INVISIBLE MAN'S LITERARY HERITAGE:

BENITO CERENO AND MOBY DICK

DISSERTATION

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by

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*To J. C. and A. C. for all
your encouragement.*

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Special thanks to my Committee, my family, and my friends, who waited patiently for the finished product.

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CHAPTER I

DEMOCRACY: THE POLITICS OF "AFFIRMING THE PRINCIPLE" AND CELEBRATING THE INDIVIDUAL

1

Democracy is a fundamental concern of Moby Dick (1851), Benito Cereno (1856), and Invisible Man (1952). Usually Melville and Ellison tend to deal with problems on an abstract or metaphysical level, as they do with the problems of ambiguity and color symbolism. However, both writers explore very concretely the political operations of "New World" society. Through Ahab and the other seamen Melville questions many of the attitudes of "democratic" Americans; and through Delano, he exposes weaknesses within the system. Ellison sees himself following most directly in the footsteps of nineteenth-century writers like Melville when he is writing about blacks within American democracy, and he feels the "chief significance" of Invisible Man to be "its experimental attitude, its attempt to return to the mood of personal moral responsibility for democracy which typified the best of our nineteenth-century fiction."¹ Ellison further explains why this moral-political issue will always be a major concern of novelists: "The contradiction between

these noble ideals and the actualities of our conduct generated a guilt, an unease of spirit, from the very beginning, and . . . the American novel at its best has always been concerned with this basic moral predicament. During Melville's time and Twain's, it was an implicit aspect of their major themes."²

The interesting point, though, is not that both men deal with the wide margin between America's aspirations and its actualities, but that they both offer the same solution: one may attack the people, but one should, as the invisible man's³ grandfather suggests, "affirm the principle." By "affirming the principle," Melville and Ellison undertake a moral responsibility for democracy. Before discussing how both writers "affirm the principle," it is necessary to clarify the meaning of this expression as used in Invisible Man.

Prior to his death, "P"'s grandfather reveals his life's strategy to his grandson: "'Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or burst wide open.'"⁴ Throughout the rest of the novel, "P" ponders what his grandfather could have meant by this statement. It haunts him during every phase of his life and is a handicap for him while fighting the Battle Royal.

After attributing various meanings to it, in the epilogue he concludes that his grandfather "must have meant the principle, that we were to affirm the principle on which the country was built and not the men." He goes on questioningly to speculate: "Did he mean to affirm the principle, which they themselves had dreamed into being out of chaos and darkness of the feudal past, and which they had violated and compromised to the point of absurdity even in their own corrupt minds? Or did he mean that we had to take the responsibility for all of it, for the men as well as the principle, because we were the heirs who must use the principle because no other fitted our needs?"

(Pp. 496-97.) "P" continues to speculate in this vein. Marcus Klein comments that "by the end of the novel the hero comes to see in his grandfather's 'yes' a greater affirmation than anything in the novel suggests his grandfather meant. He discovers in it assent to the great principles on which the country was built."⁵ The wider understanding of history that "P" gains by the end of the novel leads him to extend the meaning of his grandfather's advice. To "affirm the principle" is to give assent to the ideas of such documents as The Declaration of Independence and to such national mottoes as e pluribus unum. Because "P" recognizes a gap between what the country professes and what the country does, democracy becomes for him a moral principle as well as a political one.

Melville, although critical of different aspects of American democracy, does as "P"'s grandfather suggests: he "affirms the principle." The Pequod is supposedly democratic in nature. The inclusion of not only Queequeg, but such diverse characters as Daggoo, Tashtego, and Pip on one hand, and Starbuck, Ishmael, and Stubb on the other hand, demonstrates its democratic composition. Edward Stone comments on this motley crew: "Barely has the Pequod gained its offing when Melville implements his emotionally charged invocation to his muse (Democracy) by introducing, as the Squires of his 'Gothic Knight[s]' (mates), three dignified and even titanic dark harpooners apparently selected with care to represent every gradation of non-whiteness."⁶ As a microcosm of society, the ship seemingly becomes the melting pot of the American dream.

However, throughout Moby Dick there are incidents that reveal the shortcomings of the Pequod's "democratic" society. The melting pot of common men is not as congenial as it first appears. The Quakers want Queequeg, the best harpooner, converted before boarding the ship. The Pequod's crew contains a demonism which responds to the demon in Ahab. Yet these seamen consider Fedallah and his group devils. Throughout the work there are statements that reveal the crew's stereotypes: "native Americans have all the brains, the rest of the world the muscle"⁷; the narrator attributes to Pip all the stereotypes "peculiar to his tribe" (p. 408).

The men aboard the ship have attitudes that fall short of the country's ideals.

The Pequod's leader, Ahab, also falls short of democratic ideals. Underneath the ship's democratic facade lurks Ahab, who dominates the crew, who turns them to his purpose in ways suggestive of the nineteenth-century American captains of industry and robber barons. His domination of the crew demonstrates how democracy can be transformed. Commenting on Ahab's "dictatorial ego," Harry Slochower writes: "They [the crew] are somehow hypnotized by their leader's demon and they act as if they were all a collective Ahab. The transformation is achieved by something akin to black magic." The crew are like "Loose-Fish" inasmuch as they are "unformed"; but "Ahab is a finished and closed mold. By virtue of his completely organized form, Ahab can silence their vague, rebellious murmurings, can melt their will down to the point where it merges with his purpose."⁸ The Pequod, although democratic in composition, has a tyrant for its leader. Ahab's dominance eventually leads the ship to destruction.

Although critical of particular attitudes of the crew and Ahab's actions, Melville uses Ishmael and Starbuck to "affirm the principle." Ishmael affirms the inalienable, God-given rights of everyone by mixing notions of democracy with notions of religion.

Because Ishmael sees God as the "centre and circumference of all democracy" (p. 113), he usually discusses American democracy and the Christian religion together. At first he is apprehensive about an "abominable savage" coming to "this Christian country" (p. 22). But after he contrasts the practices of "uncivilized" Queequeg with those of his fellow Americans, he sees that Queequeg deserves to be given a fair chance regardless of whether he is a "good Presbyterian Christian." Queequeg has an inner dignity which a democracy should recognize and appreciate. As noble as any of the founding fathers, he appears to be "George Washington cannibalistically developed" (p. 49).

Ishmael as a character displays democratic attitudes. Initially, he is afraid of Queequeg, but his democratic ability to embrace all permits him, nevertheless, to "try a pagan friend." While squeezing sperm, Ishmael meditates upon a democratic ideal, universal brotherhood: "Let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness" (p. 413). He decides that even though he was "born and bred in the bosom of the infallible Presbyterian Church" (p. 51), there are lessons he can learn from Queequeg. In fact, as the work progresses, instead

of Ishmael's having to worry that Queequeg's cannibalism will affect others, Queequeg is "fearful Christianity, or rather Christians, [have] unfitted him for ascending the pure and undefiled throne of thirty pagan Kings before him" (p. 56). As a cannibal, he must indeed "help these Christians" (p. 61). Because Ishmael shows democracy working positively and practically, Richard Chase comments that "Ishmael in one sense symbolizes Young America -- the revolutionary nation, the bearer of light in the wilderness, in quest of destiny; the Ishmael of the world seeking to become a 'great nation' such as Abraham promised his outcast son."⁹

Melville especially "affirms the principle" through Starbuck's portrayal. The principles of democracy are praised above the weaknesses of Starbuck as an individual. Starbuck is "uncommonly conscientious" and has a "certain superstitiousness," even "a fall of valor in the soul." But "men may seem detestable as joint stock-companies and nations; knaves, fools, and murderers there may be; men may have mean and meagre faces; but man, in the ideal, is so noble and so sparkling, such a grand and glowing creature, that over any ignominious blemish in him all his fellows should run to throw their costliest robes" (p. 113). Although at first contemptuous of Starbuck, by the end of

the work Ahab tries to save Starbuck in recognition of "that immaculate manliness we feel within ourselves, so far within us, that it remains intact through all the outer character seem gone" (p. 113). It is Starbuck's "fall of valor" which occasions the following idealistic celebration of nineteenth-century American democracy:

If, then, to meanest mariners, and renegades and castaways, I shall hereafter ascribe high qualities, though dark; weave round them tragic graces; if even the most mournful, perchance the most abased, among them all, shall at times lift himself to the exalted mounts; if I shall touch that workman's arm with some ethereal light; if I shall spread a rainbow over his disastrous set of sun; then against all mortal critics bear me out in it, thou just Spirit of Equality, which hast spread one royal mantle of humanity over all kind! Bear me out in it, thou great democratic God! . . . Thou who didst hurl him upon a warhorse; who didst thunder him higher than a throne! Thou who, in all Thy mighty, earthly marchings, ever cullest Thy selectest champions from the kingly commons; bear me out in it, O God! (Pp. 113-14).

By praising the Spirit of Equality and the common man, despite his weaknesses, Moby Dick affirms the documents and doctrines upon which the country was built. Even the meanest mariner is entitled to tragic graces.

In Benito Cereno Melville "affirms the principle" in a different way. After exposing the weaknesses of American naiveté, he shows American survival through innocence. In this drama of international interplay, Benito represents the Old World aristocracy and Delano, the American democratic character. Clad in a dark velvet

jacket, a high-crowned sombrero, and silver buckles, Benito is "a gentlemanly, reserved-looking, and rather young man."¹⁰ Delano compares him to Charles V or "an invalid courtier tottering about London streets in the time of the plague" (p. 121). The whole world which Benito represents is like the San Dominick -- "in its time, a very fine vessel," but now a "relic of faded grandeur." Even the New World figurehead, Christopher Columbus, is replaced by the skeleton of an aristocrat.

Delano's ship is just the opposite. It carries plenty of provisions, valuable cargo, and is, indeed, a bachelor's delight. Very innocent, Delano, like Starbuck, is characteristically American. Starbuck's innocence, akin to prudence, stems from his Quaker descent and permits him to see the whale as only a brute beast. Unable to live life on the grand scale that Ahab does, Starbuck conscientiously accepts his limitations and enjoys family and fireside. Delano's innocence is more of the type of the American abroad. With his "singularly undistrustful good nature" (p. 107), he is, in Jamesian terminology, "booked to make a mistake" and is incapable of distinguishing the real from the copy. As Chase points out, "Captain Delano is that familiar fictional American -- the man of energy and good will bewildered by the European scene."¹¹ Whereas, Starbuck's naivet is characterized by

sobriety and good sense, Delano's naiveté is characterized by ignorance and racism. Not able to conceive of the "malign evil in man," Delano cannot decipher the puzzling occurrences aboard the San Dominick. (How racism blinds Delano and limits his perception will be discussed in Chapter Three). After everything is over, the "good captain," the man of "generosity and piety," naively questions Benito: "'What has cast such a shadow upon you?'" He sees no connection between past events and present problems. His advice is that "the past is passed; why moralize upon it? Forget it" (p. 192). This attitude, as William Pilkington comments, "is the spirit of nineteenth-century America summed up in a few words. It is the only spirit which would have allowed a people to carve a nation out of the wilderness, but the contempt shown for tradition, is nonetheless regrettable. The optimism of pioneer America, as it appears in the thinking of Captain Delano, is a rather crass and simple-minded belief."¹² Max Putzell views the situation between Delano and Benito as a re-enactment of the "essential Adamic problem, confronting the Old World's guilt with the stubborn optimism of a young nation eager to cast off the past with its load of incurable hate and injustice."¹³

Although Delano is described as the "good captain" and does not suffer the guilt of being a slave ship master, his ideas of equality are thwarted. Like the Pequod's crew, Delano, too, demonstrates attitudes unbecoming a "democratic character." He offers to buy Babo and wants to give his bread, sugar, and cider only to the white seamen aboard the San Dominick (p. 148). One critic in an article entitled, "Captain Amasa Delano: Melville's American Fool," contrasts Delano's attitude with Ishmael's: "Though he is kind, genial, and no doubt benevolent (in the fashion of the old master and slave relationship?), Captain Delano nevertheless treats negroes like dogs. This American would assuredly not understand Ishmael's idea about the First Congregational Church of the World."¹⁴

Despite all the American traits that Melville satirizes in Delano, Delano as a character is the one who survives the experience. His innocence proves to be his salvation. Whereas Benito is overwhelmingly defeated by his vision of evil, Delano optimistically goes on. As a member of the New World society he falls short of its principles, but nevertheless is able to survive a crisis. The citizen of the democratic society, despite his weaknesses, lives on. This is another way of "affirming the principle."

Survival through innocence contributes to the "moral-responsibility-for-democracy" tradition that Ellison sees Invisible Man following. "P", like Delano, is naive about happenings in his environment. He witnesses apparent contradictions in American society but gains an understanding of these contradictions from his grandfather's words. After using a paint factory to reveal the true nature of the country's foundation, after ridiculing famous Americans and American emblems, and after criticizing the American dream, Ellison "affirms the principle."

As "P" arrives at the paint factory, he notices a huge electric sign clouded by fog reading, "Keep America Pure with Liberty Paints." Then, all kinds of plays are made upon American "purity." "P"'s supervisor, Kimbro, informs him that this paint, which is used only for national monuments, is "as white as George Washington's Sunday-go-to-meetin' wig and as sound as the all-mighty dollar" (p. 177). Actually, the white is not pure but is composed of and enriched by ten black drops of dope which are added to each can. However, because the paint is used for national monuments, whitewashing all federal institutions, the black must not show. Blacks remain the invisible strength within the culture. The paint is

called optic white because it appears white to the eye. America puts its white foot forward.

When "P" makes a mistake and gets the dope from the wrong bucket, Kimbro accuses him of trying to "sabotage" Liberty Paints. Because of his mistake, a gray tinge shines through the white paint. Instead of correcting his mistake, "P" deliberately makes it again. Much to his surprise this time, his supervisor does not detect it. "P" does not know whether Kimbro really cannot tell white from black or whether the joke is on him.

After "P" tries his hand at mixing paints and fails, his supervisors send him to a deep basement, three levels underground. Here he learns about the foundation of the paint company -- America. An elderly black, Brockway, informs him that he helped dig the foundation, knows where all the pipes are, and actually makes the paint base. He lets "P" know that blacks make the factory work: "They got all this machinery, but that ain't everything; we are the machines inside the machine. Ain't a continental thing that happens down here that ain't as iffen I done put my black hands into it!" (Pp. 190-91). Little does Brockway realize, however, that his white supervisors are exploiting him by giving him a job too dangerous for whites -- checking the pressure

gauges. Neither does he realize that the slogan he helped to make up for the company -- "If It's Optic White, It's the Right White," a parody of "If it's white, it's right" -- further suppresses his people.

Aside from commenting upon the backbone and composition of the nation, Ellison ridicules famous Americans and famous national emblems. Early in the prologue "P", since he has found a way to have 1,369 lights in his coal basement, jests that he has something in common with a long line of American inventors: "Though invisible, I am in the great American tradition of tinkers. That makes me kin to Ford, Edison, and Franklin. Call me, since I have a theory and a concept a 'thinker-tinker'" (p. 11), as if the others tinkers were not also thinkers.

In the Golden Day episode, the vets confusingly or jokingly (one never knows which with them) identify Norton, who is a "Bostonian, smoker of cigars, teller of polite Negro stories, shrewd banker, skilled scientist, director, philanthropist, forty years a bearer of the white man's burden, and for sixty a symbol of the Great Traditions" (pp. 38-39), with Thomas Jefferson. When Ishmael compares Queequeg to George Washington, it is to Queequeg's advantage; when the vets compare Norton to Thomas Jefferson it is to Norton's disadvantage. One

vet claims to be Norton/Jefferson's grandson "'on the field-nigger side'" (p. 73). The vets then conclude that this blur of whiteness, which is the way all the blacks in the novel always see Norton, must be either John D. Rockefeller or at least the Messiah. Richard Kostelanetz suggests that Norton may be patterned after Charles Eliot Norton, "first professor of art history at Harvard and heir to a certain kind of New England Brahmin liberalism."¹⁵

Ellison tells the most jokes at the expense of Ralph Waldo Emerson, for whom he was named. Emerson is a very busy businessman with no time to sit and listen to the dictates of his oversoul. The heritage that he leaves is a frustrated, nervous son, a Harvard graduate who visits an analyst. In a sexual gesture, Emerson Jr. with "a long hop-swinging stride" and a "strange interest in his eyes" touches "P"'s knees and invites him to the Club Calamus (pp. 159, 163). Of course, Calamus is a reference to Whitman's poems that express a sentiment of "manly attachment" in keeping with the sexual overtones of this episode. Emerson Jr. has been reading Totem and Taboo and expresses his desire to have the same type of relationship with "P" that Jim and Huckleberry had (with all the overtones of Leslie Fiedler's thesis). Leonard Deutsch, who has written

extensively on the relationship of Emerson to Ellison, stresses that Ellison is not satirizing Emerson the man, but the country's deviation from Emerson's beliefs:

Ellison's intention is not to satirize the nineteenth-century writer but to condemn the demoralizing departure which has been made from the America he represented. In the novel, when the protagonist goes for his job interview he discovers that Mr. Emerson is inaccessible, that Mr. Emerson's son is a diluted mutant, and that the whole humanistic ethic has become subverted in industrialized, capitalistic America. But, again, this moral delinquency--the capitalistic perversion of Emersonian idealism--does not mean that the ideals themselves are being discredited.¹⁶

As stressed, this is what Melville and Ellison continually do when they deal with America -- criticize the particulars, but applaud the principles.

Ellison also ridicules typically American emblems. The trademark for the paint company is a screaming eagle; there is an American flag on the belly of the dancer; the Statue of Liberty's torch is often only half visible due to the fog; "P" gets hit over the head with a baseball bat; he eats his favorite dessert of vanilla ice cream and sloe gin while listening to the blues--one of Ellison's puns on the red, white, and blue. As Floyd Horowitz points out,

historically and politically, ["P"] is beset by a cavalcade of American symbols and images which are in the wrong places, a sometimes subtle, sometimes raucous debunking of the names and institutions which Americans are supposed to hold so dear:

the American flag upon her belly undulates to the shimmy of a nude, the identity of Jefferson is an illusion in the mind of a shell-shocked veteran, the Statue of Liberty is obscured in fog while liberty is the name appellate to a corporate enterprise, Emerson is a businessman, the Fourth of July is Jack the Communist's birthday as well as the occasion of a race riot.¹⁷

Just by juxtaposing all of these Americanisms, Ellison humorously presents his satire.

