that he allowed to continue to deliver his speech. Not just his behavior but even his linguistic faculties must reflect a eunuch's existence, and as such, the "battle royal" becomes a rite to teach the protagonist what he can say.

For his apology for the truth ("social equality" for "social responsibility" as well as his acceptance of a prize, a briefcase and a scholarship, for denying that truth, signals the sacrifice of his manhood and the completion of his castration rite. With a "rope of bloody saliva running down his face onto his briefcase" (p. 26), the protagonist has successfully "swallowed" his manhood and thus, his rite of passage is granted.

Tragically, his briefcase and scholarship will lead him, not to a state of growth or maturity or acceptance as a human being, but to a gelded existence. With the misconception—that an education can make him acceptable to society, as well as superior to other Black males—firmly established in his mind, he travels to a Black college established to continue to teach him his place.
In his third year at the college, for being a model student, the protagonist is asked by Dr. Bledsoe, the president of the college, to chauffeur Mr. Norton, one of the Northern benefactors of the college, around the school. However, disaster occurs when the protagonist inadvertently takes Norton to a forbidden area just beyond the college to the house of Jim Trueblood, an uneducated Black sharecropper who is a source of disgrace to the students and other Blacks because of his notorious incestuous relationship with his daughter—not to mention the fact that both his daughter and his wife are pregnant.

Upon learning about Trueblood's incestuous act, Norton insists on talking with Trueblood and later on rewarding him with money. After hearing Trueblood's story, however, Norton becomes ill and asks the protagonist for a stimulant. To oblige him, the protagonist takes Norton to the Golden Day, a brothel frequented by veterans from a nearby mental institution. Unfortunately, for the protagonist, Norton's appearance at the Golden Day causes the vets to unleash their repressed emotions. They overthrow their overseer, Supercargo, and chaos and violence result. Supercargo is beaten and Norton passes out from a
Suspected no page 133.
blow he receives from one of the patients. After one of the vets, a neurosurgeon, helps Norton regain consciousness, Norton and protagonist leave the Golden Day, but not before the vet dispenses with some truths about Norton's involvement in the "madness" at the Golden Day.

For these incidents, the protagonist is expelled from the college, but is first made to attend a university assembly in which a blind speaker, the Reverend Homer A. Barbee, has been asked to deliver a sermon on the Founder of the school. As a seemingly kind gesture, before the protagonist leaves the school, Bledsoe furnishes him with letters on introduction to expedite his job search in the North. And the protagonist leaves with the intention of finding employment and eventually returning to the college.

The idyllic college, which provides the backdrop for the Trueblood-Golden Day-Barbee scenes, is surrounded by impotent images: a dry riverbed, another river which is sluggish and covered with algae and stagnant; only one fountain, which is broken, corroded, and dry; and disabled veterans hobbling on crutches and cane and one who is legless and thighless. The college area is a "human waste land" for the
physically and psychologically impotent men: fatherless-figures who are incapable of being father-figures themselves and offering viable and meaningful initiation rites. All the roads which lead from the college offer the same: a eunuch's existence—an insane asylum on one hand and sexual perversion rewarded on the other. The college will yield no more than this: an impotent generation. It is an appropriate locale for the Trueblood episode.

As the result of his deeds, Trueblood has become an enigma: he has sinned and lived to tell the story, and unlike Oedipus, he feels no need to be a self-castrator ("to cast out the offending eye" p. 40). In a verbal exchange in which Norton questions Trueblood about his deed, it becomes apparent that this is what so fascinates Norton: the fact that Trueblood's eyes are still intact:

"Is it true...I mean did you?"

"Suh?" Trueblood asked...

..."You have survived," he blurted. "But is it true?...

"Suh?" the farmer said...

..."You did and are unharmed!" he shouted,
his blue eyes blazing into the black face with something like envy and indignation...

"You have looked upon chaos and are not destroyed!"

"No Suh! I feels all right."

"You do? You feel no inner turmoil, no need to cast out the offending eye."

"Suh?"

"Answer me!"

"I'm all right, suh," Trueblood said uneasily. "My eyes is all right too. And when I feels po'ly in my gut I takes a little soda and it goes away" (p. 40).

Trueblood then recounts his story. As he lays next to his daughter, he dreams that he is in a white man's house in the bedroom of a white woman. She starts screaming but then grabs hold of him. He tries to escape from her embrace by running through a dark tunnel. However, he awakens to find himself having coitus with his daughter.

When his wife, Kate, awakens she discover the horrible scene and grabs an ax, bringing it down on the side of Trueblood's face. She grabs the ax a second
time, but lets it fall behind her and stumbles out the door. Finding himself ostracized by his family and the community, Trueblood exiles himself, but later returns to his family.

The Trueblood episode best exemplifies the ramifications of sexual repression/restraint of Black males. Trueblood's tale (dream-sin) is actually a sexual quest: to attempt in dream what is denied in life, only to discover that the dream mirrors life—he encounters in his quest several taboos: entering through the front door, being in a white woman's bedroom, and embracing a white woman—all of which are life-threatening. And it is the fear of these taboos, especially the fear of the white woman, which leads Trueblood out of the arms and bedroom of the white woman into the arms of his daughter. He recalls:

that woman just seemed to sink outta sight, that there bed was so soft. It's sinking down so far I think it's going to smother both of us...I looked at the floor, a red mist of anguish before my eyes. And I caint stop although I got a feelin' somethin' is
wrong. I git alose from the woman now
and I'm runnin' for the clock...(p. 45).

The implication of Trueblood's dream-sin is that
because the Black male is forced to repress, even
in a dream-state, his natural/biological desires
when these desires are directed toward a white woman
(a sacred taboo), the Black male, knowing that such
a sexual relationship will end in his death, is
"forced" to seek sexual solace elsewhere. Unfortu-
nately, although not financially so, for Trueblood
it ends in sexual intercourse with his daughter.
Because he is so afraid of breaking one of the most
sacred taboos, miscegnation, Trueblood breaks another
taboo: incest. Repressed sexual desires have led
to perverted sexual desires, or rather, to the
inability to distinguish one from the other. His
sexual limitations are so indoctrinated in his
psyche, that even the Black male's dreams are not
only conscious of taboos, but also observe them,
as well as acknowledge the consequences of breaking
those taboos--hence, the red mist before Trueblood's
eyes signals an unconscious castration anxiety.

Sexual restraints have so distorted his vision,
both symbolically and psycho-sexually, that Trueblood 
"can look at a little pigtail girl (his daughter) 
and see a whore" (p. 46). It is a complete re-
structuring of his mental and optical faculties. 
When sexual roles are limited and repressed, role 
reversals occur; thus, Matty Lou serves not only as 
a surrogate for the white woman--Trueblood's dream-sin 
is actually a substitute for miscegnation--but also 
as a substitute for Kate. And this substitute is 
only a sacrifice of sexual choice and freedom, but 
also of an innocent child, of the next generation. 

One taboo (miscegnation) would cost Trueblood 
his life, but another (incest) is perversely envied 
and rewarded. Ironically, the castrating father-
figures at the "battle royal" would castrate the 
Black males for even looking at a white woman, but 
Norton and other father-figures would reward Trueblood 
for having sexual relations with his daughter. 