Besides satirizing the men and the emblems, Ellison uses the Battle Royal incident to reveal the American dream for what it is -- elusive and empty. The Battle Royal is the first instance in the novel of whites getting blacks to fight one another. Under heavy smoke, the black boys punch blindly at each other while, as Kostelanetz points out, "their true enemy . . . remains on the sidelines, supervising the fray to make sure the violence is directed away from themselves" (p. 8). Assembled to watch the spectacle are all the white elite, even pastors (the black elite are in a mental institution). These community leaders tempt the black boys with money and sex. Advertising the money as "good hard American cash," the emcee urges the boys on. After grabbing the supposedly gold coins from off the electrified rug, they find out that these coins are mere brass tokens. America, a capitalistic society, promises money and power, but gives trinkets.

The main attraction at this gathering is a nude blonde with a flag on her belly. The black boys do not know if they should look at her dancing sensuously or refrain from doing so. They are experiencing what one writer terms "psychic emasculation."¹⁸ The whites in the audience thrive on the reactions of the now crying black boys. They smile at the boys' fear and force them to look even after some have fainted. The whites coerce them to look, for not looking would destroy the American dream, which promises sex and money, and "any act that endanger[s] the continuity of the dream is an act of treason" (p. 121). Throughout the novel, however, the whites are always the ones more affected by sexual activity; they are the ones who see it as part of the American dream, but experience it vicariously. This happens with Norton and Trueblood, Sybil and "P", and in this episode with the "big shots." One white man, "each time the blonde swayed her undulating hips, . . . ran his hand through the thin hair of his bald head and, with his arms upheld, his posture clumsy like that of an intoxicated panda, wound his belly in a slow and obscene grind" (p. 23).

Blacks in the work always tend to have a dual attitude toward America--love and hate, fear and desire.

"P" expresses this attitude while watching the nude blonde: "I wanted at one and the same time to run from the room, to sink through the floor, or go to her and cover her from my eyes and the eyes of the others with my body; to feel the soft thighs, to caress her and destroy her, to love her and murder her, to hide from her, and yet to stroke where below the small American flag tattooed upon her belly her thighs formed a capital V." (p. 22).

In a hallucinatory experience "P" envisions a black woman who has several children by her white master. They carry on a conversation about this love/hate situation:

'I dearly loved my master, son,' she said.
 'You should have hated him,' I said.
 'He gave me several sons,' she said, 'and because I loved my sons I learned to love their father though I hated him too.'
 'I too have become acquainted with ambivalence,' I said (p. 13).

In the Golden Day episode one of the vets says he is waiting for the day when he will be old enough to give his "mulatto mother a bath, the half-white bitch!" (p. 75).

This dual attitude toward America, incidentally, is a central concern in contemporary black literature. Blacks, like Melville's Bartleby, are within society, but yet always on the outside. Despite standing on the periphery of society, they are invisible strengths within

it. Ellison and Richard Wright have dealt with this problem in fiction and poets like Langston Hughes and Claude McKay in poetry. Hughes describes the irony of the situation in one very short poem, "American Heartbreak":

I am the American hearbreak--
The rock on which Freedom
Stumped its toe--
The great mistake
That Jamestown made
Long ago.¹⁹

McKay, viewing America as a ravaging tiger that he, nevertheless, is trying to like, writes:

Although she feeds me bread of bitterness
And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,
Stealing my breath of life, I will confess
I love this cultured hell that tests my youth!

As pointed out earlier in the chapter, Melville uses Moby Dick to show weaknesses in the Pequod's "democratic" crew and the melting pot concept, and he uses Benito Cereno to comment upon the limitations of American innocence; yet he creates an encyclopedic Ishmael and has his American survive an ordeal which kills a European. Ellison ridicules famous Americans, emblems, and the American dream itself; yet he urges writers to take a moral responsibility for democracy. He considers Invisible Man a morally affirmative novel because it stresses the moral imperatives of American life: the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights.

Raymond Olderman asserts that "the American, living close, on one hand, to the memory of the great documents, and close, on the other hand, to the violence done those documents every moment since their conception by man, must both affirm the great principle of hope and possibility and recognize and accept the limitations of humanity. He must live with his aspirations guided by the principles, but live also with a perceptive awareness of how far short of these principles man falls."²⁰ "Affirming the Principle" allows both men to criticize particulars, while still praising principles.

2

Melville's and Ellison's celebration of the principles of democracy also involves a celebration of the individual. Freedom and integrity of the individual are at the core of democracy. Both writers praise individuality by showing what happens when the individual fails to assert himself and by showing what happens when he isolates himself. The individual cannot grow by following others or by isolating himself from others.

Many of the characters in Moby Dick, Benito Cereno, and Invisible Man, instead of asserting their individuality, choose to "Follow their Leader." There are

differences, however, in the way each character follows his leader. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, Ahab's crew are all followers of his tyrannical leadership. But the crew are not followers in the ordinary sense of the word. Because Ahab speaks to the demonism in each of them, there exists a fiendish attraction between them and Ahab. The Quarter-Deck Chapter emphasizes how Ahab mesmerizes his crew. Ahab gladdens especially at Starbuck's "enchanted tacit acquiescence" (p. 162). All of the crew's "wild eyes met [Ahab's], as the bloodshot eyes of the prairie wolves meet the eye of their leader, ere he rushes on at their head in the trail of the bison; but, alas! only to fall into the hidden snare of the Indian" (p. 163). Ahab's magnetism demonstrates itself in a diabolical ceremony wherein all the mates cross lances and pledge death to Moby Dick (pp. 163-64). Despite "a dread in [his] soul," even Ishmael follows Ahab; his shouts go up with the rest (p. 174).

Contrastingly, Delano follows his leader unreservedly. He lacks the doubleness that Ishmael displays--the ability to follow yet harbor a dread in the soul. Babo warns of the danger of following one's leader and has the threat, "'Keep faith with the blacks from here to Senegal, or you shall in spirit, as now in body, follow

your leader'" (p. 181), painted on the side of the ship. One of the reasons why Delano fails to see the blacks as they really are is because he naively follows his leaders. As Glenn Altschuler points out, "Delano views the black man in the stereotyped mold constructed by the whites; he follows his leaders in conforming to that mold."²¹

In the beginning of Invisible Man "P"'s naiveté is much like Starbuck's and Delano's. Starbuck feels that "[his] soul is more than matched"; Ahab has "blasted all [his] reason" (p. 166). Therefore, he despairingly follows him. Delano follows without giving reasons for doing so. Sometimes "P" follows because he feels overpowered as Starbuck feels, and sometimes he follows unthinkingly as Delano does. At the beginning of Chapter One, "P" reflects on his life and pinpoints his problems: "All my life I had been looking for something, and everywhere I turned someone tried to tell me what it was. I accepted their answers too, though they were often in contradiction and even self-contradictory. I was naive. I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer" (p. 19). The two people that "P" particularly follows are Booker T. Washington and Bledsoe.

While still in high school, "P" patterns his speech after Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Exposition Address"²² instead of composing his own. He begins by repeating Washington's anecdote about a ship lost at sea, its crew dying of thirst, which had only to cast down its bucket in the surrounding waters. Busy laughing and smoking, "P"'s audience pays him no attention until he mistakenly says "social equality" instead of Washington's phrase, "social responsibility." Immediately, the audience becomes hostile, and "P" quickly rectifies his mistake. The rest of Washington's speech promises blacks that if they live industriously, cleanly, and decorously, they will prosper. "P" believes this theory wholeheartedly and continues to follow Washington until he learns that Washington's theory is not a viable one to live his life by, for its basic assumptions are false: whites reward Trueblood for his misconduct, not for his industry, cleanliness, or dignity.

Refusing to open the letters that contain his fate is another example of "P" doing as he is told. He has always wanted to be another Bledsoe:

[Bledsoe] was the example of everything I hoped to be: Influential with wealthy men all over the country; consulted in matters concerning the race; a leader of his people; the possessor of not one, but two Cadillacs, a good salary and a soft, good-looking and creamy-complexioned wife. What was

more, while black and bald and everything white folks poked fun at, he had achieved power and authority; had, while black and wrinkle-headed, made himself of more importance in the world than most Southern white men. They could laugh at him but they couldn't ignore him (p. 92).

Since Bledsoe admonished him not to open the letter, "P" refuses to open it. Obeying Bledsoe is important to him. Lacking self-reliance, "P" wails: "Everyone seemed to have some plan for me, and beneath that some more secret plan" (p. 170). He needs a plan for himself. Neither Washington's nor Bledsoe's plan will suffice for a plan of his own.

"P" grows from Starbuck's and Delano's kind of naiveté. In his dealings with the Brotherhood he advances from a state of naively following them to a state of deliberately following them in order to undermine their organization. In Chapter III I will discuss more thoroughly how "P" uses his invisibility to do exactly this. The Brotherhood tries to convince "P" that he is a person without any feelings for the individual. According to Jack, he was hired to talk and not think:

'We furnish all ideas. We have some acute ones. Ideas are part of our apparatus. Only the correct ideas for the correct occasion.'

'And suppose you misjudge the occasion?'

'Should that ever happen, you keep quiet.'

'Even though I am correct?'

'You say nothing unless it is passed by the committee. Otherwise I suggest you keep saying the last thing you were told' (p. 406).

After realizing that he is only a "tool" or "natural resource" to the Brotherhood, "P" reflects: "My problem was that I always tried to go in everyone's way but my own" (p. 496). Exasperated with following people, he concludes that it is "better to live out one's own absurdity than to die for that of others" (p. 484).

Melville and Ellison not only deal with the individual who fails to assert himself but also with the individual who isolates himself. Both conditions are not in accordance with the ideals of a democratic society. Failing to assert oneself deprives one of his elemental liberty. Isolating oneself divorces the individual from the "common chain of humanity," which early nineteenth-century American literature, the age of Jacksonian democracy, especially emphasizes.

Many critics, including Henry Nash Smith, feel alienation to be the central theme of Moby Dick. Smith points out that "this view makes Ishmael rather than Ahab the 'hero,' and relegates the quest of the White Whale to a subordinate position in the basic structure

of the narrative."²³ Of course, the name "Ishmael" connotes a castaway, a wanderer from society, an "Isolato." Ishmael is cut off from the society of the shore.

Maurice Friedman views Ishmael as the prototype of the Modern Exile.²⁴ Ishmael's isolation, however, is not primarily social. After all, he does cultivate a very important relationship with Queequeg that illustrates the theme of brotherhood throughout the work. Ishmael's isolation is technical in nature. The reader is not always aware of him as a participant nor as a narrative voice. Indeed, it can be said that sometimes he becomes invisible. When he begins to relate the story, he is all alone and simply says, "Call me Ishmael," in much the same way that "P" says, "Call me Jack the Bear." Technically, many times the story is not told from Ishmael's point of view, especially when other characters are presented alone on stage or when Ahab takes center stage.

Compared to Ishmael's isolation, Ahab's isolation is more social in nature. He secludes himself not from the reader, but from family and friends: "socially, Ahab was inaccessible. Though nominally included in the census of Christendom, he was still an alien to it. He lived in the world, as the last of the Grisly Bears lived in settled Missouri" (p. 150). Ahab's independence degenerates into isolation. According to Tyrus Hillway,

"one result of Ahab's madness is his isolation from the rest of humanity. . . . His physical and spiritual separation from his wife and child, his disdain for the ordinary comforts of life, his destruction of the helpful quadrant--all these mark his withdrawal from the common level of mankind into an egocentric stratosphere between the world of man and the heaven of God. He remains the defier of fate."²⁵ The only person with whom Ahab seems to establish any personal bonds is Pip. Just as Queequeg provides a learning experience for Ishmael, Pip provides a humanizing influence for Ahab. Nevertheless, as the journey proceeds, Ahab becomes so deeply and poignantly alienated that he is divested of all human companionship, pipe, sextant, and hat. Ahab demonstrates what Slochower refers to as "lack of social pathos."²⁶

Many minor characters and events in Moby Dick also touch upon isolation. To get to his lofty pulpit, Father Mapple must separate himself from his congregation and climb a tall ladder. Pip becomes less human when left alone so many hours in the sea. The "awful lonesomeness," "the intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity" (p. 411), destroys his mind. The games also demonstrate the separation of man from man. These games, supposedly social

meetings, all fail at communication. The captain of one ship drops his speaking trumpet; there is an epidemic aboard the Jeroboam; the crew aboard other ships have language problems.

"P" isolates himself from other blacks. His alienation, however, is different from Ishmael's and Ahab's. Because of embarrassment, "P" separates himself. He does not like being crowded in the servant's elevator with the rest of the boys who are to fight the Battle Royal. He sees himself as a different type of person than they. Hearing Trueblood (pur sang, the primitive black) sing spirituals also embarrasses him. When "P" is caring for Norton, he silently curses the vets for approaching. Ashamed of "crude black preachers" and southern blacks who migrate North, he initially does not eat chitterlings and yams. As he gains his own identity, his attitude becomes more ambivalent: "God damn, I thought, they're a hell of a people! And I didn't know whether it was pride or disgust that suddenly flashed over me" (p. 156). After the eviction episode, he gradually learns to accept other blacks.

The greatest instance of another type of alienation--technological--occurs in the operation scene.

Enclosed in glass and metal, "P" can see only images of Coca-Cola bottles, gadgets, and machines. The doctors, trying to deliver a mechanical man, cut the cord from his stomach node. When he hears the doctors and nurses discussing his case, it sounds like a discussion of history. The cold, scientific objectivity of the whole process amazes "P." Because of the clinical whiteness and remoteness of the staff, he forgets his name and his mother's name.

In retrospect, Ellison feels that American writers should take a moral responsibility for democracy. This is what he admires about Melville. Ellison comments:

. . . the writers of [the nineteenth-century] took a much greater responsibility for the condition of democracy and, indeed, their works were imaginative projections of the conflicts within the human heart which arose when the sacred principles of the Constitution clashed with the practical exigencies of human greed and fear, hate and love.²⁶

In Invisible Man Ellison refers to the-moral-responsibility-for-democracy as "affirming the principle"--upholding the documents upon which the country was built. Although Melville points out contradictions within the Pequod's "democratic" melting pot, exposes its tyrannical leadership, and shows the limitations of American innocence, he affirms the principle through his portrayals of Starbuck and Ishmael and Delano's survival. Ellison

criticizes the country's foundation, its heroes, emblems, and the American dream, but praises the country's ideals.

To affirm the principle is also to celebrate the individual, for individuality is an essential part of democracy. Both writers concern themselves with individuals who fail to assert themselves and with individuals who isolate themselves. Ahab, Ishmael, Starbuck, Delano, and "P" are all different degrees of these kinds of individuals.

"Democratic" works deal with the country's principles and the individual's role in society. Ellison feels that "whatever else [Melville's] works were 'about' they also managed to be about democracy."²⁷ Whatever else Invisible Man may be "about," it, too, is about democracy.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER I

¹Ralph Ellison, Shadow and Act (1953; rpt. New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1972), p. 102.

²Ibid., p. 164.

³I will hereafter refer to Ellison's protagonist as "P".

⁴Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (New York: The New American Library, 1952), pp. 19-20. All further references to this work will be from this edition and cited parenthetically in the text.

⁵Marcus Klein, "Ralph Ellison's 'Invisible Man'" in After Alienation: American Novels in Mid-Century (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1964, p. 251.

⁶Edward Stone, "The Whiteness of the Whale," CLA Journal, 18, No. 3 (March 1975), p. 350.

⁷Herman Melville, Moby Dick, intro. Newton Arvin (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1957), p. 118. All further references to this work will be from this edition and cited parenthetically in the text.

⁸Harry Slochower, "Moby Dick: The Myth of Democratic Expectancy," American Quarterly, 2 (1950), 263-64.

⁹Richard Chase, Herman Melville: A Critical Study (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 4.

¹⁰Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno," in Herman Melville: Four Short Novels (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 112. All further references to Benito Cereno will be from this edition and cited parenthetically in the text.

¹¹Chase, p. 158.

¹²William Pilkington, "'Benito Cereno' and the American National Character," Discourse, 8 (Winter 1965), 61.

¹³Max Putzell, "The Source and the Symbols of Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" American Literature, 34 (1962), 355.

¹⁴E. F. Carlisle, Criticism, 7 (1965), 355.

¹⁵Richard Kostelanetz, "The Politics of Ellison's Booker: Invisible Man as Symbolic History," Chicago Review, 9 No. 2 (1967), 9.

¹⁶Leonard Deutsch, "Ralph Waldo Ellison and Ralph Waldo Emerson: A Shared Moral Vision," CLA Journal, 16, No. 2 (1972), 178.

¹⁷Floyd Horowitz, "Ralph Ellison's Modern Version of Brer Bear and Brer Rabbit in Invisible Man," Mid-Continent American Studies Journal, 4 (1963), 22, 23.

¹⁸William Nichols, "Ralph Ellison's Black American Scholar," Phylon, 31, No. 1 (1970), pp. 70-75.

¹⁹Langston Hughes, "American Heartbreak" and Claude McKay, "Tiger" in The Black Poets, ed. Dudley Randall (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), pp. 87, 62.

²⁰Raymond Olderman, "Ralph Ellison's Blues and Invisible Man," Wisconsin Studies, 7 (1966), 157.

²¹Glenn Altschuler, "Whose Foot on Whose Throat? A Re-Examination of Melville's Benito Cereno," CLA Journal, 18, No. 3 (1975), 390.

²²See Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Exposition Address" in Up From Slavery: An Autobiography (New York: Doubleday Doran and Company, 1938, pp. 218-25.

²³Henry Nash Smith, "The Image of Society in Moby-Dick," in Centennial Essays, ed. Tyrus Hillway and Luther S. Mansfield (Texas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1953), p. 75.

²⁴Maurice Friedman, Problematic Rebel: An Image of Modern Man (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 77.

²⁵Tyrus Hillway, "A Preface to Moby-Dick," in Centennial Essays (Texas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1953), pp. 24, 25.

²⁶Slochower, p. 267.

²⁷Shadow and Act, p. 41.

CHAPTER II

THE SPECTRUM OF AMBIGUITY: FROM MASK WEARING TO SHAPE-SHIFTING

The works of Melville and Ellison are charged with ambiguity. This is one reason why some read Melville's works as simple sea yarns and others see them as masterpieces, or why some find Invisible Man a "meaningless potpourri"¹ and others voted it for the National Book Award. In commenting about the "illusoriness of the Melvillean experience," Edward Margolies stresses that "ambiguity sits at the center of Melville's metaphysics."² Similarly, Robert Bone emphasizes that Ellison focuses his art around "calculated ambiguity."³

The two men employ two different types of ambiguity. First of all, there is the ambiguity that arises from the creation of characters who wear masks. Mask wearing is basically an act of deception--a character assumes a deliberate, fixed personality to deceive other characters by hiding reality. There is nothing "ambiguous" about mask wearing itself, but it often creates ambiguous relationships between appearance and reality. From the

moment the reader realizes a character is wearing a mask, the true significance of each episode becomes less certain. How much of the self behind the mask is merging with the mask?; or as Todd Lieber asks, "Can there be, beneath the metamorphic exterior of the mask, an essential and substantial self, an identity that is truly separate from its false faces--or does the mask-manipulator become only a 'ghost,' a semi-existing and ultimately ineffectual presence?"⁴ I will treat Babo, Bledsoe, and "P"'s grandfather as mask wearers.

The second type of ambiguity is the ambiguity within reality itself, within the relationship of good and evil, as exemplified by the white whale. The whale's whiteness is ambiguous, for it contains opposite tendencies. Multiplicity is a continuation or outgrowth of this type of ambiguity. Not only does the white whale contain opposite tendencies, but a spectrum of tendencies. In this respect, the whale is akin to Ellison's Rinehart. Rinehart, too, is multi-faceted. In fact, Rinehart may be seen as the culmination of ambiguity: he is a mask wearer; he behaves in such contradictory ways simultaneously that his very nature seems divided, and he performs multiple roles. More complex than a simple mask wearer, Rinehart is more accurately a "shape-shifter."

1

Babo, Bledsoe, and "P"'s grandfather are all black characters who wear masks. In order to function in the white world in which they find themselves, they recognize the need to hide their real selves. Historically, blacks have had a tradition of wearing masks. In one of his very few non-dialect poems, Paul Laurence Dunbar expresses the effects of trying to mask one's true self:

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 overwise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.⁵

On his deathbed "P"'s grandfather defines the mask of humility, the way meekness becomes a dangerous activity: "I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they burst wide open.' They thought the old man had gone out of his mind. He had been the meekest of men" (pp. 19-20).

Melville portrays Babo as a meek man. To appear humble Babo performs numerous menial acts for Benito:

adjusting Benito's shoe buckles, rubbing spots and lint off of Benito's sleeves, placing a rug under Benito's feet and a pillow under his head, giving Benito his arm for support, and even taking out Benito's handkerchief for him. Because Babo seems to perform all these acts with such "affectionate zeal" (p. 114), Delano labels him a "spectacle of fidelity" (p. 120), "less a servant than a devoted companion" (p. 114). Not detecting Babo's violence or craftiness, Delano praises him for his "steady good conduct" (p. 114).

Babo gives Benito a facade of power by forcing him to dress in costly array--velvet jacket, stockings, and sombrero, and by making him carry an empty scabbard so that, by contrast, his own appearance--coarse, wide trousers with patches--seems all the more homely. Although Babo favors brightly colored clothes, as evidenced in the shaving scene, he dresses as a begging friar. He counsels Atufal to appear in chains and in an iron collar to add to Benito's facade of power. Benito has the fine garments, Atufal's submission, and a padlock and key--all the power symbols; but because Babo is wearing "the mask that grins and lies," he, and not Benito, is really in control. As Rosalie Feltenstein points out,

In 'Benito Cereno' the discrepancy between appearance and truth is so complete that every person and every

incident appear as their opposites. Again, 'paste-board masks' are the symbol of this ambiguity, and, like the two masked figures on the stern piece, Don Benito, seemingly a villain, and Babo, seemingly a good and faithful servant are disguised until the moment of revelation. It is this heart-rending ambiguity, that helps to destroy Don Benito, much more than any physical pain.⁶

Unlike Babo, who masks himself as a meek man for a temporary period of time, Bledsoe has been wearing a mask of humility all his life long. Although really powerful, influential, and authoritative, he acts astonishingly humble toward whites: he only enters the school's cafeteria after the white guests have left; he always removes his hat respectfully and bows low to whites; his favorite spiritual is "Live-a-Humble," and he even manages to arrange his striped trousers, his swallow-tail coat, and his rich ascot tie in such a way as to appear a pauper. By having his trousers bag at the knees and his coat slouch on his shoulders, he seems not only humble, but short, despite his tall stature (pp. 103-04). Before walking in Norton's room after the Golden Day episode, Bledsoe "stop[s] and compose[s] his angry face like a sculptor, making it a bland mask" (p. 93). After controlling his angry fists so that they knock gently on the door, he fakes a smile and a "strange grandmotherly concern" for Norton (p. 94). Discovering and accepting that Bledsoe is only an actor is one of "P"'s most disillusioning tasks.

Besides their actions and garments, the speeches of Babo and Bledsoe are also part of their mask. Babo's tone always sounds deferential: "'Ah, master,' sighed the black, bowing his face, 'don't speak of me; Babo is nothing; what Babo has done was but duty'" (p. 120). When Babo is not gazing with his usual "mute concern" at Benito, he is plaintively sighing, "'my poor, poor master!'" (p. 118.) The way in which many of Babo's statements contribute to his mask cannot be fully realized until after the deposition is read. With a second reading of the story one sees that most of his statements are deliberately deceitful and ironical. For instance, when Delano inquires about buying Babo, Babo replies: "'Master wouldn't part with Babo for a thousand doubloons'"; or the statement Babo makes "with a sort of half humorous sorrow" while shaving Benito: "'See, master--you shook so--here's Babo's first blood'" (pp. 136, 154-55).

Bledsoe, too, carefully tailors all of his speeches. Although he hollers belligerently at his black students, he "croons" like an Uncle Tom when talking with the white trustees (p. 94). The letter he writes to Mr. Emerson, supposedly recommending "P" for a job, is typical of the way he uses language as a part of his mask. Trying to seem concerned and respectful, he vaguely explains that

he does not want to "upset certain delicate relationships between certain interested individuals and the school." He affects emotions by using such words as "grievously" and "painlessly." Instead of saying "Keep this Nigger Running" as his real self would say, his masked self concocts an elaborate simile: "I beg of you, sir, to help him continue in the direction of that promise which, like the horizon, recedes ever brightly and distantly beyond the hopeful traveler" (p. 168).

Both Babo and Bledsoe wear a mask that affects their conduct, dress, and speech. Upon closer examination, however, one sees that the two characters are using the same means of different ends--the former to liberate his people, the latter to subjugate them. The deposition indicates that Babo's plan was a last minute expedient designed to meet the emergency of Delano's approaching ship. If the blacks are to sail to Senegal, they have to act as if a revolt has not occurred. When Babo announces his plan to the other blacks, all agree that it is necessary for their defense. There is no reason to assume Babo would have continued acting once the slaves were free of Delano's ship.

The type of mask wearing that Babo does is for survival purposes and is close to the type of mask wearing

that "P"'s grandfather does. Both see mask wearing as a necessary expedient of their race's survival. Babo needs and receives the cooperation of all the blacks aboard the San Dominick. Their mask wearing is a group effort. Similarly, the grandfather views mask wearing as a group ruse, to be passed down from one generation to the next: "'Learn it to the younguns,' he whispered fiercely; then he died" (p. 20).

Contrastingly, Bledsoe's mask is not for the benefit of his race, but for personal gain. This type of mask wearing is not in accordance with the grandfather's advice. Bledsoe, a "Machiavellian discipline of Humility,"⁷ discloses to "P" that he is power hungry: "I's big and black and I say suh' as loudly as any burrhead when it's convenient, but I'm still the king down here. I don't care how much it appears otherwise. Power doesn't have to show off. Power is confident, self-assuring, self-starting and self-stopping, self-warming and self-justifying'" (p. 127). As Raymond Olderman points out, Bledsoe "is the man who assumes the mask of humility to cover the drive for power. He says yes on the surface while he controls underneath; but he is not the answer to the puzzle left in grandfather's words, for he denies dignity and pride and affirms power only and that, the narrator learns later, could not be the message of the past."⁸

Bledsoe, unlike Babo, has no dreams about carrying his people to a safe haven. In fact, he exclaims, "'I'll have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am'" (p. 128). Ellin Horowitz comments that "for power [Bledsoe] will say yes and aid white men in subjugating his people. The hero's grandfather, however, made no claim to rule. He simply allowed himself to be swallowed so that the white man would choke."⁹

Because his own power philosophy lacks dignity, Bledsoe criticizes "P" for having "vague notions about dignity": "'You let the white folk worry about pride and dignity--you learn where you are and get yourself power, influence, contacts with powerful and influential people--then stay in the dark and use it'" (p. 129). Keeping blacks invisible aids Bledsoe's interests.

Bledsoe's power philosophy supports his concepts of education. To him education is knowing what lies to tell whites in order to advance oneself. Disappointed with "P"'s stupidity, Bledsoe rages, "'Why, the dumbest black bastard in the cotton patch knows that the only way to please a white man is to tell him a lie!'" (p. 124). Bledsoe exclaims that blacks who tell the truth should be under lock and key and concludes that "P" is a "black educated fool" (pp. 126-28). He cannot understand how "P"

could have gone as far in his school as to be allowed to chauffeur a white trustee and yet be so ignorant. His school exists to train mask wearers. The idyllic description of the school itself is a version of the mask its students are being taught to wear. Winding roads, southern verandas, broken fountains, purple wisteria, and white magnolias cover the campus. "P" even suggests that millionnaires give to the school because of the effect of "a subtle magic, the alchemy of moonlight" that surrounds the school. Archie Sanders, who compares the structure of Invisible Man with that of The Aeneid, identifies the school with the land of the lotuc-eaters because of its captivating, seductive atmosphere.¹⁰ The narrator always uses affected speech to describe this Eden: "Oh, long green stretch of campus, Oh, quiet songs at dusk, Oh, moon that kissed the steeple and flooded the perfumed nights, Oh, bugle that called in the morning . . ." (p. 38).

Just as the school is a version of the mask its students are being taught to wear, the San Dominick appears to be a version of the mask Babo and his conspirators are wearing. The ship is not masked so much as Delano's eyes are veiled. Delano suggests that the San Dominick may be like a "slumbering volcano." Babo's mask does make him a slumbering volcano. His meekness hides his treachery.

Ever so often his fellow blacks demonstrate eruptive behavior. The San Dominick, unlike Bledsoe's school, hints at what is behind the mask. Underneath Babo's facade of fidelity and submission is his destructive nature. The ship is surrounded by death and decay images. Its hull has a "hearse-like roll" (p. 110). Abroad the San Dominick are executioners and the skeleton of one of the executed. The part of the ship which reveals the most about what is behind Babo's mask is the shield-like stern piece in which a dark masked satyr holds his foot on the prostrate neck of a writing figure symbolizing Babo's hold on Benito.

The primary importance of masks in Benito Cereno and Invisible Man is to indicate how the destinies of the races are intertwined. Because Babo wears a mask of humility, Delano sees a connection between him and Benito. Thinking Babo to be "a sort of privy-counsellor," Delano feels the connection to be filial or fraternal. However, the mask covers up the real relationship--one of betrayer/friend. Instead of being tractable, as Aranda had said, Babo proves treacherous. Bruce Franklin has explored the real relationship behind the mask:

There are several shadowy hints that the relationship between Cereno and Babo is like that between Christ and Judas. Delano, who sometimes obtusely attributes to Cereno characteristics which really belong to Babo, compares Cereno to Judas: 'was the

Spaniard less hardened than the Jew, who refrained not from supping at the board of him who the same night he meant to betray?' Christ limits the identity of his betrayer with these words: 'But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table' (Luke 22:21). At Cereno's last meal on the San Dominick Babo's hand on the table is given an ominous importance: 'For nothing was to be seen but the hand of this servant pushing the Canary over toward him.'¹¹

Benito's fate is so tied to Babo's that shortly after Babo is executed, Benito also dies.

Bledsoe's mask and the grandfather's mask also indicate how the races are intertwined. Bledsoe feels he must wear his mask in order to procure finances for his school. White trustees provide the finances for black education, thus tying together trustee and student. This is why Norton insists that "P" is his destiny. He provides for "P"'s education. To keep the funds coming, Bledsoe says "yes" when it is convenient and "acts the nigger" when necessary (pp. 127-28). He dons this mask in order not to upset what he calls "certain delicate relationships" (p. 168).

The grandfather's mask, like Babo's, hides the nature of his true relationship with whites, that of betrayer/friend. Under his meekness was a militancy that made him "a traitor all [his] born days," a "spy in the enemy's country" (p. 19). The whites thought that he was a quiet ex-slave wanting what was best for their common good (p. 19)

but in reality he was plotting their downfall. The grandfather, the white's foe, wears a mask in order to be thought their friend.

2

Masking is deceptive inasmuch as it hides reality. By using masks, Babo, Bledsoe, and "P"'s grandfather create ambiguous relationships between appearance and reality. There is another kind of ambiguity within reality itself. This kind of ambiguity is exemplified by the white whale. The white whale illustrates how opposite tendencies, good and evil, can be incorporated in one object. Ahab's problem is that when he gets behind the pasteboard mask, he sees Moby Dick as only representing one thing, evil--"all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick" (p. 180). When Ahab insists that the whale has only one meaning out of many possible meanings, he becomes susceptible to the dangers of subjectivism.

Ishmael, however, sees reality as ambiguous. For him what is behind the mask is whiteness, and that whiteness is ambiguous. The chapter, "The Whiteness of the Whale," shows that whiteness means different things in itself. (Whiteness along with blackness will be discussed at length

in Chapter III). The white whale (Nature) is both good and evil. It represents nobility, strength, and innocence, as well as horror, fear, and death. Ishmael sees whiteness as representing the best and worst of things because it is, as Richard Chase points out, "the paradoxical color, the color that involves all the contradictions Melville attributes to nature. It signifies death and corruption as readily as virginal purity, innocence, and youth. It has the advantage of being, from one point of view, the color that contains all colors, whereas from another point of view, it suggests a tabula rasa which may be imaginatively endowed with significance according to the desire or obsession of him who beholds it."¹² After a lengthy meditation analyzing all the contrary qualities of whiteness, Ishmael concludes: "And of all these things the Albino Whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?"

The white whale does indeed contain contrary qualities. He is benign and yet evil. However, in between these two opposed qualities are other qualities that the whale possesses. The cetology, (to be discussed in Chapter IV) often suggests the many faces, the multiplicity of the whale. Sometimes the whale turns away in exasperation, sometimes in indifference. On the first day of the chase

Moby Dick moves away from the Pequod: "A gentle joyousness--a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness, invested the gliding whale. Not the white bull Jupiter swimming away with ravished Europa clinging to his graceful horns; his lovely leering eyes sideways intent upon the maid; with smooth bewitching fleetness, rippling straight for the nuptial bower in Crete; not Jove, not that great majesty Supreme! did surpass the glorified White Whale as he so divinely swam" (p. 538). The whale's many tendencies touch upon the traits of Ellison's Rinehart.

Rinehart is the Man of Possibility and unresolved contradictions. Unlike Babo, Bledsoe, and "P"'s grandfather, who wear one consistent mask, Rinehart assumes many masks. The spectrum of ambiguity culminates in him, for he is an example of both masking and multiplicity. To term him a simple mask wearer limits his roles. I prefer the term that one critic uses--"a practiced shape-shifter."¹³ As a shape-shifter, he is like the white whale--his very nature is contradictory and his roles are multiple. Melville places more emphasis on the whale's contradictory nature, whereas Ellison places more emphasis on Rinehart's multiple roles.

"P" first comes into contact with Rinehart's multiplicity when he decides to put on some very dark green

glasses in order to evade his pursuers. Much to his surprise a young woman wearing a tightly fitting dress and overbearing perfume approaches him and inquires, "'Rinehart baby, is that you?'" She gets very angry when she discovers that he is not Rinehart and warns him that he had better not let Rinehart catch him in his pretense. "P" concludes that Rinehart must be the lady's lover.

Immediately after this incident "P" sees some hipsters wearing dark glasses, silk shirts, and wide brimmed hats. They familiarly greet him: "'What you sayin,' daddy-o . . . Rinehart, poppa, tell us what you putting down . . . Play it cool ole man, play it cool!'" By this time "P" decides to do some research on Rinehart so that he will know for whom he is being mistaken. Then some men in zoot-suits greet him in the same lingo as the hipsters--"daddy-o" and a bartender calls him "pappastopper."

At the bar "P" sees Maceo, a member of the Brotherhood, and learns of another of Rinehart's many roles. "P" feels that if Maceo does not detect him, then his disguise does indeed work. Believing him to be Rinehart, Maceo speaks to him rather sharply and assumes that "Rinehart" wants to knife him. They quarrel violently, and "P" finds himself using the language and assuming the type of attitude Rinehart might have. He postulates that Rinehart must be

a pretty belligerent fellow, for the bartender tells him not to try pulling his gun.