Trueblood is rewarded, in part, because he proves 
the myth true: the Black male's inability to control 
his sexual appetite, and because he serves as a 
scapegoat for Norton's own incestuous desires for 
his daughter (i.e., Norton's philanthropy inter-
twined with his sexuality). Trueblood does what
Norton has always wanted to do, and Norton experiences vicariously Trueblood's incestuous act. And it is fitting that both men receive phallic wounds and are symbolically castrated for their deeds.

Trueblood suffers his wound at the hands of the matriarchal figure of Kate who must symbolically castrate him. Because white society deems his actions heroic--because it is contained within the race--and because Trueblood will not, unlike Oedipus, castrate himself, Kate must do what society will not do. She becomes the would-be castrator usurping the role of the father-figure and substituting the ax for the knife. When Kate, upon discovering Trueblood's deed, grabs the ax bringing it down on the side of his face, he feels "like the whole side of his face is smashed clear off, as though there's no skin on his face, only naked bone" (p. 50). He recalls: "And her eyes! Lawd, them eyes!" (p. 47). The eyes of the matriarch also have castrating powers and it is these eyes that Trueblood must face for his "foul deed." Kate castrates Trueblood because she deems his deed "foul" and unnatural and, most importantly, because his manly desires are directed toward her child. She would prevent and repress and punish "perverted" sexual
desires.

If Matty Lou serves as a substitute for both the white woman and Kate, then Kate serves as a substitute for Mr. Broadnax. Kate as usurper of the patriarch's role is further reinforced by the fact that she will be getting a pair of eyeglasses she has been needing for a long time (p. 52). The acquisition of the eyeglasses will improve her sight, and in Ellison's fiction, the ability to see is equated with manhood—or in Kate's case, with the role of the patriarch.

Although Trueblood moves his head to avoid Kate's attempt to literally castrate him, the ax lands on the side of his face producing his phallic wound—an unhealing wound which remains raw and moist and serves as a testament to his symbolic castration. The wound remains raw because he re-enacts his incest and ensuing castration time and time again—thus, keeping the wound fresh and changing Trueblood into a kind of Black Ancient Mariner doomed to repeat his incestuous tale over and over—but for financial rewards.

Norton suffers the first phase of his castration after hearing Trueblood's story. He becomes sexually drained and ill from his vicarious voyeurism and he
looks at the protagonist with unseeing eyes... staring blankly...his voice a whisper" (p. 53). His face takes on phallic dimensions and is described in phallic terms: "...is drained of color, ghostly... chalk white" (p. 53). He suffers the final stage of his castration at the Golden Day as his philanthropy is undermined by the veterans.

The Golden Day reveals to Norton one of the ramifications of his philanthropy: forced insanity. The veterans represent the fate of those who attempted, mostly through education, to step outside their parameters and live unrestricted lives. Gathered here at the Golden Day is a microcosm of men educated and trained but not allowed/ permitted to use their education or training, resulting in their psychological demise. Included in this group are "men who had been doctors, lawyers, teachers, Civil Service workers, several cooks, a preacher, a politician, an artist, and a psychiatrist" (p. 57). These men are a facsimile of the men who were present at the "battle royal," but unlike those men, the veterans at the Golden Day are not active participants/members of society, but rather the recipients of a perverted rite.

A paternalism exists between the young men at
the "battle royal" and town's leading citizens as it does between Norton and the veterans--and the students at the college. Norton shares a fraternalism with the castrating father-figures at the "battle royal." Norton castrates his sons and daughters--the students at the college--through his philanthropy to the college. As the vet, the neurosurgeon, acknowledges to Norton: "to some, you are the great white father, to others the lyncher of souls..." (p. 72). The vet's statement is made even more relevant by the fact that the vet was also a student at the college. The veterans are the results of the philanthropy to the college: they are driven insane by an education which leaves them impotent. And Norton is rightfully mistaken for various authority figures, substitute fathers and father-figures: General Pershing (p. 56), Thomas Jefferson--one of the vet's "grandfather" (p. 60)--Mister Eddy (p. 60), John D. Rockefeller (p. 60), the Messiah (p. 60), and the Creator (p. 61). Norton's identity is taken away from him with each successive name, much in the same way that Black men were commonly referred to and called by names other than their own; thus,
contributing not only to a loss of identity, but a loss of dignity and manhood. By having Norton be mistaken for other personages, Ellison "deconstructs the myth of white purity," cast some doubt on the true cause of philanthropy, and examines the complexity of paternalism in this scene of mistaken identities.

Norton is first mistaken for General Pershing, commander in chief of the A.E.F. in World War I. John Joseph Pershing was known as "Black Jack"--which hints at another Jack the protagonist will meet: Brother Jack--because he once commanded Black troops. Interestingly, Pershing, at the age of 17, taught at a local Black School. Norton is also associated with a Black School and he serves, in a manner of speaking, as the "commander" of the students by being their benefactor, by taking on the role of commanding their lives. And his "troops," the students, become the shell-shocked veterans at the Golden Day.

Thomas Jefferson, as one of the veterans mistakes Norton for, the major author of the Declaration of Independence, not only owned slaves, but fathered children with one of his slaves, Sally Hemings. Thus, Ellison undermines the fear of miscegenation by illustrating that since the founding of the nation
have been violating Black women and fathering children by them. Norton also owns "slaves," the students at the college, who do his bidding by blinding themselves to their own humanity. As well, by vicariously sharing in Trueblood's incestrous encounter with his own daughter, Norton symbolically "fathers" a child with another one of his "slaves."

The reference to a "Mister Eddy" recalls the name of one of the legendary heroes-- "the bad Black man-- in Black folklore: Eddy Jones. The "bad Black man" is known for his sexual exploits and virility, he gives credence to the stereotypes/myths surrounding the Black male's sexuality. By being mistaken for Mister Eddy, Norton's sexuality symbolically acquires legendary status. As well, Norton acquires the sexual stereotypes of Black men. This becomes evident when, later, one of prostitutes, Edna, says that rich old white like Norton have "monkey glands and billy goat balls" (p. 67) and that the "ole bastards don't never git enough. They want to have the whole world" (p. 68). This sexual affinity to an old goat gives Norton's sexuality bestial qualities while, at the same time, offering a comic look at Norton's repressed sexuality.
John D. Rockefeller was not only a philanthropist, but was instrumental in the education of Blacks and helped establish what is now known as Spelman College. Rockefeller's philanthropic endeavors were influenced by the death of his daughter.10 Like Rockefeller, Norton is also a philanthropist who is concerned with the education of Blacks. As well, the death of his daughter—and the guilt over his incestuous feelings towards her—prompts Norton's philanthropic involvement with the college. Also like Rockefeller, Norton believes that his money bestows upon the "duty" of "first-hand organizing of human life" (p. 33). Ellison questions the motivations behind philanthropy and Norton, like Rockefeller, symbolizes "the liberal, governed by too simple an idea of control and whose good intentions disguise—especially from themselves—the persistence of racist assumptions."11

The fact that Norton is mistaken for both the Messiah and the Creator aligns him with both son and father, Christ and God. Freud argues that:

in the Christian myth the original sin was one against God the Father. If, however, Christ redeemed mankind from the burden of original sin by the sacrifice of his own life, we are driven to conclude that the sin was a murder. The law of
talion, which is so deeply rooted in human feelings, lays it down that a murder can only be expiated by the sacrifice of another life: self-sacrifice of a life brought about atonement with God the Father, the crime to be expiated can only have been the murder of the father.¹²

Christ's self-sacrifice, however, "brought him at the same time to the attainment of his wishes against the father."¹³ By attempting to destroy the Old Law, Christ rebels against the Father, the Creator. This rebellion is viewed as a castration attempt. "Fearing castration, the father must castrate the son in the symbolics of the crucifixion; hence, the son's triumph is marginal and the oedipal drama continues in the hearts of men."¹⁴

Norton is both Messiah and Creator. He portrays himself as a savior of the students by providing them with the means by which to better themselves. He is also their Creator for he "creates" men and women who are educated but whose education leaves them impotent. Norton castrates them in the symbolics of education, but does not eliminate their parricidal desires/wishes for later, as they come to discover, as the vets do, the insanity inherent in their education--when their realize their impotence--they come
to hate their fathers and all father-figures.