Finally, "P" learns of Rinehart's other roles. In the next block a man asks "Rinehart" for a job. A woman wants to know "the final figger," because Rinehart is also a numbers runner. Then "P" finds out that Rinehart has some kind of shady deal with the police department. By this time, "P" can hardly believe that one person can play so many different roles. And yet Rinehart has still two more identities--that of a pimp and of a preacher. An "exotic girl" walks up to "Daddy Rinehart" and tries to give him money. An old lady, member of the Holy Way Station Church, praises Reverend Rinehart for spiritual fortitude: "'You know, Rever'n, I once heard you preach years ago. You was just a lil' ole twelve-year-old boy, back in Virginia. And here I came North and find you, praise God, still preaching gospel, doing the Lord's work. Still preaching the ole time religion here in this wicked city'" (pp. 427, 429). Just as the white whale incorporates two very opposed tendencies, good and evil, Rinehart lives as pimp and preacher.

After all the happenings of this curious night, "P" ponders what he has learned about Rinehart: "Rine the runner and Rine the gambler and Rine the briber and Rine the lover and Rinehart the Reverend? Could he himself be both rind and heart?" (p. 430). It is the white whale's

ability to embody opposites that leads Ishmael similarly to ask, "Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?"

A fraud and a trickster, Rinehart is reminiscent of Melville's Confidence Man. Just as the Confidence Man can be a deaf-mute, a cripple, or an agent for an orphanage, Rinehart too changes. Ellison sees Rinehart as a follower in the long tradition of the archetypal trickster beginning with Ulysses and popularized by the Confidence Man.¹⁴ In talking about tricksters as diverse as Robert Green's Cony-Catchers and the Characters in American southwestern humor, Joseph Baim defines a trickster as someone who is "ambiguous, without a clearly defined personality. . . . The trickster is a perfectly inclusive figure in whom all opposition is resolved."¹⁵ The white whale's ambiguity and opposite tendencies can qualify it to be included in this definition.

One important difference between the Confidence Man and Rinehart, however, is their primary function. The Confidence Man, as Chase points out, "represents all that was wrong with the liberalism of Melville's day: its commercialism, its superficiality, its philistinism, its spurious optimism, its glad-handed self-congratulation, its wishfulfilling vagueness, its fondness for uplifting rhetoric, its betrayal of all tragic or exalted human and

natural values, its easy belief in automatic progress."¹⁶ Rinehart shifts identities in order to survive in a particular kind of Harlem environment which in itself is amorphous and kinetic.

Rinehart's world of possibilities is really what fascinates "P." This is the same type of world Ishmael is able to comprehend, but Ahab tries to narrow by defining too precisely. "P" must learn that Rinehart serves more as a warning than as a model. After he gets mistaken many times for Rinehart, "P" muses over the type of world within which Rinehart exists: "His world was possibility and he knew it. He was years ahead of me and I was a fool. I must have been crazy and blind. The world in which we lived was without boundaries. A vast seething, hot world of fluidity, and Rine the rascal was at home. Perhaps only Rine the rascal was at home in it. It was unbelievable, but perhaps only the unbelievable could be believed. Perhaps the truth was always a lie" (p. 430). "P" realizes that the members of the Brotherhood live in a static world and would be "outraged to discover that there is another type of world out here--a world where "you could actually make yourself anew. The notion was frightening. . . . All boundaries down, freedom was not only the recognition of necessity, it was the recognition of

possibility" (p. 431). The more "P" contemplates Rinehart's world, the more he questions his own self: "How could I have missed it for so long? Hadn't I grown up around gambler-politicians, bootlegger-judges and sheriffs who were buglars; yes, and klansmen who were preachers and members of humanitarian societies? Hell, and hadn't Bledsoe tried to tell me what it was all about? (p. 441).

Realizing that "somewhere between Rinehart and invisibility there were great potentialities" (p. 441), "P" decides to imitate Rinehart, which proves disastrous. A germinal theme of the book is that one should assume his own identity and not accept any identity that is externally thrust upon him. In an effort to use Rinehart's methods on the Brotherhood, "P" decides to seduce one of the members' wives. Unfortunately for him, Sybil is available. Early in the evening he realizes his mistake: "I tried to manage things as I imagined Rinehart would have done. But I bungled it from the beginning. I made the drinks too strong-- which she liked too well; and I brought up politics-- which she all but hated--too early in the evening" (p. 447). Sybil refers to "P" as "Beautiful" and requests that he sing "Old Man River," do tricks, and rape her. Living in a fantasy world in which all black males are bucks, Sybil also wants the "big black bruiser"

to beat her. Instead of calling him "Beautiful," she now calls him "Boo'ful"--he is her sexual Boogie Bear.

After this incident "P" realizes that he cannot be another Rinehart. During the riot, in one last effort to hide himself, he searches for his dark Rinehart glasses but finds them crushed. Like all the other tokens in his brief case they prove to be no answer to his dilemma, for Rinehart is a master of chaos (p. 498). However, "P" does learn something from Rinehart: "My world has become one of infinite possibilities. What a phrase--still it's a good phrase and a good view of life, and a man shouldn't accept any other; that much I've learned underground. Until some gang succeeds in putting the world in a strait jacket, its definition is possibility" (p. 498). This is what all mask wearers and shape-shifters intuitively realize and what "P" learns--reality is fluid.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER II

¹ Earnest Kaiser, "A Critical Look at Ellison's Fiction and at Social and Literary Criticism By and About the Author," Black World, 20, No. 2 (1970), 83.

² Edward Margolies, "Melville and Blacks," CLA Journal, 18, No. 3 (March 1975), 364.

³ Robert Bone, "Ralph Ellison and the Uses of the Imagination," in Anger and Beyond, ed. Herbert Hill (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 98.

⁴ Todd Lieber, "Ralph Ellison and the Metaphor of Invisibility in Black Literary Tradition," American Quarterly, 24 (1972), 96.

⁵ Paul Laurence Dunbar, "We Wear the Mask," in Black Writers of America, ed. Richard Barksdale and Kenneth Kinnamon (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), p. 352.

⁶ Rosalie Feltenstein, "Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" American Literature, 19 (1947), 251.

⁷ Floyd Ross Horowitz, "The Enigma of Ellison's Intellectual Man," CLA Journal, 7, No. 2 (December 1963), 129.

⁸ Raymond Olderman, "Ralph Ellison's Blues and Invisible Man," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, 7, (1966), 147.

⁹ Ellin Horowitz, "The Rebirth of the Artist," in On Contemporary Literature, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Avon Books, 1964), p. 334.

¹⁰ Archie Sanders, "Odysseus in Black: An Analysis of the Structure of Invisible Man," CLA Journal, 13, No. 3 (March 1970), 221.

¹¹ H. Bruce Franklin, The Wake of the Gods: Melville's Mythology (Stanford University Press, 1963), p. 148.

¹²Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1957), pp. 110-111.

¹³John W. Shroeder, "Sources and Symbols for Melville's Confidence-Man," PMLA, 66 (1951), 368.

¹⁴Shadow and Act, p. 181.

¹⁵Joseph Baim, "The Confidence-Man as Trickster," American Transcendental Quarterly, 1 (1st Quarter, 1969), 81.

¹⁶Chase, p. 206.

CHAPTER III

WHITENESS OR BLACKNESS: WHICH "CASTS THE SHADOW?"

1

The characters in Moby Dick, Benito Cereno, and Invisible Man perceive whiteness and blackness in particular ways that determine their outlooks on the related concepts of evil and guilt. When Ellison states that "there is a mystery in the whiteness of blackness, the innocence of evil and the evil of innocence,"¹ he is playing with the same type of color symbolism so basic to Melville's vision. However, in Invisible Man Ellison makes some deliberate reversals. Whereas in Moby Dick Ishmael contemplates the ambiguity of whiteness, in Invisible Man "P" contemplates the ambiguity of blackness. Whereas in Benito Cereno Melville closely aligns blackness with evil, in Invisible Man Ellison aligns whiteness with evil. The question that ends Benito Cereno begins Invisible Man: What has cast a shadow? When Delano asks, "What has cast such a shadow upon you?", Benito replies, "The Negro"--el negro--blackness, darkness. Invisible Man, however, gives the exact opposite response--el blanco, whiteness, brightness. One author describes evil through a black metaphor, and the

other through a white metaphor. In this chapter I would like to explore how Melville and Ellison arrive at completely different answers to the same question.

First of all, in Moby Dick Melville presents whiteness as the color pregnant with meaning, as the color full of ambiguity. To confirm this assertion one has only to look at Ishmael's views on whiteness. Why select Ishmael? To Ahab, who suffers from monomania, the whale is evil incarnate. To Ishmael, who has already been established in Chapter II as having an encyclopedic mind, the whale has as many meanings as the color white. Ishmael is the only character in the work aware of such multiplicity. Since Ishmael can be regarded as a "reliable narrator," his views of whiteness as a concept are credible within the framework of the novel. As R. E. Watters suggests, "there are . . . innumerable meanings for the white whale, just as there are innumerable readings of other examples of 'Nature's cunning alphabet.' This fact does not, of course, make every meaning equal to every other: that kind of philosophical relativism was foreign to Melville's thought. But . . . for Melville the more nearly omniscient the observer, the more true and valuable his interpretation."² Ishmael's interpretations of whiteness are not only valuable, but revealing. He sees whiteness at

the center of all mysteries and as the color that encompasses opposites and baffles the mind.

At the beginning of Chapter 42, "The Whiteness of the Whale," Ishmael says that he must explain the phenomenon of whiteness before he proceeds with his narrative, or "else all these chapters might be naught" (p. 184). He begins by specifying all the positive connotations of whiteness. It represents the innocence of brides, the benignity of age, the beauty of natural objects, and the majesty of justice. It is the color of kings and gods. Royalty uses white elephants, snow-white chargers, and white steeds. In various religions it is the symbol of divine spotlessness and power. Attempting to show its universal positive appeal, Ishmael draws his examples from a variety of cultures--Roman, Persian, Greek, American Indian, and Christian.

After examining all these favorable connotations, Ishmael lets the reader know that this is only one half the story: "Yet for all these accumulated associations, with whatever is sweet, and honorable, and sublime, there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood" (p. 185). Ishmael begins to contemplate all the terrifying connotations of whiteness. Animals like polar bears and white sharks, which by their

very size and ferocity cause fear, by their whiteness cause even more fear. Geographical locations which carry "white" in their titles--the White Mountains of New Hampshire, the White Tower of London, and the White Sea--are more awesome than other places. Even the whitest person, the Albino, "repels and often shocks the eye. . . [He] is as well made as other men--has no substantive deformity--and yet this mere aspect of all-pervading whiteness makes him more strangely hideous than the ugliest abortion. Why should this be so?" (P. 188). These fearful connotations are as universal as the favorable ones. Harry Levin comments: "The symbolism of terror is universal. Otherwise Death would not ride a pale horse in Scriptures, and the Ancient Mariner would never have been bedeviled by an albatross. The glitter of Antarctic snow and ice, we may not irrelevantly remember, was the single mystery that Poe had left unresolved."³

After Ishmael contemplates the varied meanings of whiteness, he concludes that he still has not "solved the incantation of this whiteness, and learned why it appeals with such power to the soul; and more strange and far more portentous--why, as we have seen it is at once the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian's Deity; and yet should be as it is, the

intensifying agent in things most appalling to mankind" (p. 192). By emphasizing and discussing the vast scope of whiteness, Ishmael suggests that whiteness is the nature of the cosmos. The whiteness of the whale becomes a symbol for the universe.

"P" makes the same claims for blackness. While hallucinating in his underground retreat (p. 11), he contemplates the nature of blackness, the way it embraces opposites and contains ambiguities. His hallucinatory experience occurs at different levels. At first "P" finds himself listening to music in a new, analytical way, "hearing not only in time, but in space as well." Then he begins to descend into deeper depths. On one level he hears an old woman "singing a spiritual as full of Weltschmerz as flamenco." On a lower level he sees a slave auction. On the deepest level he hears a sermon on the "Blackness of Blackness." Using a black lingo and an antiphonal structure, the preacher shouts that blackness is the beginning of all things. Then follows the series of contradictions:

'Now black is . . . ' the preacher shouted.
 'Bloody . . . '
 'I said black is . . . '
 'Preach it, brother . . . '
 ' . . . an' black ain't . . . '
 'Red, Lawd, red: He said it's red!'
 'Amen, brother . . . '
 'Black will git you . . . '

'Yes, it will . . .'
 ' . . . an' black won't . . .'
 'Naw, it won't!'
 'It do . . .'
 'It do, Lawd . . .'
 ' . . . an' it don't'
 'Halleluiah . . .'
 ' . . . It'll put you, glory, glory, Oh my Lawd in the
 WHALE'S BELLY.'
 'Preach it, dear brother . . .'
 ' . . . an' make you tempt . . .'
 'Good God a-mighty!'
 'Old Aunt Nelly!'
 'Black will make you . . .'
 'Black . . .'
 ' . . . or black will un-make you'
 'Ain't it the truth, Lawd?' (Pp. 12-13.)

By dreaming that "black is and black ain't; that it will and it won't and that it do and it don't," "P" attributes to blackness the same double meanings and contradictions that Ishmael feels whiteness carries. Just as Ishmael discusses the positive and negative qualities of whiteness, the aforementioned black sermon discusses the heights of blackness--"it'll put you in glory" and the horror of blackness--"it'll make you tempt Good God a-mighty!" Ishmael speaks about the awesomeness and the paradoxes of whiteness, while the sermon says that blackness is paradoxically red and that it affrights the very blood. Ishmael establishes the importance and contradictions of whiteness by devoting a chapter to its contemplation and by citing examples from many cultures to show its universal significance. The black preacher establishes the importance of blackness by declaring:

'In the beginning . . .'
 'At the very start, they cried.
 '. . . there was blackness . . .'

In blackness all things begin and are reconciled.
 According to the sermon, the nature of the cosmos is
 blackness, and not Ishmael's "all-prevading whiteness."

All of the aforementioned happens during "P"'s
 hallucinatory experience while he is smoking a reefer. Is
 it valid, therefore, to compare "P"'s thoughts on the
 ambiguity of blackness with Ishmael's on the ambiguity of
 whiteness, since Ishmael is speaking in a much more con-
 scious state? Would "P" feel the same way if he were fully
 awake? Before defending the validity of "P"'s experience,
 it should be pointed out that although Ishmael is not
 speaking from a physically, drugged state of mind, he does
 refer to the "incantation" of whiteness and its portentous
 appeal to the soul (p. 192). This suggests a hallucinatory
 or nightmarish quality that is in accordance with much of
 the atmosphere of Moby Dick--all the omens, the "supersti-
 tious dread," and the demonism of Ahab.

To receive this revelation about blackness while he is
 hallucinating does not diminish its validity, but in fact
 increases it. What is important in the novel usually takes
 place during a hallucinatory experience, a dream, or a
 nightmarish episode. For instance, after "P" gives his

high school speech, he dreams that he is with his grandfather who instructs him to open an envelope and read an engraved document containing the words: "To Whom It May Concern . . . Keep This Nigger-Boy Running" (p. 35). This recurring dream is prophetic of what actually happens in his encounter with Bledsoe. Another instance is the surreal hysteria which characterizes the important Golden Day Episode. The whole ordeal at Liberty Paints is like a "sequence in a feverish dream" (p. 176), and "P" is in a semi-conscious state at the hospital. There is a "quality of unreality" about the eviction afternoon. Events at the final riot are like a "nightmarish somersault" (p. 481). Ras resembles "a figure out of a dream" (p. 481). "P"'s last dream is of being castrated by Bledsoe. The whole novel has a surrealist, Kafkaesque atmosphere, and one of "P"'s final questions is, "Why should I be the one to dream this nightmare?" (p. 501). Eugenia Collier suggests that

perhaps the voice of the unconscious--the source of personal truth--speaks most clearly and consistently in dreams. . . . In his epochal Invisible Man, Ralph Ellison has used dreams and semi-conscious states as the depositories of truth for his unnamed archetypal protagonist . . . These unconscious manifestations contain the crux of the novel. Together they contain virtually every vital symbol of the book. By examining the Protagonist's dreams and semi-conscious states one by one, we can trace not only the development of his awareness, but also the unfolding of the novel's essential truth.⁴

One of the "essential truths" about blackness is its paradoxical nature, its depth, and its intensity. "P" often uses expressions like "black dark," "dark, plum black," "pitch black," "most black, Brother, most black" when speaking of blackness. The blackness is so deep that "P" has to "plunge" into the blackness of his mind or "dive" into his blackness to get to his identity (p. 209). Just as Ishmael cannot "solve the incantation of whiteness," "P" cannot penetrate the mysteries of blackness. To both of them their respective colors are pregnant with paradoxes.

Recapitulating, whiteness is ambiguous and meaningful to Ishmael; blackness is ambiguous and meaningful to "P." When Ishmael looks around at nature, at the cosmos, he sees whiteness--"the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian's Diety" (p. 192). "P" looks at the same cosmos and uses for his text, "The Blackness of Blackness," and concludes that in the beginning there was blackness. In Moby Dick whiteness is at the core of the universe, and in Invisible Man blackness is. In Section Two of this paper I will attempt to show how Melville and Ellison, in answering the question, What casts the shadow?, align guilt and destruction to their color symbolism. Neither writer links guilt and destruction

to the color he feels to be the most meaningful or the most ambiguous.

2

Invisible Man and Moby Dick have indeed, many parallels. This is not surprising since Ellison admits to having a fascination with nineteenth-century American literature,⁵ and Moby Dick is an important, if not the most important, work of that period. Invisible Man, however, claims to have a more direct relationship to Benito Cereno. It starts off with a question from Benito Cereno and purports to answer that question:

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

In this section we will discover what Invisible Man says casts the shadow and will thus determine Invisible Man's essential concerns, invisibility and blindness.

Before exploring Invisible Man's response, what is Benito Cereno's response to the question? At the end of the short story when Delano asks Benito, "What has cast such a shadow?", he is asking what has weakened and depressed Benito to the point that he cannot forget the past nor fully appreciate his rescue. Benito responds, "'The negro'" (p. 192). Benito has very negative perceptions of blackness.

Weak and despondent, Benito is at the mercy of Babo. Walking around like a "hypochondriac abbot" and lodging a distempered spirit in a distempered frame, Benito, "mocked with hope," falls a "prey to settled dejection." He nervously bites his lips and finger nails and twitches his beard. All this "nervous suffering" is supposedly, as Max Putzel suggests, because "the Spaniard is the victim of idleness, disorder, disillusionment, and malign force."⁶ As the story progresses, the adjectives describing Benito become more morbid. At only twenty-nine or thirty years, Benito wears a cadaverous aspect and keeps swooning and fainting--death wishes. This is the extent to which the shadow of the negro reduces him.

Through Babo, Benito sees a vision of reality that overpowers him. Like Hawthorne's Young Goodman Brown, Benito lets this vision of evil wreck him. This is why Guy Cardwell insists that "Don Benito is not a deeply perceptive martyr: the hypochondriac dies of his own inadequacy, of his inability to face or transcend the horror of life."⁷ When Benito reaches Lima, he is so diminished physically and mentally that he has to be carried ashore and needs both a physician and priest (p. 175). He cannot withstand the shadow of the negro, the web of evil of which he perceives he has been part of, perhaps even an agent of.

The shadow becomes fused with his own guilt. Blackness totally destroys him.

One could argue that Benito's whole attitude towards blackness is qualified by his hypochondriac disposition and whatever other weaknesses he may have as a character. However, because of the deposition which attributes inhumane acts to the blacks and because of Melville's handling of the original source, I maintain that, although evil in Benito Cereno extends beyond the black metaphor, it is definitely transmitted through a black metaphor. The deposition definitely attributes inhumane acts to the blacks, especially to Babo, their ringleader. Babo, representing the wishes of all the blacks, wants the murders done on the deck before him. He also throws some white seamen alive in the sea, and searches for the sharpest razor and makes it sharper to shave Benito. With his "dagger as alert as eyes" (p. 183), he is ready to kill instantly if anything goes wrong with his plan. As an act of mental cruelty, Babo brings the white seamen forward to behold Aranda's skeleton and teasingly questions them on the whiteness of it. Because of these acts, some critics have dealt very sharply with Babo. Newton Arvin calls him a "monster of Gothic fiction,"⁸ while Max Putzel terms him a "sinister and primitive conundrum."⁹ Sidney Kaplan even

suggests that Babo's name is an abbreviation of baboon, "ringleader of the Negroes who are primitives, beasts."¹⁰ If Babo's very name contains these connotations, then the evil in the story is attaching itself to blackness.

By making some significant changes to the original deposition, Melville associates the blacks with evil. In 1928 Harold H. Scudder discovered the source of Benito Cereno--the eighteenth chapter of Amasa Delano's A Narrative of Voyages and Travels.¹¹ Because of the close parallels, most critics do indeed accept Amasa Delano's narrative as the source. Those critics who have studied Melville's version and Amasa Delano's original deposition conclude that Melville tends to associate more of the evil and destruction with the blacks than the original does. For instance, Margaret Jackson describes the original deposition: "A highly realistic tale of the ingratitude of one captain to another, with a unique instance of a mutiny of slaves, interesting because of its incredibility, was transformed into a Gothic tale of terror, with an entirely different theme."¹² Jackson also points out that in the original source Benito does not come across as weakened and depressed by Babo, but is a very villainous person himself, treating the blacks far worse than the blacks treated them. Benito, like Babo, also had a concealed

daggar in the end.¹³ After analyzing what facts were added, deleted, or attributed to different characters, Rosalie Feltenstein concludes that "Melville is everywhere consistent in altering the source to emphasize Babo as the origin of evil."¹⁴ Blackness is the pervading color and is associated with most of the physical destruction in Benito Cereno.

Contrastingly, the color that is most prevalent and destructive throughout Invisible Man is whiteness. Whiteness casts the shadow, produces the harm. Its destructive quality, however, is different from the way blackness is physically destructive in Benito Cereno. "P" unlike Benito, does not die from its effects. Whiteness in Invisible Man is mentally destructive--it is damaging to "P"'s psychological existence, for it is always present, permeating every episode and affecting all his thoughts. Ellison takes the physical terror and violence that Melville shows through a black metaphor, transforms it into a mental oppression and shows it through a white metaphor.

Whiteness begins to surround and affect "P" during the first episode--the Battle Royal. Before "P" gives his high school speech, "tense white faces" blindfold him with broad bands of white cloth. Although he tries

desperately to push the layers of white aside, he fails to do so. He simply cannot get out of the white blindfold which is "as tight as a thick skin-puckering scab" (pp. 24-25).

While driving Norton, "P" focuses his attention on the white line dividing the highway. Because he finds the white line captivating, he "glues" his eyes to it. The further he drives the more blazing the white line becomes. Half-consciously following the white line causes him to drive out of the way towards Trueblood's place. When Norton sees Trueblood, "P" wishes he were on the other side of the line. He also gets disgusted when he sees the Vets crossing the white lines. By the end of the day "P" refers to the highway with its white dividing line as being "hostile." It only serves to increase his fears and disappointments (p. 90).

The whiteness of Liberty Paints and the whiteness of the hospital also affect "P." To enter the paint plant, "P" walks down a pure white hall. He worries over getting the glossy white paint the exact tinge and recalls that the buildings of the campus were the same glossy white. When he works in the sub-basement, he fails to turn off the white valve and the explosion leaves him in "a bath of whiteness" (p. 201). He is taken to a hospital where clinical whiteness surrounds him. He

sits in a "cold, white rigid chair," wears strange white overalls, and sees nothing but long, white corridors, white ceilings, and white attendants in white coats. Because of a "clinging white mist," he cannot even remember his name. Lost in all of this whiteness, he wonders: "Where [does] my body end and the crystal and white world begin? The whiteness symbolizes the impersonality and sterility of the modern, mechanical age.

The largest concentration of whiteness in Invisible Man is in Norton. If Babo personifies the physically destructive power of blackness, Norton personifies the mentally destructive power of whiteness. Everything about Norton is white: silk white hair, "weak and white faced," white cheeks, white shoes, all white suit (a "white-suited St. Nicholas") and white ideas--"forty years a bearer of the white man's burden and for sixty a symbol of the Great Traditions" (p. 39). "P" often describes him as "chalk white." Accordingly, when Norton gets sick at the Golden Day, he lays around like a "figure of white chalk" (p. 71). It is the overwhelming whiteness of Norton which contributes to the "nightmare landscape"¹⁵ of the novel. Reacting to Norton's whiteness, some of the vets were "hostile, some cringing, some horrified;

some, who when among themselves were most violent now appeared as submissive as children. And some seemed strangely amused" (p. 75). "P" reacts even more strongly: "a mass of whiteness was looming two inches from my eyes: it was only his face but I felt a shudder of nameless horror. I had never been so close to a white person before. 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, suddenly appeared before me, a death which had been there all the time and which had now revealed itself in the madness of the Golden Day" (pp. 79-80). Norton's whiteness frightens "P," and by the end of the novel, "P" sees Norton, Jack, and Emerson as one single white, terrifying figure (p. 439).

The vet who was once a doctor (hereafter referred to as the vet) sees Norton's whiteness for what it is and summarizes Norton's role in life: "For some you are the great white father, to others the lyncher of souls, but for all you are confusion come even into the Golden Day" (p. 86). Notice, the vet is not accusing Norton of actually lynching bodies, but of an equal offense-destroying minds. All of the black students at the school are being damaged by Norton's ideas. Pointing to "P," the vet declares, "'Behold! a walking zombie! Already he's learned to repress not only

his emotions but his humanity. He's invisible, a walking personification of the Negative, the most perfect achievement of your dreams, sir! The mechanical man!" (p. 86). This vet wants "P" to realize the mental destruction that Norton is perpetuating.

Although in an insane asylum, the vets are quite perceptive. Just as they realize that their attendant, Supercargo, who checks their inhibitions and censors them, is really taking over the role of their superego, they realize that Norton is a "trustee of consciousness" (p. 82), a destroyer of minds. This is indeed what Norton tries to be by continuously emphasizing how his destiny is linked to the blacks, how their fate is his fate. Although Norton speaks positively about these intertwined destinies, the vet sees clearly the relationship. He informs Norton and "P": "'You cannot see or hear or smell the truth of what you see--and you, looking for destiny! It's classic! And the boy, this automation, he was made of the very mud of the region and he sees far less than you. Poor stumblers, neither of you can see the other. To you he is a mark on the score -- card of your achievement, a thing and not a man; a child, or even less--a black amorphous thing. And you, for all your power, are not a man to him, but a God, a force--'" (p. 87). Norton perpetuates these kinds of false relationships.

Bledsoe and the trustees waste no time in transferring the vet to another asylum because he speaks too freely. He exposes Norton's "crimes." Because of his frankness, whites fear him. The treatment he receives contrasts with that of Trueblood. The whites reward Trueblood for his incestual sin because he gives substance to their myth. On the other hand, they whip the vet for saving a life. Trueblood is the scapegoat for Norton's own sins, and it is this kind of situation which "casts the shadow"--the white man's own whiteness, his own guilt.¹⁶ The vet often talks about the problem that "they" have. Upon being asked to whom his constant "they" refers, he replies: "'They? Why, the same they we always mean, the white folks, authority, the gods, fate, circumstances--the force that pulls your strings until you refuse to be pulled any more'" (p. 137). He sees "they" as the problem --they cast their own shadow. All the incidents in Invisible Man stress the mental dangers of whiteness.

As shown, Melville and Ellison deal with the metaphysical implications of whiteness and blackness. As pointed out in Section One, in Moby Dick Ishmael sees whiteness at the center of life, ambiguously pregnant with meaning, reconciling opposites. In Invisible Man the sermon, "The Blackness of Blackness," makes these claims

for blackness, not whiteness. In Benito Cereno evil is transmitted through a black metaphor, but in Invisible Man through a white metaphor. For Melville white is ambiguous, but black is unambiguously evil. For Ellison black is ambiguous, but white is unambiguously evil. Therefore, when Benito Cereno answers what casts the shadow, the response is blackness, darkness. But Invisible Man's response is whiteness, brightness. As a modern black writer, it is not surprising that Ellison's answer is different. Although Invisible Man is concerned with the same types of questions that Moby Dick and Benito Cereno are concerned with, it is at the same time a "black novel" and answers its questions from a black perspective.

3

Ellison's answer that whiteness casts the shadow is significant, for it is in accordance with his invisibility concept. The white man casts a shadow that makes the black man invisible. This invisibility is not the black man's fault, but a condition he must learn to live with. Standing in shadows, blacks cannot be seen by whites. Dr. Vet accurately tells "P": "'You're hidden right out in the open'" (p. 137). Ellison makes a lot of careful distinctions between blindness and invisibility. Any character may be blind, but black characters are invisible. For

instance, in Benito Cereno Delano is blind, but Babo is invisible. Blinded by racism and innocence Delano cannot see Babo. "P" stresses that he is invisible, not because he cannot see, but because others refuse to see him.

In Benito Cereno numerous incidents take place which should have led Delano to suspect mutinous activity on the part of the slaves, but he does not see them as intelligent human beings. The whites seem to have suffered disproportionately from misfortune; four blacks are stationed above the rest; a slave cuts a white seaman without being reprimanded; the blacks exhibit a "noisy indocility" and the whites a "sullen inefficiency"; no white officers are present; the slaves have sudden fits of violence and there is general confusion. But because Babo and the other slaves are invisible to Delano, Delano's suspicions are never of them, but of Benito.

In his blindness, Delano sees nothing unusual about Babo, but sees Benito exhibiting a "mysterious demeanour." Delano keeps wondering about what "sinister schemes" Benito may have and develops a "ghostly dread" towards him (p. 133). He wonders about the veracity of Benito's story and Benito's idiosyncracies. He even believes that Benito is thinking of having him massacred. When Benito jumps into the boat, Delano feels he is merely feigning a kidnapping. Only when

Delano spots Babo with a second dagger in his hand does he guess the truth: "Captain Delano, now with scales dropped from his eyes, saw the negroes, not in misrule, not in tumult, not as if frantically concerned for Don Benito, but with mask torn away, flourishing hatchets, and knives, in ferocious piratical revolt" (p. 171).

Why had Delano been so blind? Delano never suspects the truth aboard the San Dominick because he stereotypes the mentality of the slaves. Delano's ideas that blacks make the "most pleasing body-servants in the world" (p. 114), and that "there is something in the negro which, in a peculiar way, fits him for avocations about one's person" (p. 151) forces him to interpret all of Babo's actions as filial, fraternal, or faithful. He thinks that Babo loves Benito as a friend or counsellor would because that is what he wants to believe. He sees the slaves as musical, good-humoured and cheerful--"as though God had set the whole negro to some pleasant tune." He ponders whether Benito could be in complicity with the blacks, but then quickly concludes that they would be too stupid (p. 142). In actuality, the slaves are not only intelligent, but alert and shrewd.

After the truth is revealed, the ultimate insult Delano renders to Babo's ability is his final question to

Benito: "'You are saved,' cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; 'you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?'" Unable to conceive of the "malign evil in man" or to recognize Babo as an intelligent being, Delano does not understand how the whole ordeal could have long-term effects on Benito.

Delano's racial perceptions cause his blindness; his inability to see is his own fault. Contrastingly, "P"'s problem, invisibility, is not of his own making. Others refuse to see him. He has to learn to accept and deal with his condition. Babo and his cohorts realize that they are invisible to Delano. This is why they are able to effectively fool him. They take advantage of their invisibility, even to the point of using it for sadistic ends. "P," too discovers his invisibility, but takes advantage of it by other means.

In the prologue "P" tells how he first became aware of his invisibility. Whites continually bump into him while he is walking up and down the city's streets. Even when they apologize, they never glance his way. At first "P" responds with amazement, and then anger--How can anyone keep knocking against flesh and blood? He wants to bump them back. Later, people start bumping into him on subways and in cafeterias. These confrontations confuse "P" and he

attributes them to the "peculiar disposition" of the eyes of others.

As "P" gets used to his invisibility, he discovers that there are some advantages to invisibility. He lives in a cellar rent-free; he sees around corners, and has a different sense of time--"you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead" (p. 11). Invisibility gives him a broader view of life and enables him to "classify the stench of death" (p. 502). It also affects his value system: "When one is invisible he finds such problems as good and evil, honesty and dishonesty of such shifting shapes that he confuses one with the other, depending upon who happens to be looking through him at the time" (p. 495). Babo's invisibility also allows him to merge good with evil, to justify his own violence.

When the Brotherhood angers "P," he decides to use his invisibility as a weapon. He does not realize that he will be playing into the Brotherhood's hands, since they want a race riot. "P" wants the Brotherhood to "gag" and "choke" on what they refuse to see. He plans to use his invisibility to undermine them: "Oh, I'd serve them well and I'd make invisibility felt if not seen, and they'd

learn that it could be as polluting as a decaying body, or a piece of bad meat in a stew. And if I got hurt? Very well again. Besides, didn't they believe in sacrifice? They were the subtle thinkers--would this be treachery? Did the word apply to an invisible man? Could they recognize choice in that which wasn't seen? (p. 440). "P" often questions whether an invisible man should have the same code of responsibility as others. Initially, he feels that responsibility rests upon recognition, thus absolving an invisible man. By the end of the novel, however, feeling that he has hibernated too long, he concedes that "even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play."

Blindness is a problem that Delano personally has to conquer. Invisibility is a social problem arising from the shadow that the white man casts. Babo and "P" cannot make others see them. However, even invisible men have responsibilities. They must recognize their invisibility. Until the experience recorded in the novel proper, "P" is blind as well as invisible: he is blind to his own invisibility. The whites do not see "P" because they do not look. But even if they were to look "P" offers them nothing to see. Throughout the novel he learns to "run the risk of his own humanity" -- to make his own decisions, to define himself at any cost. To solve an invisibility problem one needs the cooperation of the perceiver and the perceived. All of

society has to work together if the motto e pluribus unum is ever to be realized. Politics must merge with perception. As "P" points out in the Epilogue, "America is woven of many strands. . . Our fate is to become one, and yet many--This is not prophecy, but description (p. 499). "P"'s problem is also society's problem. Therefore, for fear that his readers may think he has been raving only about his own dilemma, "P" asks his final question: "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?"

NOTES FOR CHAPTER III

- ¹Shadow and Act, p. 53.
- ²R. E. Watters, "The Meanings of the White Whale," University of Toronto Quarterly, 20 (1951), 157.
- ³Harry Levin, The Power of Blackness (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), p. 221.
- ⁴Eugenia Collier, "The Nightmare Truth of Invisible Man," Black World, 20, No. 2 (1970), 12-13.
- ⁵Shadow and Act, p. 102.
- ⁶Max Putzel, "The Source and the Symbols of Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" American Literature, 34 (1962) 153.
- ⁷Guy Cardwell, "Melville's Gray Story: Symbols and Meaning in 'Benito Cereno,'" Bucknell Review, 8 (1959), 166.
- ⁸Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1950), p. 240.
- ⁹Putzel, p. 153.
- ¹⁰Sidney Kaplan, "Herman Melville and the American National Sin: The Meaning of Benito Cereno," The Journal of Negro History, 42 (1957), 21.
- ¹¹See Harold H. Scudder, "Melville's Benito Cereno and Captain Delano's Voyages," PMLA, 43 (1928).
- ¹²Margaret Jackson, "Melville's Use of a Real Slave Mutiny in 'Benito Cereno,'" CLA Journal, 4 (December 1960), 85.
- ¹³Ibid., p. 82.
- ¹⁴Rosalie Feltenstein, "Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" American Literature, 19 (1947), 248.

¹⁵See Jonathan Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (New York: New York University Press, 1965). Baumbach shows that Invisible Man is one of the modern novels whose nightmarish atmosphere makes it similar to a romance.

¹⁶In modern fiction it is not uncommon for shadows to represent the white man's guilt. For instance, Joanna Burden in Light in August sees black men as shadows.

CHAPTER IV

MELVILLE'S AND ELLISON'S METHODOLOGY: BIRD IMAGERY AND WHALE AND CIRCUS LORE

1

In developing their themes, Melville and Ellison use similar methods. One such method is their use of bird imagery to create tension and to reinforce character traits. Besides bird imagery, Ellison makes extensive use of circus imagery. It is my contention that not only does circus lore perform a vital function in Invisible Man, especially in Tod Clifton's portrayal, but that Ellison uses it for the same purpose that Melville uses his cetology--as a method for concretizing abstractions.