The mistaken identities are relevant in that the Golden Day episode is a revolt against authority figures, particularly fathers and father-figures. The Golden Day serves, then, as a plunge into the Black males' psyches and uncovers their hatred and repressed animosity toward their fathers. Norton and Supercargo become substitute fathers and scapegoats for the veterans and stand for all authority figures. Norton becomes the first scapegoat as the inhabitants at the Golden Day engage in a reverse castration rite.

The first castration attempt is made when one of the vets "takes Norton's head between his hand" and "like a barber about to apply a razor" (p. 61), slaps Norton's face. Norton is slightly injured from this castration attempt as "five pale red lines" (p. 61) appear on his cheek and "a slow red flush" (p. 61) creeps up his neck, spreading over his face. As Norton regains consciousness, his eyes are pale, watery, and moist (p. 61).

The vets' hostility and anger turns from Norton to Supercargo--superego--when he appears, "swaying on the stairs," and calls for order (p. 63). Supercargo's call only plunges the Golden Day further into chaos. The vets
attack him, throwing bottles of liquor at him until one of the bottles hits him on the forehead and he wavers (p. 64). The vets continue the castration rite by "snatching his feet, dragging him by the ankles, and aiming a shoe at his head" (p. 64). "The flesh above his right eye jumped out as though it had been inflated" (p. 64). The feet, ankles, head, and, of course, the eye all serve as phallic symbols. And Supercargo becomes "drenched in blood and beer" and loses consciousness. The rite achieves its desired end and the vets can now fully celebrate their freedom from Supercargo's control. The vets are able to release their repressed anger at their fathers and father-figures through emotions and actions otherwise forbidden in Supercargo's presence.

Caught up in the excitement of this reverse castration rite, the protagonist discovers that he has "lost" Norton. The protagonist must lose this father-figure in order to be uninhibited and want to join in the castration rite. When he finds Norton, he, like Supercargo, is stretched out and unconscious. The protagonist becomes cognizant of some threatening power in Norton's visage. As he is pushed up against an unconscious Norton and is face-to-face with him, the protagonist acknowledges:
it was only his face but I felt a shudder of nameless horror... In a panic I struggled to get away... With his eyes closed he seemed more threatening than with them open. He was like a formless white death...(p. 66).

This confrontation with Norton's face results in a type of hysteria (castration anxiety) for the protagonist as he screams at the sight of Norton's face and closed eyes. Norton's closed eyes represent, unconsciously, for the protagonist, the symbol of a castrated man and a castrated existence (i.e., the protagonist's fate). One of the vets, the neurosurgeon, has to remind the protagonist that Norton is only a man (p. 66); in other words, if the protagonist can view Norton as a man, not a god, and not a father, then Norton's eyes would not have this effect upon the protagonist.

The eye imagery continues as Norton is moved and then examined by the vet. The protagonist fears the expression that might come into Norton's eyes when he regains consciousness (p. 69), when he discovers that a Black man is examining him. The protagonist is afraid and yet drawn to the castrating power of Norton's eyes. He becomes appalled at the manner in which the neurosur-
geon looks at Norton for the protagonist knows that "men like us did not look at a man like Mr. Norton in that manner" (p. 69). The protagonist knows that for Black men ("men like us") to look at a white man is to break a taboo, to risk castration. And yet, the protagonist cannot help but feel a sense of pride that a Black man has spoken to a white man as an equal, man-to-man.

The vet can speak to Norton in the manner in which he does because the vet is already castrated and he is cognizant not only of this fact, but also of Norton's role in the vet's castration. Thus, Norton's eyes do not have a castrating effect upon the vet. And he sets forth to psychologically castrate this father-figure by attempting to explain to Norton the dangers of his misguided philanthropy; that the school does not inform the students that their education will ultimately lead them to the Golden Day, the symbol of the "success" of Norton's work. The fate of the students is exemplified by the vet being lynched and run out of town when he attempted to save a life--when he attempted to use his education, when he attempted to be a man.

The vet proceeds to tell both North and the protagonist the true goal of Norton and the school: to produce
things, not men; but children, or even less—black amorphous things (p. 73). For the protagonist to be Norton's "destiny," then his blindness, his psychological castration is necessary.

Outraged at the fact that both Norton and the protagonist fail to see, to understand, what he has been trying to explain about the nature of the college's teaching, and at Norton for his refusal to acknowledge his role in the students', and the vets', impotence, the vet threatens both Norton and the protagonist with castration; he tells them: "Get out before I do you both the favor of bashing in your heads!" (p. 73).

The revelations the vet reveals to Norton only result in Norton proclaiming the vet insane. But Norton does not completely escape. He is pushed down the stairs by one of the prostitutes, and as Halley, the owner of the brothel, pilots Norton to the door and releases him, Norton undergoes yet another symbolic castration. Norton, "his face pale again,...topples and falls, his head scraping against the screen of the door" (p. 74). And Norton leaves the Golden Day with his phallic wound—similar to Trueblood's wound on the side of his face—a raw place showing on his forehead (p. 75).

The protagonist must now face the wrath of another
father-figure, Dr. Bledsoe. Bledsoe is the emasculated man when he goes to see Norton and, later, the castrating father-figure when he confronts the protagonist. Before he and the protagonist enter Norton's room, Bledsoe composes his face, clears his throat, and leaves only the sparkle of his eyes to betray his previous anger (p. 79). In front of Norton, Bledsoe is the epitome of the emasculated man. When he sees Norton's injury, Bledsoe rushes forward and cries, "Mr. Norton, your head!" (p. 80). Seeing this phallic injury enrages Bledsoe and his voice becomes effeminate towards Norton. And unlike Norton he believes that the protagonist must be punished for his actions, for Bledsoe sees this "offence"--this injury Norton has suffered--as an "offence" against him. But he does not expel the protagonist in front of Norton, this castration rite he saves for later, after the chapel service.

The chapel scene illustrates how the students are enticed/seduced into obedience; how they are mentally castrated. The chapel becomes the altar where individuality, humanity, and manhood are sacrificed. The students' castration is achieved through their vicarious sharing in Homer A. Barbee's retelling of the Founder's life.

The castration imagery is implicit in Barbee's account of the Founder's life, beginning with the fact
that, as with Oedipus, a castration attempt is made on the Founder's life when he is a child. Appropriately, Barbee begins his sermon recalling that "the land was barren and that brother's hand turned against brother, father against son and son against father" (p. 92). Because the Founder is fatherless, "knowing only his mother" (p. 92), Oedipal desires are implied; that the Founder may wish to take on the role of the father. And "an insane cousin splashes the babe with lye and shrivels his [the Founder's] seed" (p. 92). This "'insane cousin' recalls Rank's observation that the child may project the hatred of the father onto a surrogate, a surrogate feared as a murderous persecutor by the child."\textsuperscript{15} The Founder serves as this surrogate.

Another castration attempt is made on the Founder's life as he follows "a simple white man of God" (p. 94), a possible emissary from above, who leads him to his ritual castration. While following the emissary, the Founder is shot in the head. The shot does not prove to be fatal and he is able to make it to the cabin designated by the emissary (p. 94). Once there, at the hands of a "seemingly demented Black man" (p. 94), the fatherless Founder undergoes a symbolic castration: his skull is shaved and his wound is cleansed and bound neat with
bandages (p. 94). After this ritual castration, the Founder is "reborn" and joins the ranks of other castrated men.

Barbee continues with his account of the Founder's life, describing the Founder's escape and inevitable death. He passes on to Bledsoe the duty of continuing his vision.

Barbee makes the Founder's life into a myth, the myth of the castrated man as hero and visionary. But the vision is one which limits the student's freedom and asks them to sacrifice their autonomy. "Barbee's sermon is hardly a call for freedom; it is a plea for subservience to myth, to heroics that are inauthentic, larger than life." 16

By making the Founder's life the students' life, Barbee makes them both fatherless and impotent--blind as he is blind. And thus, the students cannot see this, the protagonist cannot see this either; for Barbee's sermon mesmerizes the students and the protagonist as they mentally submit themselves to the Founder's "vision."

The protagonist is shown, however, the flaw in Barbee's myth of the Founder, of the Founder's vision in general. When the protagonist looks up, and sees that Barbee--after his own rousing words--trips over Bledsoe's legs and falls down on stage, he discovers "between the gesture and the opaque glitter of his [Barbee's] glasses, the blinking of sightless eyes, that Homer A. Barbee is blind" (p. 103).
This revelation undercuts—although not for the protagonist—Barbee's speech, for he is a castrated man, psychologically impotent and can neither offer a viable rite for the students nor see the castrating effects of the Founder's vision—and particularly the continuation of that vision in the hands of Bledsoe. Appropriately, the castrating effects of his own words castrates him and Barbee falls, revealing the blindness which he offers the students and the protagonist. But his sermon achieves the desired results for the protagonist feels guilty for his actions, actions which have "endangered the continuity of the dream" (p. 104).

For his actions, for having attempted—in Bledsoe's eyes—to destroy/undermine, although unwittingly, Bledsoe's power, the protagonist is submitted to a verbal lynching and castration by this "coal black daddy." Bledsoe verbally castrates the protagonist by first calling him a "nigger" (p. 107). Bledsoe views the protagonist's actions as an attempt to usurp his role as father and tells the protagonist that he must be disciplined—castrated for his actions (p. 108). The protagonist threatens this father-figure with castration by threatening to report him to Norton and expose the fact that he has lied about disciplining the protagonist.
The verbal exchange which follows between Bledsoe and the protagonist amounts to father against son and son against father with both attempting to eliminate the other.

Bledsoe begins by looking the protagonist up and down, but the protagonist merely stares back at him and starts for the door, away from Bledsoe's eyes. The protagonist has successfully stood up to the father. Seeing that his eyes have no effect on the protagonist, Bledsoe, lets out "a cry of rage" (p. 109). The protagonist's stare momentarily emasculates Bledsoe and he "gasps for breath" and has to "prop his huge head up with hands as tears stream down his face" (p. 109). But Bledsoe is not about to relinquish his role as father to this son.

He lures the protagonist back. Bledsoe removes his glasses, wipes his eyes and calls the protagonist "son" (p. 109). Appropriately, the protagonist feels as though he is "being put through a fraternity initiation," for he is being initiated into the fraternity of castrated sons (p. 109). And he does relinquish his manhood; Bledsoe's actions causes him to go back and when he does his eyes burn. Bledsoe has tricked him; and he informs the protagonist that to remain in his place, he would "have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning" (p. 110). To keep his position of power, Bledsoe
would, in other words, castrate not only his sons and daughters, but the entire Black race if necessary.

The protagonist becomes blinded by Bledsoe's words, psychologically castrated. He can see no "more than the play of light upon the metallic disks of his [Bledsoe's] glasses" (p. 111). Bledsoe tells the protagonist that his "arms are too short to box with him" (p. 111); that the protagonist is not man enough to usurp the power of the father. And that it has been a while since he has had to "clip," in other words castrate, a young Negro in years (p. 111). These words cause the protagonist's legs to be rubbery, and he feels as helpless as an infant (p. 111).

By the end of Bledsoe's speech, the protagonist is unable to speak. Ironically, Bledsoe tells him to keep his eyes open—to protect/keep his manhood intact—for it is Bledsoe who is closing the protagonist's eyes. And this father banishes his son in order to keep him from any more attempts at usurping his power by expelling the protagonist from the school.

The eye imagery parallels the protagonist's psychological castration. As he leaves Bledsoe's office, it is appropriate that, like Ellison's other male character who have experienced a symbolic castration, the protagonist
walks "beneath the wisteria that hung from the trees on ropelike vines" (p. 112). This scene subtly suggests/indicates what has transpired: a symbolic lynching and castration. As well, the protagonist's eyes are out of focus, and he must cover one eye to avoid crashing into trees and lampposts (p. 112). And it is beneath those trees that the protagonist literally vomits--symbolically vomiting his manhood.

The next day, Bledsoe furnishes the protagonist with "letters of introduction." These letters are merely a continuation of the vengeance of the father and serve to further punish the protagonist for his parricidal attempt.

On the train, on his way to New York, the protagonist meets the vet, the neurosurgeon, a final time. He offers the protagonist advice, advice that may keep him from self-castration. He tells the protagonist "to play the game, but don't believe in it" (p. 118), and most importantly, to be his own father (p. 120).

The novel shifts to New York and details the protagonist's work experience. He hopes, with the aid of Bledsoe's letters, to find employment and return to the school. After being unsuccessful with six of the seven letters, the protagonist begins to despair--never suspecting the contents of the letter to be the cause.
Using his last letter he meets not the man whose name is on the envelope, but his son who exposes Bledsoe's letters for what they are: not recommendations, but rather condemnations of the protagonist. With Emerson's son's assistance, the protagonist lands a job at the Liberty Paint Factory. To undermine the union, the company has been hiring Blacks as scabs. When he is hired, the protagonist is distrusted by both sides. Reassigned to work with Lucius Brockway, the protagonist gets into an argument with him. Believing that the protagonist is after his job, Brockway causes an explosion in which the protagonist is injured. He is taken to the factory's hospital, subjected to shock treatments and a lobotomy, then released to the streets of Harlem.