Three different categories of birds pervade Moby Dick. One type, described as "angelic" and "ethereal," has an affinity to Moby Dick and serves to dramatize the Pequod's conflict with nature itself. A second type, described as "savage" and "inscrutable," vexes the crew, which also dramatizes the Pequod's conflict with nature, and serves as ill omens. One other bird, the Catskill eagle, functions as a character parallel for Ishmael.

The birds which follow Moby Dick show the peaceful and close connection that the world of the sky and the world of the sea have with each other: "Hoveringly halting, and dipping on the wing, the white sea-fowls longingly linger over the agitated pool that he [Moby Dick] left" (p. 539). Like Moby Dick, these birds are a part of the "serene tranquillities" of nature, which the Pequod disrupts. When Moby Dick submerges out of sight, these "heavenly" birds flutter above the water and make "joyous, expectant cries" (p. 539). They always react when they are near the whale. In the final scene, after the last encounter with the whale, Ishmael describes how the man-made ship, like a sinking hell, took a relic of heaven with her: "And so the bird of heaven, with archangelic shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upwards, and his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down with the ship, which, like Satan would not sink to hell till she had dragged a living part of heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it" (p. 565).

Other birds, ravens, vultures, and hawks, serve as bad omens contributing to the foreboding atmosphere of the work. During one of his meditative moods, Ishmael muses over the way the sea-ravens regard the Pequod as a sepulchre: "And every morning, perched on our stays, rows of these birds were seen; and spite of our hootings, for a

long time obstinately clung to the hemp, as though they deemed our ship some drifting, uninhabited craft; a thing appointed to desolation, and therefore fit roosting place for their homeless selves" (p. 231). On another occasion, vultures, representing death and decay, circle above the Rosebud. The appearance of these birds indicates the undesirable presence of a blasted whale--"that is, a whale that had died unmolested on the sea, and so floated an unappropriated corpse. So intolerable indeed is it regarded by some, that no cupidity could persuade them to moor alongside of it" (p. 399). The unpleasant odor of the blasted whale is an ironical comment upon the ship's name--Rosebud.

Another bird, "one of those red-billed savage sea hawks which so often fly incommodiously close round the manned mast-heads of whalemens in these latitudes," bothers Ahab by "wheeling and screaming round his head in a maze of untrackably swift circlings. Then it darted a thousand feet straight up into the air; then spiralized downwards, and went eddying again round his head" (p. 529). Finally, the hawk screeches and flies away with Ahab's hat. Already divested of family and pipe, Ahab is truly a solitary man. In the legend of Tarquin, an eagle replaces Tarquin's hat after stealing it, signifying that Tarquin would become king of Rome. Instead of replacing Ahab's hat and thereby

signifying his retention of power, the hawk flies so far out into the sea, it is unlikely that the bird will return, for this sea swallows up man and nature (p. 273) in a "heartless immensity" (p. 411). The hawk's actions suggest a bleak future for Ahab.

One final use of birds in Moby Dick is to reinforce character traits. As mentioned in Chapter II, Ishmael is like a Catskill eagle which can "dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces. And even if he for ever flies with the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is still higher than the other birds upon the plain, even though they soar" (p. 421). Ishmael maintains a middle flight and sees beyond the rest of the crew. To him, the whale is neither simply evil incarnate nor a brute beast, but a symbol of many things. Ishmael does not experience Starbuck's "fall of valor" (p. 113), nor does he have Ahab's "mad recklessness" (p. 458). He is in between, maintaining that middle flight.

In Benito Cereno birds also have two functions: (1) to provide a foreboding atmosphere, and (2) as in Moby Dick, to reinforce character portrayal. Grey fowl comprise the landscape of Benito Cereno. These fowl provide the intense, foreboding atmosphere in which the story unfolds: "The sky seemed a gray surtout. Flights of troubled grey fowl, kith

and kin with flights of troubled grey vapours among which they were mixed, skimmed low and fitfully over the waters, as swallows over meadows before storms. Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come" (p. 107). The grey fowl silhouetted against the drab sky create the tension and prophetic overtones so important to the work. They have much to do with what Richard Chase refers to as the work's "twilit consciousness . . . the muted quality of a dream or silent masque."¹ Because the work has an ominous atmospheric quality, the grey fowl are actually performing two functions at once--establishing the setting and serving as omens.

Just as the Catskill eagle parallels Ishmael, a bird in Benito Cereno parallels Benito and Delano. Amid all the decay of the San Dominick, a white noddy perches: "The tops were large, and were railed about with what had once been octagonal net-work, all now in sad disrepair. These tops hung overhead like three ruinous aviaries, in one of which was seen perched, on a ratlin, a white noddy, a strange fowl, so called from its lethargic, somnambulistic character, being frequently caught by hand at sea" (p. 110). The traits of the noddy, lethargy and somnambulism, are reflected physically in Benito and mentally in Delano.

With a "dreary, spiritless look" (p. 122) Benito sluggishly performs his duties. Because of his "saturine moods," his "sour and gloomy disdain," and his "cadaverous sullenness," Benito is a human noddy. When Delano questions him, he falters "like some somnambulist suddenly interfered with" (p. 117). Delano often speculates that no misrule would have occurred had Benito been a man of greater energy (pp. 113, 146).

Delano, however, resembles the noddy mentally. The noddy is so slow in realizing what is happening around him that sailors can catch this bird by hand. Delano's naiveté causes him to dismiss too readily many strange happenings. Charles Nicol stresses that the noddy's characteristics are as much a part of Delano's portrayal as they are of Benito's: "The bird's relevance is also to Delano himself, who continually paces the strange decks as if asleep, caught in the deep dream of a benevolent universe, under an enchantment that will not allow him to realize the teeming malevolence about him."² Due to his mental lethargy, Delano naively summarizes the whole situation: "Yes, this is a strange craft; a strange history, too, and strange folks on board. But--nothing more" (p. 145).

Although Ellison uses bird or flight imagery in some of the same ways that Melville does, (to serve as omens and reinforce character portrayal), his use of them is even

more extensive and also more significant. Ellin Horowitz contends that "images of birds and flight are extremely important in Ellison's work."³ Even before Ellison wrote Invisible Man, birds played a central part in his works. Bird and flight imagery in two of his short stories in particular, "That I had Wings" and "Flying Home," prefigure his use of it in Invisible Man. "That I Had Wings" (1943) is the story of a young black boy, Riley, who loves to watch birds and aviation movies. He associates freedom with flying and dreams about doing so, although his religious aunt warns him to stay in his place if he wants to live long. Riley yearningly asks his friend, "'Buster, don't yuh wish somebody would teach yuh and me how to fly?'"⁴ Inquisitive and innovative, Riley constructs some parachutes to attach to his family's chickens so that they will be able to fly. He plans to catch the chicks before they actually hit the ground. However, scared by his aunt's voice, he fails to catch the chicks and they die. Although he will be punished severely, Riley can only think about his momentary success. As the story ends, he wistfully remarks: "For a while they were flying . . . We almost had 'em flying . . . We almost . . ."⁵ Throughout the story flying becomes intertwined with equality and the democratic experience. As pointed out in Chapter One, Ellison is very

much concerned about American democracy and feels that this concern links him to nineteenth-century American writers.

"Flying Home" (1944) is a short story about a black man, Todd, who envies birds' ability to fly. One day he finally receives his license to fly a plane. Unfortunately, while making a test flight he incurs some mechanical problems. To add to these problems a buzzard smashes against the plane, causing it to crash. Todd is extremely humiliated because the whites did not think he had enough intelligence to fly in the first place. To further his shame, an old black farmer comes to the scene of the crash and inquires, "'Son, how come you want to fly way up there in the air?'" Todd wants to answer, "because it's the most meaningful act in the world . . . because it makes me less like you."⁶ But he knows that the black peasant will not understand his aspirations, he hates the way that he will always be "a part of this old ignorant man." The old man begins to relate the familiar black folk tale about going to heaven and getting wings just like the white angels. But the black man flies around so fast that St. Peter has to kick him out with a parachute and a map of Alabama. Todd really fails to see the humor and wonders if he is indeed a buzzard trying to be an eagle. This story echoes Ahab's dilemma. The other seamen really do not understand his

passion for the whale nor why he must strike through pasteboard masks, but Ahab "soars" anyhow, only to be brought low. Finally, the whites arrive and put Todd into a strait jacket. As they take Todd away, he sees a mockingbird and a buzzard; he falls out in hysterical laughter.

Building on these two short stories and others, Ellison increases his use of birds in Invisible Man. Like their usage in the two Melvillean works, birds in Invisible Man serve as omens and character reinforcers. As omens, however, Ellison's birds are not like the vultures of Moby Dick or the grey fowl of Benito Cereno. They function to foreshadow calamities, but they do so humorously.

The prime example of birds in Invisible Man humorously foreshadowing calamities is demonstrated by a flock of geese. On the night that he commits incest, Trueblood dreams that he is trying to break out of a white woman's grasp--"then swoosh! all of a sudden a flock of little white geese flies out of the bed like they say you see when you go to dig for buried money" (p. 57). At this moment the woman's husband walks in and all of Trueblood's fears are realized: "I runs and runs till I should be tired but ain't tired but feelin' more rested as I runs, and runnin' so good it's like flyin' and I'm flyin' and sailin' and floatin' right up over the town" (p. 57). Although foreshadowing the

husband's appearance, these white geese heighten the levity of Trueblood's predicament.

Another instance of birds that humorously foreshadow calamities occurs during the episode in Emerson's office. Because "P" is extremely uneasy, he perceives the beautiful, caged tropical birds as vicious. The birds disconcert and distract "P" from the moment he sees them: "A large bird began a song, drawing my eyes to the throbbing of its bright blue, red and yellow throat. It was startling and I watched the surge and flutter of the birds as their colors flared for an instant like an unfurled oriental fan" (p. 159). As soon as "P" gains some confidence and tries to relax, the birds seemingly flare up again: "Suddenly there came a harsh cry from the cage, and once more I saw a mad flashing as though the birds had burst into spontaneous flame, fluttering and beating their wings maliciously against the bamboo bars, only to settle down just as suddenly when the door opened and the blonde man stood beckoning, his hand upon the knob" (p. 160). When "P" finally does read Bledsoe's letter, he is completely baffled. To make matters worse, the birds began flaming in their cage, "their squawks like screams in a nightmare" (p. 169).

There are other instances in Invisible Man wherein birds serve humorously as omens. The actions of birds

portend the final riot scene. Birds seem to deliberately plague "P," foreshadowing the way Ras and his men plague him until he takes refuge in an underground retreat. During the riot Ras wears an inappropriate, cumbersome outfit which decreases the seriousness of the riot. Similarly, festering birds make "P"'s flight to the scene of the riot ludicrous:

And I looked above toward the sound, my mind forming an image of wings, as something struck my face and streaked, and I could smell the foul air now, and see the encrusted barrage, feeling it streak my jacket and raising my brief case above my head and running, hearing it splattering around, falling like rain. I ran the gantlet, thinking, even the birds; even the pigeons and the sparrows and the goddam gulls! I ran blindly, boiling with outrage and despair and harsh laughter. Running from the birds to what, I didn't know. I ran. Why was I here at all? I ran through the night, ran within myself. Ran (pp. 461-62).

Little white geese, beautiful tropical birds, and birds that mar their surroundings lack the malice and grandeur of Melville's vultures and hawks. Ellison's ominous birds are at the same time humorous.

Besides having birds serve humorously as omens, Ellison makes extensive use of birds as character reinforcers. Mockingbirds characterize the campus, the statue of the Founder, and modern society. "P" sees himself as a robin and Trueblood constantly compares his situation to that of a paralyzed jaybird.

Mockingbirds typify the superficiality of the campus. It is on the campus amid the ivy vines, wild roses, and purple wisteria, that "P" receives his "mock" education. He has to leave the school before he can realize his invisibility. While in his underground retreat, he remembers the fantasy world of the campus and especially "how the mocking birds fluttered their tails and sang" (p. 36). The idyllic life of the school fails to prepare "P" for the years ahead. The campus is Norton's dream--not the reality of black life. Like the white noddy, mockingbirds represent a lethargic state, a refusal to think for oneself. Instead of singing their own song, mockingbirds imitate the songs of other birds.

Mockingbirds pester the most imposing monument on campus--the statue of the Founder. Everything about the Founder is a mockery. The statue stands at a crossroads; one road leads to the edenic campus and the other to an insane asylum--serenity bordering right on the edge of hysteria. On the night that "P" is expelled, he recalls that "a mockingbird trilled a note from where it perched upon the hand of the moonlit Founder, flipping its moon-mad tail above the head of the eternally kneeling slave" (p. 121). "P" learns that the Founder's way of life will always keep the slave kneeling. Birds often alight on the statue, soiling until it "runs with liquid chalk" (p. 38).

"P" readily remembers every detail of the statue: "Then in my mind's eye I see the bronze statue of the college Founder, the cold Father symbol, his hands outstretched in the breathtaking gesture of lifting a veil that flutters in hard, metallic folds above the face of a kneeling slave; and I am standing puzzled, unable to decide whether the veil is really being lifted, or lowered more firmly in place; whether I am witnessing a revelation or a more efficient blinding" (p. 37). Therein lies the mockery. Like the ideas of the other two father figures, Norton (the "great white father") and Brother Jack ("Marse Jack"), the Founder's ideas fail miserably. Instead of finding their own identities, the black students imitate the Founder.

Mockingbirds also characterize modern society. While on the operating table, "P" hears the "mocking obbligato of a mocking bird" (p. 204). In the operating room the doctors and staff try to create a mock man, a mechanical person. Lying in a glass and nickel box, "P" is in a modern womb, and the doctors, instead of cutting an umbilical cord, cut an electric cord. Through technology, they imitate the birth process. Glass and metal replace flesh and bones.

Although Ellison uses birds to characterize the campus, the statue of the Founder, and modern society, he, like

Melville, uses birds to characterize actual people. Just as Ishmael is akin to the Catskill eagle, and Delano and Benito to the noddy, characters in Invisible Man have direct bird parallels. "P" is like a robin and Trueblood a jaybird. After "P"'s disappointing interview with Emerson Jr., he sings a mock funeral dirge and identifies with a robin:

O well they picked poor Robin clean
 O well they picked poor Robin clean
 Well they tied poor Robin to a stump
 Lawd, they picked all the feathers round
 from Robin's rump
 Well they picked poor Robin clean (p. 170).

"P," feeling like a wounded Robin, pithily paraphrases Bledsoe's letter and imagines Emerson's reply: "'My dear Mr. Emerson . . . The Robin bearing this letter is a former student. Please hope him to death, and keep him running. Your most humble and obedient servant, A. H. Bledsoe';
 "'Dear Bled, have met Robin and shaved tail. Signed Emerson.'" Humiliated, "P" feels that he has been sent to the rookery (p. 171). From henceforth, he builds up an intense dislike for "Bled."

As Benito's and Delano's predicament are likened unto a noddy, Trueblood likens his predicament to that of a "jay-bird that the yellow jackets done stung 'til he's paralyzed--but still alive in his eyes and he's watchin' 'em sting his body to death" (p. 61). This sense of paralysis has always characterized Trueblood's life. When

he vividly recounts his story to Norton, he keeps emphasizing the inertness of his life and relates this inertness to the power of whiteness. Whiteness numbs Trueblood. The earth around his porch is hard and white; he has to go to white people for everything. He ends up in a white bedroom with a white woman wearing a silky white gown. He desperately tries to leave the room but finds that he cannot move, talk, or hear. Trueblood states that he has been trying to move all his life. He explains what made his situation with his daughter so precarious: "'I had to move without movin'. I done thought 'bout it since a heap, and when you think right hard you see that that's the way things is always been with me. That's just about been my life" (p. 58). Later, when "P" is in his underground retreat, he identifies with the kind of immobility that Trueblood experiences: "It was a state neither of dreaming nor of waking, but somewhere in between, in which I was caught like Trueblood's jaybird that yellow jackets had paralyzed in every part but his eyes" (p. 492). The paralyzed jaybird becomes a symbol for the general condition of black men. Eagles, noddies, robins, and jaybirds all effectively portray character traits and symbolize conditions ranging from self-assertion to paralysis.

Life in Invisible Man is most consistently pictured in one of two ways. First of all, life is a nightmare, and hence all the dreams, semiconscious states, and surrealistic episodes. As a punster and humorist, Ellison uses comedy to present his nightmare. Therefore, life is, secondly, a joke, a side-show or a minstrel show. Invisible Man abounds in circus imagery--clowns, sambo dolls, kewpie dolls, and puppets. In the December 1970 issue of Black World, many critics attacked Ellison's use of circus imagery to make statements about black life. For example, Ernest Kaiser insists: "I know several novels and short stories by Black writers in which Black men and women are heroes and heroines fighting and leading their people in freedom struggles. They are not Black clowns and victims in tragi-comedies such as "Invisible Man."⁷ As stated in the introduction, I feel that Ellison is deliberately using clown imagery, not to belittle the black man, but as a vehicle for making certain statements about invisibility, identity, and life in general, in much the same way that Melville uses his cetology. Both are ways of "getting beyond history."

First of all, why and how does Melville use cetology in Moby Dick? One could offer many reasons: whales are

interesting in themselves, and thus the cetology is informative and entertaining; the cetology helps to make the work more "realistic," or simply as Arvin suggests, "[Melville] was a romantic idealist with a passion for actuality, for precise knowledge, for facts."⁸ While these reasons may be true, a close examination of the cetology reveals another reason for its use. Ishmael gets his method of understanding life from the cetology. By concentrating on the cetology, he philosophizes about life itself. Talking about whales enables him to talk about life in general, so that there is a constant movement from the concrete and factual, to the abstract and metaphysical. There is a kind of mythmaking. In commenting upon the function of the cetological chapters in Moby Dick, J. A. Ward asserts that "Melville creates a world cosmic in scope and spiritual at its center, but his starting point is earthly and physical. . . . Melville constantly attempted to arrive at an understanding of spiritual reality through an understanding of physical reality. . . . The examination of the whale leads to an examination of all humanity and the entire universe."⁹ This whole process of magnifying minutiae is similar to the basic method of transcendentalism. The doctrine of correspondence assumes that natural facts are symbols of spiritual facts.