The protagonist's experiences in Harlem begin appropriately with the protagonist experiencing a minor "battle royal." On the subway when he is pushed up against a white woman, he expects her to scream. He closes his eyes, emasculates himself, to somehow prove to the woman that his closeness to her is not of his own doing, not intentional. When he finally exits the subway, he is limp and his clothing wet (p. 121).

The eye/sight imagery continues when the protagonist meets with Emerson's son. Emerson's son is yet another
castrated son. The fact that Emerson's has been reading Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (a copy lies open on the desk) indicates that "like the rebellious homosexual sons in Freud's Primal Horde, Emerson's son seems to have undergone the terror of a psychological emasculation"\(^\text{17}\) administered at the hands of the father. And he has a symbolic phallic wound: the twitching of his face—similar to Trueblood's scar on the side of his face, Norton's wound on his forehead, and later, Jack's glass eye. Furthermore, Emerson's son has never grown up; he has no other name or identity other than his father's. And before he can even confess that he is Emerson the son and not Emerson the father, he must symbolically castrate himself by snatching off his glasses and closing his eyes—he even fights back a scream (p. 144).

Emerson's son realizes that a tyranny exists among fathers and father-figures and he rightfully equates Bledsoe with his own father and suggests a symbolic lynching/castration for Bledsoe. He says, "he [Bledsoe] should be horsewhipped" (p. 144). Despite the fact that he reveals the contents of the letter to the protagonist, Emerson's son asks the protagonist not to tell his father of this slight usurpation of his power. And despite the fact that Emerson's son tells the protagonist not to blind
himself—not to castrate himself—the best that the son can offer the protagonist is a job as his valet (i.e., to join those sons who rebel against the patriarch by breaking a taboo) or, at best, to inform him of a possible job at the place where his father—again the dominance of the father emerges—sends other fellows: the Liberty Paint Factory. At the end of this meeting, the protagonist's eyes are open and dry—he is free of his delusions for now—and he vows to return to the school and murder the father-figure. But his job leads the protagonist not to freedom but to yet another castration and to another castrating father-figure: Lucius Brockway.

It is appropriate that when he enters Brockway's domain, the protagonist smells something familiar: it is a pine tree smell, a fitting prelude to the protagonist's castration. The eye imagery reveals that Brockway is castrated; he has a withered face like a walnut and he has reddish eyes (p. 158). This castrated father-figure is merely another Bledsoe, whose main focus is to keep control over his domain at all costs—even if this means castrating a surrogate son. What prompts Brockway to castrate the protagonist is that Brockway believes that the protagonist is a member of the fraternity—the union—and along with the other sons and will attempt to
usurp the power of the father.

The castration attempt begins when Brockway threatens to kill the protagonist and picks up an iron bar to strike him with (pp. 171-172). Trying to use the iron bar, Brockway strikes the protagonist's face. This castration attempt is met with another one; the protagonist retaliates by striking Brockway's face, making his head fly backwards. Brockway then tries to choke the protagonist. The protagonist strikes Brockway again, "jabbing at his bobbing head" (p. 172). He then grabs the iron bar and starts to bring it down on Brockway's head (p. 172) until he yells for the protagonist to stop.

Angry that Brockway attempted to cut him (at one point the protagonist feels a sharp pain as if he has been stabbed), the protagonist threatens to tear off Brockway's head (p. 172). There is no need for this for he has symbolically castrated Brockway: his face is caved in and his false teeth have been knocked out. What the protagonist had taken for a knife was actually Brockway's false teeth; he had bitten him.

But this battle between father and son does not end with the son's triumph. After retrieving his false teeth, and thereby symbolically regaining his phallic powers, Brockway deliberately causes the protagonist to over-
pressurize one of the boilers and it explodes. The episode ends with the protagonist's symbolic death. He opens his eyes to a blinding flash and he is unable to speak (p. 175). Correctly, he senses that he has "lost irrevocably an important victory" (p. 175). Brockway's victory lands the protagonist in the factory's hospital.

The hospital scene is both a symbolic castration and rebirth. The doctors attempt not just to psychologically castrate the protagonist, but to eradicate his identity and return him to a state of infancy. Indeed, when the protagonist first regains consciousness, a man is touching his skull gingerly as though he were a child (p. 176). But the protagonist is, at this point, still an adult and his major concern is with his head, his manhood. Each response to a question concerns his head:

"What is your name?" a voice said?
"My head..." I said.
"Yes, but your name. Address?"
"My head--that burning eye..." I said...
"Shoot him up for an X-ray," another voice said.
"My head..." (p. 176).

The protagonist fails this test; he is still concerned
with his manhood. As a result, more electrical shock waves are shot through the protagonist's body. And he discovers that his "head is encircled by a piece of cold metal like the iron cap worn by the occupant of an electric chair" (p. 177). The purpose of this piece of metal--not unlike the iron leg chains used in slavery--is to castrate the protagonist. But the protagonist realizes that he in a hospital and thus, he believes that he is safe and this comforts and relaxes him.

The electrical shock waves have, however, made the protagonist's mind a sort of tabula rasa; he cannot even remember how he came to be in the hospital. He makes another discovery: that he is not "lying on an operating table but in a kind of glass and nickel box, the lid of which is propped open" (p. 178). This box serves as a symbolic womb; for the protagonist must be reborn, leaving behind his former self and forgetting any ideas of achieving true manhood. But as the protagonist feels himself going under, he fights it (p. 178); he fights for his manhood, for his identity. And snatches of hymns and folk sayings bring him back--saves him--and he opens his eyes, retains his manhood (p. 179).

And once again when he is questioned about his head, the protagonist panics because he cannot not feel his
head (p. 179). This lobotomy is actually a castration, "without the negative effects of the knife" (p. 180). Ironically, one of attendants suggests, "Why not castration, doctor?" (p. 180). Again, electrical shock waves are administered through the protagonist's body and he submits himself to castration. His teeth chatter; he closes his eyes and warm blood fills his mouth (p. 180); and he feels as though something has been disconnected from his body (p. 181). All of his limbs seem amputated and his eyes are "swimming with tears" (p. 181). He cannot move nor open his eyes. The castration appears to have been successful; but the castration must go beyond the "mere" amputating of his manhood, it must also destroy the memory of it, and thus, destroy his identity.

This time the protagonist not only recalls characters from folklore, but also how to "play the dozens." And it saves him, brings him back again. Interestingly, he has the good sense to hide the fact that he knows the folklore characters, that, at least in part, he knows who he is.

The hospital scene serves as another "battle royal," another attempt to render the protagonist impotent. And the protagonist's experiences mirror those at the "battle royal." The bright metal bars which separate the protag-
onist from the doctor and the attendants is no different from the ropes of the boxing ring which separate the protagonist and his classmates from the men at the smoker. The boxing ring is now replaced by the glass box. The electric shock waves recall the electrified rug in the boxing ring, and when the shocks are administered, the protagonist dances between the nodes (p. 180). The call to "Bring up the shines, gentlemen! Bring up the little shines!" (p. 15) is replaced with "Get hot, boy! Get hot!" (p. 181). And in both scenes the loss of manhood is evidenced by warm blood filling the protagonist's mouth. And in both scenes the protagonist is reborn.

The glass box serves as both the instrument of his unmanning and the instrument of his rebirth, suggesting a type of mechanical mother--the phallic mother. The protagonist is removed from the box--this sterile birth womb--and "the cord [umbilical cord] attached to his stomach node is removed with shears" (p. 185). Satisfied with the results of the lobotomy, the doctor releases the protagonist.

The psychological unmanning of the protagonist is not a total success; for when he emerges from the subway, his head throbs (p. 191), indicating that a part of his manhood is still intact. Yet, he looks about "with wild,
infant's eyes" (p. 191). He has been reduced to a
state of infancy. Released from the mechanical birth
mother, the protagonist falls into the hands of another
mother, Mary Rambo.

The final series of episodes in the protagonist's
life, and the novel, address his political affiliation
with the Brotherhood. As such, the novel comes full
circle; it is a speech which gains the protagonist
access to another fraternal society and leads him into
confrontations with more castrating father-figures.

It is the protagonist's oratory abilities which
catch the eye of the Brotherhood, and it is a white
woman who, in showing him an escape route away from a
possible riot at the eviction site, leads him to his
unmanning, leads him fact-to-face with another cas-
trating father-figure: Brother Jack. And it is in the
very first conversation between the protagonist and
Brother Jack that Brother Jack reveals--although the
protagonist is unaware of this--one of the major flaws
of the organization when he tells the protagonist not
to waste his "emotions on individuals, they don't
count" (p. 220). The Brotherhood does not recognize,
nor welcome, individuality any more that it actually
cares about articulating the grievances of the
people (p. 221).

Although the protagonist initially refuses Jack's offer, the "odor of Mary Rambo's cabbage changes his mind" (p. 225). This odor has an emasculating effect upon the protagonist for it reminds him that he has no job, that he owes Mary money, and that Mary would not be cooking cabbage so often if she were not low on money. And this leads him to the Brotherhood.

The protagonist's experience at the Chthonian serves as his initiation rite. He is told that he must forget his former identity, and all of his former learning and training. And the common practice of giving neophytes new names is re-enacted when Emma, instructed by Brother Jack, reaches "into the bosom of her taffeta hostess gown" (p. 235) and gives the protagonist an envelope containing his new name and identity. His initiation continues as he drinks his glass of bourbon, which burns his throat and causes him to lower his "head to hide the tears that pop from his eyes" (p. 236). When a drunk suffers a Freudian slip of the tongue and asks the protagonist to sing a spiritual, his eyes fill with tears and he can barely see (p. 237); this loss of sight is connected with subliminal castration.
The protagonist's initiation is not complete, however, until he delivers his first speech as a member of the Brotherhood. In a scene reminiscent of the "battle royal," the protagonist enters a room which has a "football locker smell of ancient sweat, iodine, blood and rubbing alcohol" (p. 252). As well, the protagonist notices an old photograph of a prize fighter who lost his sight in the boxing ring (p. 252). It is fitting that the protagonist gives his first speech in such a place, for he is the "prize-speaker" of the Brotherhood and he, too, will be beaten blind, blinded by the Brotherhood and its ideology, and lose his sight, his manhood, in the process.

Ironically, the protagonist's speech is about the dangers of losing one's sight. He states that "they've [hinting at a paternity of castrating father-figures] dispossessed us each of one eye from the day we're born" (p. 260). He goes on to say that if one is not careful then the threat of castration will become a reality, one will lose that last good eye and be as blind as a bat (p. 260). He then calls for all the one-eyed sons to unite, to "take back their pillaged eyes!" (p. 260) and reclaim their manhood. But the
Brotherhood is part of that paternity of castrating father-figures who seek to blind the protagonist and the other Black brothers of the organization, as well as the Black people of Harlem. And it is appropriate that the protagonist's speech leaves him blind. Tears stream down his face and he cannot see (p. 262). And he stumbles "as in a game of blindman's buff" (p. 263).

Castration imagery continues when the protagonist and Brother Tod Clifton encounter Ras the Exhorter and some of his followers, and a fight ensues. Tod attempts to castrate this would-be father-figure by punching him in his head and stomach. Ras retaliates by pulling out a knife (p. 279). But Ras, despite his proneness to violence, will not use the knife to perform the castration. Instead, he exhorts both Tod and the protagonist for their blindness toward the Brotherhood. He tells Tod and the protagonist the truth: that the Brotherhood has coaxed them into betraying themselves and their people by offering them (Tod, the protagonist, and the other Black men in the organization) money and white women as symbols of equality. By offering them financial and sexual "rewards," they will come to believe that they have
achieved equality.

He tells them to open their eyes, to recognize their manhood, that "a man knows he's a man when he got not'ing, when he's naked--nobody have to tell him that" (p. 282). And Ras correctly predicts that he will be left to fight for the people of Harlem "when the white folks have got what they wahnt and done gone off laughing" (p. 283).

Ras's words finally become too much for Tod and he attempts to silence this would-be father-figure by punching him and knocking him down. Still, although they do not affect the protagonist, Ras's words have a lasting effect upon Tod and contribute to his recognition as a betrayer of his people.

The protagonist remains oblivious to his own blindness and that of the Brotherhood's until he witnesses Tod Clifton's murder and the Brotherhood's response to that murder. The disappearance and discovery of Tod Clifton cause the protagonist to re-examine the Brotherhood's ideology and authority.

When he finds Tod Clifton selling papier-mache Black Sambo dolls, Tod looks past the protagonist with unseeing eyes (p. 327). And this paralyzes the protagonist. He cannot understand why Tod would be
selling these dolls and why Tod does not seem to see him. But these dolls represent the Black castrated man and they embody all the stereotypes of Black people, all that society wants to see in the Black person. The dolls represent Tod Clifton and each Black man who is a member of the Brotherhood for each has allowed himself to be blinded by the authority figures of the Brotherhood.

What Tod sells, then, is merely a replica of himself, what he has allowed the Brotherhood to reduce him to: the young Black intellectual who has abandoned his people and their needs for an organization’s hollow promises of equality. Tod has allowed himself to be manipulated; he has become the Black Sambo doll dangling from the strings of the Brotherhood; a darkie minstrel singing the praises of an organization which refuses to acknowledge his individuality or manhood. And in so doing, Tod not only sacrificed himself, but also his own people, people he knew and understood better than anyone else in the Brotherhood. And the realization of what he has done and—like Oedipus—the discovery of who he is: Black Sambo, causes Tod to castrate himself. And he takes upon himself not only his own sins as
betrayer of his people, but also the sins of the Brotherhood and offers himself up as a sacrificial scapegoat—in essence, he commits suicide.

Tod's selling of the Black Sambo dolls on the street results in a confrontation between Tod and the police. When a cop pushes him, Todd responds not only by "talking-back" to the cop, but actually hitting him (p. 329). For asserting his manhood, for striking the white cop, Tod is gunned down. His body crumples just as the papier-mâché Black Sambo dolls do.

With Tod's death, a part of the protagonist dies as well; he suffers a symbolic castration: he cannot move; his eyes blur and when he opens his mouth to speak, nothing comes out (p. 331). Later, the protagonist asks himself why he had not tried in some way to save Tod; that if the protagonist had hit Tod, or at least tried to emasculate him, that by doing so, he might have saved Tod. But Tod's death causes the protagonist to realize that he has indeed been blind toward the true motives of the Brotherhood.