Sometimes perhaps, Ishmael tries out the method only to contest the transcendental conclusion.

There are numerous examples of the cetology working in a mythmaking fashion. One cannot determine whether the spout of the whale consists of water, spray, or mist. By extension, the spout becomes symbolic of ambiguity in the universe. Or the fact that the whale has no face extends into the concept of muteness in nature. The pursuit of the whale becomes symbolic of all pursuits of life: "But in pursuit of those far mysteries we dream of, or in tormented chase of that demon phantom that, some time or other, swims before all human hearts; while chasing such over this round globe, they either lead us on in barren mazes or midway leave us whelmed" (p. 235).

Perhaps the best example of how the cetological facts are extended is found in the chapter on the whale's tail. It is important to take a lengthy look at this chapter to establish, first of all, Melville's procedure from fact to myth, and secondly, to point out the kinds of issues that the cetology raises. After looking at Ellison's circus lore, we will see that the circus lore works in the same way as Melville's whale lore and that the final effect of both techniques is the same.

Ishmael begins by discussing factual, anatomical details. The tail comprises approximately fifty square

feet of the whale's trunk; it expands into two broad flukes; three distinct strata compose it; fibers in the upper and lower layers are long and horizontal; fibers in the middle layers are very short (p. 371). After Ishmael gives details about the size, internal aspects, elasticity, and function of the whale's tail, he begins to magnify his material. Because the whale's power is located in its tail, Ishmael includes a discussion on the nature of power and its relationship to beauty. In explaining how the strength of the tail does not detract from the grace of the tail, Ishmael talks of how strength enhances beauty in art. The statue of Hercules is charming because of its "tied tendons"; Michelangelo's portrait of God is great because of its "robustness"; the best portraits of Christ show his brawniness, his power. This kind of magnification of the cetology is characteristic throughout the work. An even closer look at this chapter reveals other topics for which the tail serves as a springboard. Ishmael is interested in identity, history, time, and invisibility.

Ishmael carefully distinguishes the difference between the whale's tail and the tails of other sea creatures. Throughout the work he gets heavily involved in classification processes in order to establish the whale's identity. After classifying at length, though, Ishmael realizes that no one can fully know or identify anything: "The more I consider this mighty tail, the more do I deplore my

inability to express it. At times there are gestures in it, which, though they would well grace the hand of man, remain wholly inexplicable. . . . I but go skin deep; I know him not, and never will. But if I know not even the tail of this whale, how understand his head? much more, how comprehend his face, when face he has none?" (p. 375).

The chapter on the tail illuminates still other issues which arise from the facts. When Ishmael discusses the way the flukes of the whale's tail peak, he typically brings in examples from human history. The peaking process provides an opportunity for him to discuss Satan's descent to Hell, Dantean devils, Isaiah's archangels, and Ptolemy's elephants. Biblical history and allusions are particularly important to the work. The full significance and effects of these historical allusions will become apparent in my discussion of Invisible Man. Ishmael is concerned about history and the whale's relationship to human history. The cetology shows how the whale is larger than or above human history, which accounts for the problems that Ishmael has in identifying any part of the whale.

Finally, before finishing the chapter on the tail, Ishmael discusses one last topic--invisibility. To him, despite all the descriptions that he has been giving, the whale remains invisible: "Thou shalt see my back parts, my tail, he seems to say, but my face shall not be seen.

But I cannot completely make out his back parts; and hint what he will about his face, I say again he has no face."

This passage is an allusion to Moses' request to see God:

And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.¹⁰

God showed Moses his traits, but as a physical entity he remained invisible. By echoing the biblical passage, Ishmael shows the limitations of the cetology. It gives the whale's traits, but the whale remains invisible.

In Invisible Man the circus imagery and clown lore provide a method for "P" to concretize also abstractions--invisibility, identity, and life in general. F. W. Dupee comments that "the narrative method of Invisible Man is thus, in itself, quite obvious and fairly well known at least to readers of Melville and other writers who seem to have inspired Ellison. His inventions take off from familiar facts or fables or situations which he then proceeds to magnify to near mythical proportions by exploiting to the fullest their dramatic, ironic, and symbolic implications."¹¹ I have already shown this process at work with the whale's tail. After discussing

the process in Invisible Man, I would like to analyze the total effect of both processes--what do the particulars that Melville concretizes have in common with those of Ellison?

In Invisible Man concrete objects such as dolls, dummies, and darkey iron figures aid in the understanding of abstract concepts. The very first paragraph of the book introduces a circus simile and relates it to invisibility: "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass" (p. 7). "P" continues discussing "bodiless heads" and their differences from "circus freaks," not because he is concerned about the minutiae of circus lore, but because he magnifies his material to explain invisibility in the same way that Ishmael magnifies his material. "P" stresses that invisibility makes one a "head," not a freak. To be a freak places the problem within himself; to be a bodiless head places the problem within the distorting mirrors.

Just as Ishmael uses the cetology to discuss the whale's identity, "P" uses clown lore to understand identity problems. He sees blacks as victimized clowns, puppets, or comedians who lack any real identity. At the Battle Royal "P" refers to his black opponent as a "stupid clown" who was

ruining his chances of giving his speech. Reacting to the electrified rug, another boy jumps up wildly, "glistening with sweat like a circus seal" (p. 29). "P" even describes himself in clownish imagery: "Would not this go against my speech, and was not this a moment for humility, for non-resistance? A blow to my head as I danced about sent my right eye popping like a jack-in-the-box and settled my dilemma" (p. 28). "P" sees himself and all of his friends as clowns because the whites are victimizing them. He also sees the most exploited white character in the novel, the belly dancer, in clown imagery. He notices that her hair is "yellow like that of a circus kewpie doll" (p. 22). She has to flee to escape the aggression of the white men and the anxiety of the black boys.

In most of the succeeding episodes "P" especially equates with clowns old black men whom he feels are less enlightened than he. To be ostensibly talking about clowns is to be really talking about weak, ineffective black men. By calling them clowns and dwelling on their stupidity and lack of refinement, "P" ignores his own dilemma: an inability to find his identity and at the same time to lose his shame and disgust for members of his own race. (This is the same dilemma Todd faces in "Flying Home"). When Brockway angrily accuses "P" of being a union member, "P" immediately meditates upon this buffonery:

You were trained to accept the foolishness of such old men as this, even when you thought them clowns and fools; you were trained to pretend that you respected them and acknowledged in them the same quality of authority and power in your world as the whites before whom they bowed and scraped and feared and loved and imitated, and you were even trained to accept it when, angered or spiteful or drunk with power, they came at you with a stick or strap or cane and you made no effort to strike back, but only to escape unmarked (p. 197).

In "Flying Home" Todd expresses the same dissatisfaction with old black men as evidenced by his definition of "humiliation": "Humiliation was when you could never be simply yourself; when you were always a part of this old ignorant man" (p. 471).

While searching for his identity, "P" continually sees the world in clown imagery. In the hospital he feels that he is a clown, a mechanized man. Then, at the eviction, he wonders if the "dispossessed" black man was a former minstrel because among his remnants are knocking bones. While running away from the eviction scene, "P" leaps across the roof tops like a "black-face comedian shrinking from a ghost" (p. 255). He uses a lot of clown lore especially when dealing with the Brotherhood, the exploiter of all men. Emma thinks that "P" should be blacker, causing "P" to believe that she just wants a black-face comedian (p. 263). "P" sees Wrestrum, who is tightly controlled by the Brotherhood, as a clown who needs to be dealt with in a special way, and he accuses other

members of the Brotherhood of being participants in side-shows. Sybil wants him to act like a clown by flexing his muscles and performing fancy tricks.

"P" is critical of those blacks who "like wild jacks-in-the-box broken loose from [their] springs," come up too rapidly to the North from the South (p. 380). They still have all the trappings of their southern, rural heritage with them. In order not to be identified as one of these "wild jacks-in-the-box," "P" does things to deliberately deny his identity. Instead of ordering pork chops, grits, and hot biscuits, he orders orange juice, toast, and coffee. He does not understand why Mary maintains a very black, red-lipped, white-eyed, wide-mouthed Negro bank. "P" finds this sambo figure and other clownish figures humiliating because he does not choose to be identified with them. It takes a long time for him to accept many aspects of his racial heritage and an even longer time for him to exclaim, "I yam what I am."

"P"'s grandfather and the vet do not regard clowns with the contempt that "P" does. "P" feels a clown to be a powerless man (p. 270). But in his recurring dream, (which significantly takes place in a circus with his grandfather), "P" remembers one peculiarity about the old man--he refused to laugh at clowns, no matter what antics they performed. The perceptive vet declares that he is "really more clown

than fool" (p. 138). What is there about the clown that the vet identifies with and the grandfather respects? Is the clown really a powerless man, or is he, like Ishmael's whale, a method for understanding and dealing with the puzzles of life?

Through the example of Louis Armstrong, Ellison hints at the advantages and the freedom of performing as a clown: "Armstrong's clownish license and intoxicating powers are almost Elizabethan; he takes liberties with kings, queens, and presidents; emphasizes the physicality of his music with sweat, spittle and facial contortions; he performs the magical feat of making romantic melody issue from a throat of gravel."¹² In Invisible Man Todd Clifton performs by "clownish license" what some critics feel to be not only a willful act, but the most significant death act in black literature.¹³ Clifton "plunges outside of history." He uses clown imagery to parody and even subvert history. This "plunging outside of history" has a connection with Melville's cetology. The whale is a natural creature who was here before history began and who, as the cetology illustrates, is larger than history. The chapter on the whale's tail shows a kind of myth-making process that transcends history. Who is Clifton, and why is he important in a discussion of cetology, clowns, and history?

Clifton is a romantic character combining beauty, youth, and eloquence. One hears of him before actually meeting him. Women breathe "pleasurable sighs" and cry over his wounds, when he finally does show up at meetings. Very handsome, black, and charming, Clifton is a leader of the youth, a black Adonis. Even his enemies recognize this. Ras keeps stressing that Clifton would have been a king in Africa, for he is a natural prince. When Clifton dies, the people play romantic military marches and refer to him as "our hope shot down."

Although capable of aggressive action, Clifton lets himself be killed. In the past he has fought Ras physically and even beat up a white brother--by mistake, he says. One of the Brothers remarks that Clifton is like a wild man when he gets mad, making his suicidal death even more inexplicable. Having been in the Brotherhood three years, Clifton, days before his death, feels that a change is coming. As he confronts Ras, he finds himself doubting, even changing. Ras' way of thinking is never presented as a viable alternative, for during the riot he ridiculously dresses up as an Abyssinian Chieftain with spear, spurs, saddle and shield. Despite his obvious insanities, Ras has a message for Clifton. He sorrows over Clifton and recognizes his potential. Shaking his fist at a plane, Ras predicts that one day blacks will

even own them, but they will not reach that point by fighting one another. Clifton gets fascinated, paralyzed, and upset by all of Ras' exhortations. Then Clifton makes a peculiar statement to "P." He tells him that in order to live up to the kind of potential that Ras talks about, one either has to "plunge outside of history" or go crazy (p. 327).

Throughout the work there is much discussion of historical time and the way the world moves. "P" always remarks that the world moves like a boomerang; one of the vets, a student of history, states that "the world moves in a circle like a roulette wheel" (p. 75). The Brotherhood toasts to history and classifies men by whether they are inside or outside of historical time. Since they claim to have history and science under their control, anyone outside the Brotherhood is also outside of history. Only after Clifton's death, does "P" question the Brotherhood's stance on history. He begins to feel "history stomping upon [him] with hobnailed boots" and wonders if Brother Jack were wrong: "What if history was a gambler, instead of a force in a laboratory experiment?" (p. 381). After doubting that the world moves in a mechanical fashion, "P" ponders whether Clifton and other men outside of time are "the saviors, the true leaders, the bearers of something precious" (p. 381). Falling outside of history

becomes not a disgraceful act, but a deliberate effort that reveals one's whole concept about the past and the future. Men outside of history are ahead of their times.

Selling dolls is the means whereby Clifton takes his plunge outside of history. Having chosen sambo dolls for their obvious significance to black heritage, Clifton sells them, ironically, to gain self-respect. Sambo dolls dramatize the humiliation, the exploitation that he as a man has endured. He becomes the willing scapegoat for all who have shared his experience. Clifton parodies the type of person the Brotherhood wants him to be. What many thought was his act of betrayal is his only act of independence. Clifton explains that the doll is "more than a toy, ladies and gentlemen, he's Sambo, the dancing doll, the twentieth-century miracle . . . he'll kill your depression and your dispossession" (p. 374). At first "P" thinks that the dolls are randomly or mechanically dancing and jerking. After a careful examination, however, he realizes that Clifton controlled every movement by a black, invisible thread. Recall that the cetology, as demonstrated in the chapter on the tail, is more than a toy, an entertainment for Ishmael; it is the substance of his philosophical moods. At times, the cetological facts seem randomly selected. A careful examination, however, reveals that Ishmael deliberately weaves in topics larger than the facts themselves.

All the details about Clifton's clownish act--his death--contribute to his portrait as a spiritual hero outside of history. Jonathan Baumbach points out that Tod Clifton's name suggests a kind of Promethean entrapment--death on a cliff.¹⁴ Because his clownish guise is misunderstood, Clifton makes an invisible sacrifice.

Baumbach aptly clarifies Clifton's dilemma:

Entrapped by the Brotherhood through the commitment imposed by his integrity, Clifton becomes even more than the narrator, a victim of the Brotherhood's betrayal. Like the implicit suicide of Conrad's Lord Jim, Clifton's death (he provokes a policeman into shooting him) is a sacrifice to a culpability too egregious to be redeemed in any other way, and, at the same time, a final if gratuitous act of heroism. In giving himself up to be murdered, Clifton takes on the whole responsibility for the Brotherhood's betrayal of the Negro. If by his sacrifice he does not redeem the hero from his own culpability, he at least through his example sets up the possibility of Brother _____'s redemption. If the various characters with whom the 'invisible' hero is confronted represent possible states of being, Clifton symbolizes the nearest to an ideal.¹⁵

Before dying, Clifton, the spiritual hero, assumes a prayer posture. His clowning takes on the symbolic implications of plunging outside of history. His final movements are described in ballet language to illustrate that his clownish act is not a destructive one, but a creative one. Although the people do not understand his plunge, they funeralize him in grand manner and experience emotions that the Brotherhood does not even have names for. As the

expectations of the people increase, "P" has to remind them that Clifton is not Christ--"there'll be no miracles; these bones shall not rise again" (Pp. 393, 396). Because Clifton has been portrayed so much as a Christ figure, "P" tries to establish his common humanity--Clifton was just like any male in your own family; his blood was red as anyone's blood; like any man, he was born of woman."

Instead of dispersing, the crowd continues to wait, and the more they wait, the more desperate "P" becomes. He knows that Clifton's stance has little to do with the cop, that Clifton "might have been angry before he resisted, before he'd even seen the cop" (p. 386). Finally, "P" gives them the truth:

His name was Tod Clifton and he was full of illusions. He thought he was a man when he was only Tod Clifton. He was shot for a simple mistake of judgment and he bled and his blood dried and shortly the crowd trampled out the stains. It was a normal mistake of which many are guilty: He thought he was a man and that men were not meant to be pushed around. But it was hot downtown and he forgot his history, he forgot time and the place (p. 395).

"P" still wonders if the crowd understands what is really important: that his name was Tod Clifton and he used sambo dolls to plunge outside of history. Selling dolls is very different from discussing whale lore. Both are methods, however, of getting beyond history. As vehicles for making certain observations about life, both lead to the

same end. The whale is larger than history and Clifton dismisses history. As shown, the total effect of the abstractions that Melville discusses and the total effect of the abstractions that Ellison discusses are similar. What starts off as simple facts about whales expands into mythical proportions, even as what starts off as a simple selling of dolls culminates in a plunge outside of history.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER IV

¹Chase, Herman Melville: A Critical Study (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 154.

²Charles Nicol, "The Iconography of Evil and Ideal in 'Benito Cereno,'" American Transcendental Quarterly, No. 7 (Summer 1970), 29.

³Ellin Horowitz, "The Rebirth of The Artist" in On Contemporary Literature, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Avon Books, 1964), p. 344.

⁴Ralph Ellison, "That I Had Wings," Common Ground, 3, No. 4 (Summer 1943), 36. All further references to this work will be from this edition.

⁵Ibid., p. 37.

⁶Ellison, "Flying Home," Cross Section, ed. Edwin Seaver (New York: L. B. Fischer, 1944), p. 473.

⁷Ernest Kaiser, "A Critical Look at Ellison's Fiction and at Social and Literary Criticism By and About the Author," Black World, 20 (December 1970), 94.

⁸Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1950), p. 169.

⁹J. A. Ward, "The Function of the Cetological Chapters in Moby-Dick," American Literature, 28 (May 1956), 26.

¹⁰The Bible. King James Version, Exodus 33:20-23.

¹¹F. W. Dupee, "American Fiction: The Post War Years 1945-1965 in Book Week, The Washington Post, Sept. 26, 1965, p. 26.

¹²Shadow and Act, p. 52.

¹³See Bennett, Stephen B. and William Nichols, "Violence in Afro-American Fiction: An Hypothesis," Modern Fiction Studies, 17 (Summer 1971), 173.

¹⁴Jonathan Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in Contemporary American Novel (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 79.

¹⁵Baumbach, p. 68.

CHAPTER V

SOCIAL PROTEST

In this final chapter, by focusing on some key questions, I would like to discuss the value or effects of having looked at Invisible Man from a Melvillean perspective. What does this approach do to a "black novel?" Are there significant ways wherein Melville and Ellison differ? These questions invariably raise the other questions that usually come up whenever one discusses Ellison or any black writer at length: Does Invisible Man lack "social protest"? How does "P" as a character and Ellison as the author meet the charges of critics who attack the work's lack of realism, of sociology? Most of these issues have been touched upon throughout the previous chapters, for they can hardly be isolated from the themes and methods themselves. However, I would like to address them more directly in one final effort to understand better one of the greatest works of the century.