During the funeral he organizes—without the authorization of the Brotherhood—the protagonist states one of Ellison's major themes in both his short
fiction and his novel: that when the Black male forgets his history and attempts to assert his manhood, he pays for this lapse in memory with his manhood and/or his life. Tod thought "he was a man and that men were not meant to be pushed around" (p. 345). And the protagonist acknowledges that Tod is not murdered because he was selling the Black Sambo dolls, but because he forgot his history; and to step outside of history is to risk castration, is to risk death.

The protagonist's funeral oration attempts to convey this to the crowd, that what is important is that Tod was a man, a Black man who was unarmed and who was gunned down by the police. The protagonist does not attempt to cast Tod's life into the heroic or mythical mold; Tod will not rise again. He attempts to free himself and the crowd from the opiate of religion. And in so doing, the protagonist regains, temporarily, his eyesight and at the end of his speech, he looks out at the crowd and sees "not a crowd but the set faces of individual men and women" (p. 347).

The protagonist's unauthorized funeral results in a confrontation with the members of the Brotherhood, particularly Brother Jack, and reveals more castration imagery as this father-figure and son verbally battle.
The fact that the protagonist has acted on his own and gone against the goals and teachings of the Brotherhood is viewed by the Brotherhood as an attempt to usurp its power; and indeed, it is the son asserting his authority over these castrating father-figures.

When the protagonist enters the meeting room, Brother Jack studies him "with his penetrating eyes; the others are blank-faced, looking out of eyes that were meant to reveal nothing" (p. 349). These blank faces and eyes reveal the Brothers' castrated existence--for the protagonist has entered a room of castrated men. When the protagonist reveals that he organized the funeral on his "personal responsibility" (recalling the protagonist's slip of the tongue at the "battle royal," "social equality" for "social responsibility"), Brother Jack's eyes narrow (p. 350), for this is clearly a usurpation of Jack's authority.

In this verbal exchange with Brother Jack, the protagonist defends autonomy and manhood. He defends Tod as a man, a Black man who was unjustly gunned down by a white policeman. The Brotherhood, on the other hand, defends their position of not making an issue out of Tod's death because he betrayed the Brotherhood, and focusing on his death only harms
the prestige and image of the Brotherhood. When the protagonist states that it is the Brotherhood, not Tod, who is the betrayer, that Tod disappeared when he realized that, with his assistance, the Brotherhood had betrayed the people of Harlem, Brother Jack retaliates against the protagonist's accusations by stating the Brotherhood's true feelings toward the people of Harlem: "our job is not to ask them what to think but to tell them!" (p. 357). The protagonist accuses Jack of trying to be "the great white father" (p. 357), of attempting to extend his paternalism beyond the Brotherhood to include all of Harlem. The protagonist exposes Jack for who he is: not a brother, but a castrating father. When the protagonist goes on to suggest that perhaps Brother Jack should be called by his true name "Marse Jack" (p. 357), the protagonist's accusation castrates Brother Jack: he grips the edge of the table, begins spluttering and lapsing into a foreign language, choking and coughing and shaking his head until something erupts out of his face: a glass eye (p. 357). This glass eye is a symbolic replacement phallus. And the fact that Jack is missing an eye attests to his blindness.
With the eruption of his glass eye, the father-figure has been symbolically castrated by the son. But the son's triumph is only marginal, for the eruption of Jack's glass eye emasculates the protagonist, leaving him speechless and unable to answer Brother Jack's question (p. 358).

Brother Jack is pleased with the effect his glass eye has on the protagonist, and uses his symbolic phallus to retake his position of authority. He explains that he lost his eye in the line of duty, that is was the price of his sacrifice. And since that sacrifice involves the loss of sight, then it follows that the sacrifice was that of his manhood--lost in the line of duty as a son to his father, to appease the father by submitting to a castration, or perhaps, the price extracted from a rebellious son. This sacrifice, the relinquishing of one's manhood, is what Brother Jack demands of the protagonist. But the protagonist has now seen Jack's glass eye, has seen his blindness; thus, the father-figure's triumph is but marginal as well.

When the protagonist leaves the meeting, he confronts another castrating father-figure when he runs into Ras the Exhorter. To escape from Ras and his
followers, the protagonist runs into a drugstore and buys a pair of dark sunglasses; once on, they transform him into a man who has mastered the art of masks wearing: Rinehart.

Castration imagery is implicit in the Rinehart scene. By donning dark glasses, the protagonist symbolically castrates himself—the covering of his eyes equates to a castration. The world of Rinehart may appear to be a world of possibilities, but it is actually a world in which a castrated man has learned to utilize the reality of his castration, his blindness, for profit. Rinehart becomes different things to different people. He is "Rine the runner and Rine the gambler and Rine the briber and Rine the lover and Rinehart the Reverend" (p. 376); in essence, he "offers the illusion of fatherhood and authority to men and lovers,"18 but he does so by using and exploiting the people of Harlem. And for the protagonist to be Rinehart, he must not only learn to use the people of Harlem, but he must sacrifice his identity and manhood in order to do so. Thus, to maintain Rinehart's disguises, the protagonist would have to wear the dark sunglasses and remain forever castrated, with no chance of being reborn. And in
order to be his own father, the protagonist must first reject all would-be father-figures, including Rinehart, only then, does he have a chance of being reborn. The Harlem riot offers him the opportunity to release himself from the last father-figure he must confront: Ras the Exhorter.

The Harlem riot, which ironically takes place on the Fourth of July, allows the people of Harlem to release their repressed desires in the form of looting and burning. The Fourth of July is also the date of Brother's Jack birthday and this riot serves as his celebration as well, for this is what he and the Brotherhood had planned for all along: "that the crash of men against things would become the crash of men against men" (p. 417); in this way, the people, of Harlem would castrate and murder themselves, and they, not the Brotherhood, would appear guilty of their own demise. And the protagonist realizes that because the policemen have the majority of the guns and the numbers, on their side, that Harlem is indeed being murdered (p. 417). In fact, the protagonist barely escapes a castration attempt as he is shot, nicked in the head, by a policeman.

Although the protagonist becomes caught up in
the riot, he realizes that the riot has the potential of becoming a blood bath and that this blood bath will be led by none other than Ras the Exhorter, and that the protagonist must somehow prevent this from happening. Yet, when he is first noticed by Ras, the protagonist's first impulse is to hide behind his Rinehart disguise. But when he opens his suitcase, he discovers that the dark glasses are broken, that he must face and confront this final father-figure—that if the protagonist is to achieve true manhood, he must remove all blindfolds and reject all would-be father-figures.

The protagonist attempts to reason with Ras, but Ras proposes a hanging—a lynching—for the protagonist; to hang him near the dummies, "the mannequins hanging before a gutted storefront" (p. 420), to teach the Black people of Harlem a lesson. In this respect, Ras is no different from white society, he would lynch a Black man as an example for other Blacks. The protagonist cannot reason with Ras, for the father-figure demands the death of the son. But the protagonist will not, like Tod, sacrifice himself. He will, instead, castrate the father-figure. When Ras yells for his followers to hang the protagonist, he plunges
the spear through both of Ras's cheeks (pp. 422-423), symbolically castrating him and silencing Ras forever. The protagonist leaves Ras "spitting blood" from his fatal phallic wound (p. 424). Only now can the protagonist be reborn.

It is appropriate that when he runs from Ras's followers, the protagonist immediately decides to return to the mother figure, to Mary's, and he runs "over puddles of milk in the black street" (p. 423). This desire to return to Mary's represents a desire to return to the uterine birth canal. Instead, he falls into a dark hole--symbolic of the womb--where he awaits his rebirth and return to the world as a whole man.

Before the protagonist can be reborn--a rebirth which does not occur in the novel--he must first be free of his former self. When the protagonist falls asleep in the coal hole, he dreams that all the castrating father-figures: Brother Jack, Bledsoe, Emerson, Norton, Ras, and Tobitt--and others--appear and literally castrate him, taking his penis and testicles and throwing them over a bridge. But the protagonist realizes that his genitals are an intricate part of American society and that:
the black phallus--in its creative, ambulant, generative power, even under conditions of castration--is like the cosmos itself, a self-sustaining and self-renewing source of life, provoking both envy and fear in Anglo-American society [in all father-figures].

By castrating the protagonist, the father-figures not only relinquish their authority and control over him, but also, as he informs them, the drip-drop upon the water they hear is all the history they've made, all they're going to make (p. 431), for the protagonist is now free to not only be reborn, but to be his own father and make his own history.

The novel proper concludes with the protagonist symbolically castrated and awaiting his rebirth into the world. But the challenge which lies before him is to answer the question he ponders in the epilogue: "Yes, but what is the next phase? How often I have tried to find it" (p. 435). That next phase must be to discover "how to reach humanity, how to keep the inner self alive in the face of potential physical and emotional castration, how to truly see."
this journey from literal and psychological castration must begin from within.
Notes


5 List, p. 248.


8 Bell, p. 207.

9 See Lawrence W. Levine *Black Culture and Black


13 Freud, p. 154.

14 List, p. 30.

15 List, p. 254.

16 List, p. 98.

17 List, p. 100.

18 List, p. 112.


CHAPTER IV

THE JOURNEY FROM CASTRATION: SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Black men still mean trouble. Means we ain't dead yet. Means the old, unfinished battle drags on...

—John Edgar Wideman

In his article, "Dead Black Men and Other Fallout from the American Dream," John Edgar Wideman correctly maintains that Black men still evoke the image of the rapist, the interloper; and that society still views "a Black man's lust for freedom as his lust for white women."¹ And since, "in the patriarchal lexicon,"² white women are considered property, the Black male's "demands for equal opportunity and equal access become symbolic assaults, rapes."³ And these symbolic rapes these acts of aggression, of anti-submissiveness, have resulted in a resurgence of hate groups and in an increase in racially motivated incidents and violence reminiscent of the past. The well-publicized inci-
dents in Atlanta (1979), Mobile (1983), Howard Beach (1986), Bensonhurst (1989), and Los Angeles (1991), serve to illustrate that the Black man is still, as he always has been, a potential lynching victim; that the rope and faggot have not disappeared, but have been replaced with the more "contemporary" methods of lynching and castration: baseball bats, guns, and policemen's clubs.

Perhaps, Atlanta signalled the surfacing of the continuing conspiracy of violence directed against the Black male as the Black male children of Atlanta, Georgia began to disappear and then reappear--dead. While a nation held its breath, tied red ribbons around trees for hopeful homecomings never to be--all eyes glued to Atlanta and its missing children--the search began for a psycho, serial killer. But, very quietly, at first, some who observed saw and feared something else at work: genocide--that what was taking place in Atlanta was merely what was taking place across the country sans the limelight of the media; that these murders were not the work of some serial killer, but rather, they were ritual killings, "contemporary lynchings," aimed at eradicating the Black male from society.

Finally, in June of 1981, a nation sighed in
relief; twenty-two months and twenty-eight bodies later, a Black man, Wayne Williams was charged and convicted of the murders (he was actually only charged with the last two murders). With Williams' conviction, the charges of genocide seemed quenched. But recent evidence has surfaced—evidence apparently known during the time of the trial—which suggests that the Ku Klux Klan may have committed some of the murders as a way to rid society of Blacks—genocide—and that Wayne Williams merely served as a scapegoat. Whether one believes in Williams' guilt or innocence, the fact remains that twenty-six murders remain unsolved, unanswered.

An incident in Mobile, Alabama, however, was undeniably the work of the Klan and followed the more traditional, classic lynching method. A nineteen-year-old Black college student, Marvin Davis, was selected at random on a city street and kidnapped at gun-point. He was lynched and the next morning, his body was found hung by the neck from a tree in a Black neighborhood. His lynching was to illustrate the strength of the Klan in Alabama.

Two incidents in New York would show that modern day lynchings were not—and are not—confined to the
South or to the Klan. In Howard Beach, New York, three Black men—Cedric Saniford, Timothy Grimes and Micheal Griffith—were attacked and chased by a gang of white youths armed with tree limbs, golf clubs, and baseball bats. Grimes escaped; Sandiford and Griffith were both beaten; and Griffith, in an attempt to elude the gang, ran through a hole in a fence and out into traffic. He was struck by a car and killed.

The other modern lynching in New York would also shock—and momentarily enrage—the nation. This time, the location was Bensonhurst. Four young, Black men—Yusuf Hawkins, Troy Banner, Luther Sylvester, and Claude Stanford—who went to look at a used car for sale, were surrounded by a mob of white youths armed with baseball bats. One of the youths drew a gun and fired four shots, each striking Yusuf Hawkins. One bullet pierced his heart, killing him.

Both the Howard Beach and the Bensonhurst incidents involved Black men whose deaths resulted not from any actual crime but from "trespassing," for being Black men and being in all-white neighborhoods.

Perhaps, no other incident so evokes the images of a modern lynching and symbolic castration than the beating in Los Angeles of a Black motorist, Rodney G.
King. King was stopped by white policemen for supposedly speeding. He was handcuffed by the police and then brutally beaten for supposedly resisting arrest. This lynching, which received national attention only because a by-stander happened to videotape the incident, served to underscore the historically troubled relationship between Black men and white policemen.

But the most tragic example of physical and psychological castration inflicted upon the Black male today exists in the organization of gangs. In the place of viable father-figures, of positive role models, have arisen

gangs of young black men full of self-destructive, unfocused rage, crack and chaos, hustling drugs, spouting obscene, race-baiting, woman-hating rap, slam-dunk ideology as rude and crude as the Klan's.  

These gangs are merely more fraternal societies; each wanting authority and dominance over the other; each lynching and castrating and killing each other—rem-
iniscient of the Black prize fighters pitted against each other in the boxing ring--over pseudoturfs.

Thus, the challenge for the Black male remains: to somehow find a way to emerge from the violence which is intertwined with his life and discover how, in this society, to keep his manhood intact, to be his own father, to offer to others--the sons--positive and non-violent initiation rights, and to learn--as well as teach--rituals of survival while embarking on the journey from castration.
Notes


2 Wideman, p. 153.


Two of the murdered children were female. Those who saw—and continue to see—the murders as genocide charge that these two murders served to "throw off" the pattern and silence suspicions of genocide.

For further information and discussion, see the article written by Mary A. Fischer in the April 1992 issue of Gentlemen's Quarterly.
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