What exactly are the charges against the work? What kinds of attacks have critics made? Many critics, especially black critics, question Ellison's role as a writer. They contend that his novel does not address

itself to the problems of a people engaged in a freedom struggle. John Clarke asks: "What is the role of a writer at a time of crisis relating to his people's survival? I maintain that a writer in such a time should be, both a creator and an activist. He has to realize that literature is an instrument of liberation. In order to be able to use it as a weapon to effect dynamic change for freedom the writer must know who he is in relationship to his people." Clarke concludes that Ellison "is neither a Black nor a white novelist in a world where things are clearly defined."¹ Clifford Mason suggests that Ellison should have "insisted on Blackness as a literary way of life." Mason stresses that

the amplitudes of Ellison's literary references, ensconced as they were in his mainstream mentality, did not permit this sort of aggressive, Black literary independence. All of his validities in his essays, and, in effect, in Invisible Man, are based on a white substructure. His achievement in the novel should have rendered him free of such a disabling psychosis, however. He should have stood against white literary values, not with them, and like W. E. B. DuBois in history and Alain Locke in cultural art, have set his own standard for the Fifties and Sixties that would have made him valid for the Seventies as thinker.²

The work's surrealistic techniques have drawn further criticism. Early reviews of the work decry its handling of the Communist Party, its lack of "realism," and its "fever fantasy."³ As Larry Neal points out, "social realism, particularly Marxist socialist realism, does not allow for

the free play of fantasy and myth that Ellison was attempting in his novel."⁴ Many black critics complain that this fantasy, this surrealism, encourages "elitist" literature, which, although characteristic of modern literature, is alien to black literature. Ernest Kaiser summarizes most vehemently this position, first of all by denouncing everything that white critics have written about the work and then by criticizing those black critics who see something beyond social criticism going on in the work. Kaiser comments:

Jonathan Baumbach . . . takes all of the ritual, illusion and disillusion of the novel seriously. But this is only the playing of a game, a looking for clues in a puzzle that has no real meaning. This has nothing to do with the Black man's reality in America. But the white critics, knowing nothing about real Black life, are tricked into thinking that they are dealing with something meaningful. These white critics (add C.I. Glicksberg, R. Kostelanetz, E. H. Rovit, et al.) have had a field day dissecting and looking for symbols and meanings of Black life in Invisible Man. It's really pathetic, for this is nothing but a critical, artificial game in which they are indulging. But all this serious attention to Ellison by white critics has also influenced the Black academic critics. Darwin T. Turner, George E. Kent, Archie D. Sanders and the white critics all celebrate and praise Invisible Man. The sharp criticism and evaluation which one expects here are nowhere in evidence. The critics are mesmerized by Ellison's 'complex' nightmarish, surrealist novel which has a little of everything. . . . The fact is that the novel doesn't make any real sense.⁵

What does "make sense" to these critics is Richard Wright's Native Son, a proletarian, naturalistic novel that overtly expresses the kind of fear, hatred, and injustice

existing in American society. Its anti-hero, Bigger, grows by committing a violent act, and his lawyer spends the last third of the book presenting his defense--an indictment of society. No one can deny that the first two thirds of the book are well written in a straightforward, suspenseful manner. Bigger emerges as the prototype of all victimized black men. Mason complains: "Invisible Man, on the other hand, never shows his outer side, his Bigger side, the side that a woman could love or a man have a fight with."⁶

In Shadow and Act Ellison presents his rebuttal to the aforementioned charges. First of all, he explains his pluralistic attitude toward literature. He deliberately wrote Invisible Man to participate in the larger heritage of all American literature. Ellison agrees with Eliot's premise that "no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead."⁷ Similarly, Ellison declares that the black writer must "pit his talents against the standards set by the best practitioners of the craft, both past and present. For the writer's real way of sharing the experience of his group is to convert its mutual suffering into lasting value."⁸ Ellison argues that the

work's themes are American themes, and that he is using a black experience to extrapolate universal concerns.

Throughout Shadow and Act Ellison speaks of the larger world which surrounds the black world, his mastering of two musical traditions, jazz and classical, and his usage of two speech patterns, standard English and the black idiom. He rarely attributes any particular technique to his being black, but rather to his larger background. For instance, he explains that he uses folklore not because it is a feature of black literature, but

because writers like Eliot and Joyce made me conscious of the literary value of my folk inheritance. My cultural background, like that of most Americans, is dual (my middle name, sadly enough, is Waldo). I knew the trickster Ulysses just as early as I knew the rabbit of Negro American lore, and I could easily imagine myself a pint-sized Ulysses but hardly a rabbit, no matter how human and resourceful or Negro. My point is that the Negro American writer is also an heir of the human experience which is literature, and this might well be more important to him than his living folk tradition.⁹

Ellison also specifically comments on the frequent comparisons made between him and Richard Wright. Although Ellison admits that Wright admonished him to write consciously and guided him to James, Conrad, Dostoevsky, and others, he also says, "Wright believed in the much abused idea that novels are 'weapons'--the counterpart of the dreary notion, common among most minority groups, that novels are instruments of good public relations. But I

believe that true novels, even when most pessimistic and bitter arise out of an impulse to celebrate human life and therefore are ritualistic and ceremonial at their core."¹⁰

In response to the personal attacks and lack of social criticism, Ellison feels he is intensely involved in social and political activity. In his writings he does not feel there to be a lack of the sociological approach, but in other black writers too much of this approach. According to him, "much potential fiction by Negro Americans fails precisely at this point: through the writer's refusal (often through provincialism or lack of courage or opportunism) to achieve a vision of life and a resourcefulness of craft commensurate with the complexity of their actual situation. Too often they fear to leave the uneasy sanctuary of race to take their chances in the world of art."¹¹ As with so many issues sometimes one makes false dichotomies. Ellison sees no dichotomy between art and protest and feels that art by its nature is social.

The issue that Ellison and his critics have been arguing is a long standing one of black literature. To fully understand the nature and complexity of the charges, one has to look at how other twentieth-century black writers have handled the problem of remaining within the mainstream of American literature and at the same time

dealing positively and accurately with the black experience. Because of this dual responsibility, black writers see themselves in a special position with a divided allegiance--"Do we write primarily as American artists or as black artists?" Because this question has become the central question of modern black poetry and criticism, I will look at the spectrum of responses given by these poet/critics. Then, it will be easier to see exactly where Ellison stands.

As early as the turn of the century, Paul Laurence Dunbar foresaw the problem, but used dialect poetry to escape it. For instance, one of his representative dialect poems, "The Party," was well received by white audiences, but fails to remain true to the black experience. It presents poetically a minstrel show--"eyes a-battin,' teeth a-shinin,' haih brashed back ez slick ez grease."¹² Neither is Dunbar true to the black idiom. There is a difference between the patronizing hard-to-read dialect he uses to express pathos and humor and the rhythmic folk speech which later black poets pridefully employ. Nevertheless, some of Dunbar's non-dialect poetry reveals his awareness of his own inability to solve the problem. On one level, "We wear the mask that grins and lies / It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes" can be read as the regret

of a black poet as his inability to deal adequately with his double consciousness. He cannot show his real identity nor reveal his true experiences to a world which wants to see him forever grinning. Not able to find an appropriate medium in which to write about his deeper experiences, Dunbar exclaims: "I know why the caged bird beats his wing / Till its blood is red on the cruel bars / For he must fly back to his perch and cling / When he fain would be on the bough a-swing." Because Dunbar could not cope with these frictions, he is remembered only for what he himself calls his "jingle in a broken tongue." His efforts to be received in the American mainstream cost him any reputation as a black poet.

Countee Cullen, following in the footsteps of Keats, wrote a lot of typically romantic poetry. By using many conventional forms (sonnets, lyrics, Spenserian stanzas), he links himself with traditional English poetry. However, his best poems are the ones that deal especially with the black experience. Examples are "Yet Do I Marvel" and "From the Dark Tower." Thematically, a strong sense of black identity bursts through their tight sonnet constructions. This is also true of another popular poet of the Harlem Renaissance, Claude McKay. The contrast between the revolutionary ardor and the sonnet form in his "If We Must Die" only serves to make his theme more powerful: "What though

before us lies the open grave / Like men we'll face the
murderous, cowardly pack / Pressed to the wall, dying, but
fighting back." In "Tiger" McKay uses the sonnet, the
form most associated with love poetry, to express his
hatred: "The white man is a tiger at my throat . . ."

Many later black poets have questioned the use of
traditional forms and poetic conventions (imagery, poetic
diction, etc.), even as many black novelists are trying to
develop a peculiarly black style based on the rhythms of
the black sermon. Poets and novelists alike are beginning
to feel that they do not have to please white critics.
The poet/critic, Dudley Randall, expresses this view in
his poem "Black Poet, White Critic":

A critic advises
not to write on controversial subjects
like freedom or murder,
but to treat universal themes
and timeless symbols
like the white unicorn.

A white unicorn?

In another poem, "I Know I'm Not Sufficiently Obscure,"
Ray Durem attacks traditional literary conventions as
antithetical to the black experience:

I cannot find those mild and gracious words
to clothe the carnage.
Blood is blood and murder's murder.
What's a lavender word for lynch?
. . .
You deal with finer feelings,
very subtle-an autumn leaf
hanging from a tree-I see a body!

Today, contemporary black writers are placing more value on describing the black experience than on being a part of any American tradition of poetry. This view is contrary to the turn of the century black poet's view and is more of a separatist concept than that of the writers of the Harlem Renaissance. For instance, in "For Sandra," Nikki Giovanni points out that no matter how much one may wish to write about the same themes in the same way as other Americans, blacks must remember that "revolution doesn't lend itself to be-bopping," that "no trees grow / in manhattan, that "perhaps these are not poetic / times at all." In "Black Art" Imamu Baraka uses very anti-middle class diction to explain that blacks need another kind of poetry, a "black poem"--"poems that kill"; "we want poems / like fists beating niggers out of jocks / or dagger poems in the slimy bellies / of the owner jaws." Less concerned about universal themes and using a very urban black folk speech, Don L. Lee summarizes this new attitude:

I ain't seen no poems stop a .38
 I ain't seen no stanzas brak a honkie's head,
 I ain't seen no words kill
 & if the word was mightier than the sword
 Pushkin wouldn't be fertilizing russian soil
 & until my similies can protect me from a night stick
 i guess i'll keep my razor
 and buy me some more bullets.

Lee's judgments are a far cry from Dunbar's jingle.

Where does Ellison stand on the spectrum from Dunbar to Lee? F. W. Dupee compares Ellison's political stance to that of O'Leary and Yeats:

[Ellison] is as hesitant about repeating his literary successes as he is about capitalizing politically on his position as a leading Negro intellectual. 'There are things a man should not do to save a nation,' insisted the veteran Irish revolutionary, John O'Leary, whom Yeats liked to quote in this connection. Ralph Ellison appears to be of the same persuasion, while cherishing his 'nation,' the negro population of America, no less than Yeats and O'Leary cherished theirs. Thus, despite the acute present pertinence of his position and ideas, Ellison remains a literary artist of the old school, and Invisible Man seems to have made for itself an appropriate body of readers--readers, one might say of the old school.¹³

Robert Bone, who has written extensively about the black novel, insists that the black novelist, unlike the black musician or other black artists, has always been expected to take a political stand. Because the novelist deals with words, he is not afforded the same amount of freedom, but must use his words for political exhortations. The black musician does not have to play a civil rights march to be applauded by his people, but with the novelist

the question of militancy is raised, bearing not on the novelist's conduct as a citizen or political man but precisely on his creative work, his function as an artist. To those who feel above all else the urgency of the Negro's political struggle, it is not enough that a writer demonstrate his solidarity; he must enlist his image-making powers in the service of the cause. Since no writer who understands the proper uses of imagination can acquiesce in this perversion of his talent, he must prepare to walk that

lonesome valley during much of his career, and to accept a good deal of abuse from those who do not recognize the value of his art.¹⁴

Invisible Man abounds in social criticism. As Dupee points out, Invisible Man is "a veritable Moby Dick of the racial crisis, with the terrors of exaltations of Negro-White existence replacing those of a whaling voyage, and the hero's search for a real identity and human function . . . supplanting the pursuit of the whale."¹⁵ Ellison uses surrealism as his vehicle for sociology. He "arrive[s] at the truth about the human condition with all the bright magic of a fairy tale."¹⁶ Chapter III dealt with the importance of surrealism to the work, pointing out that the crux of the novel, the essential truths, are all conveyed in "P"'s dreams and semiconscious states. All the major episodes of the novel have a nightmarish quality: surreal hysteria characterizes the Golden Day episode; the paint factory seems like a feverish dream; a quality of unreality surrounds the eviction scene, and the final riot is like a "nightmarish somersault." Through dreams "P" remembers the treacherous militant attitude of his grandfather. While smoking a reefer he analyzes the dual attitude of blacks toward America, and also hears the sermon, "The Blackness of Blackness," which establishes the depth and ambiguity of blackness.

It is Ellison's treatment of social concerns that illustrates precisely his differences with Melville. Chapter I discusses the way Ahab is suggestive of a captain of industry and Delahó, the American democratic character. Ellison, however, gets very specific in his criticism of Americans by satirizing Thomas Jefferson and John D. Rockefeller in the Golden Day episode and Emerson in a later episode. This same chapter shows how Melville uses sperm squeezing and the monkey rope to comment upon universal brotherhood and Ishmael's and Queequeg's relationship to comment upon the bond of humanity. Ellison, on the other hand, deals specifically with how brotherhood works in America. He satirizes its emblems, and in the Golden Day episode exposes the American dream. Ellison comments upon contemporary discriminatory laws and stereotypes. During the Golden Day episode the bartender lets "P" know that he can bring Norton inside since they do not Jim Crow there. On his way North, "P" must sit in the rear of the bus. His interview with Emerson Jr. reveals the kinds of things whites place emphasis on in hiring blacks. While in the hospital, he listens to the stereotypes about having rhythm, and while with Sybil he hears the sexual stereotypes. When Brother Jack chides "P" for "riding race again," "P" replies that he is "riding the

race [he's] forced to ride" (p. 405). He recognizes the sociology of his very existence. Indeed, the whole concept of invisibility has sociological implications, since others in society refuse to see him.

Chapter II discusses an abstract Melvillean concept, the whiteness of the whale. Ellison puts his version of the white whale in flesh and blood--the grandfather whose dying words instruct "P" how to deal with whites in daily life. Chapter II also discusses Ahab's pasteboard masks--a metaphysical concept which deals with the ambiguity within reality. Ellison, however, uses a specific character, Rinehart the shape-shifter, to represent the epitome of ambiguity. He shows how Rinehart survives Harlem life.

Chapter III discusses the mental destructiveness of whiteness, the way it affects black education and "lynches souls." Delano ponders about the primitiveness of blackness, and Ishmael philosophizes about the meaning of whiteness. More "sociological" than Delano or Ishmael, "P" seeks an audience for his meditations. He calls himself an orator, a "rabble rouser." While a member of the school's debate team, he was the "bungling bugler of words, imitating the trumpet and the trombone's timbre, placing thematic variations like a baritone horn (p. 102). When the old matrons spoke, he liked to listen to the vowel sounds and their crackling dentals. In crisis

situations, "P"'s old urge to make speeches would always return; something would begin to work within him, spilling out bottled up phrases. His high school speech wins him a scholarship; his eviction speech ("The Rhetoric of the Dispossessed") attracts the attention of the Brotherhood; Clifton's funeral eulogy demonstrates his leadership ability. "P" views speechmaking as his ticket to freedom and greatness in life:

For now I had begun to believe, despite all the talk of science around me, that there was a magic in spoken words. Sometimes I sat watching the watery play of light upon Douglass' portrait, thinking how magical it was that he had talked his way from slavery to a government ministry, and so swiftly. Perhaps, I thought, something of the kind is happening to me. Douglass came north to escape and find work in the shipyards; a big fellow in a sailor's suit who, like me, had taken another name. What had his true name been? Whatever it was, it was as Douglass that he became himself, defined himself. And not as a boatwright as he'd expected, but as an orator. Perhaps the sense of magic lay in the unexpected transformations (p. 331).

Chapter IV discusses Ellison's use of bird and clown imagery for sociological purposes. Whereas Melville uses birds to portray individual characteristics, moderation, egotism, lethargy, Ellison uses a jaybird to symbolize the paralysis of all black men and a robin to show their humiliation. Chapter IV also discusses how the cetology works and raises some of the same questions that Ellison's clown lore does. Melville uses a whale to discuss these questions, but Ellison uses a character who sells sambo dolls to gain

self-respect, which is much more "sociological." He illustrates the sociology of Clifton's existence, its dispossession and depression, through clown imagery. Selling dolls is a political act of defiance.

"P" performs a very militant act in the Prologue. Angry because a white man refuses to apologize for bumping into him, "P" almost cuts the man's throat. He describes the violence of this episode and his subsequent reactions:

I kicked him repeatedly, in a frenzy because he still uttered insults though his lips were frothy with blood. Oh yes, I kicked him! And in my outrage I got out of my knife and prepared to slit his throat, right there beneath the lamplight in the deserted street, holding him by the collar with one hand, and opening the knife with my teeth--when it occurred to me that the man had not seen me actually; that he, as far as he knew, was in the midst of a walking nightmare! And I stopped the blade, slicing the air as I pushed him away, letting him fall back on the street (p. 8).

This incident helps "P" to realize that he is only a phantom.

"P" often debates what kind of action he should take. While listening to Armstrong's music, he is prompted to act: "At first I was afraid; this familiar music had demanded action, the kind of which I was incapable, and yet had I lingered beneath the surface I might have attempted to act" (p. 15). Action is one of the primary themes of the prologue. "P" states that he "believes in nothing if not in action." He defines hibernation as "a covert preparation for a more overt action." The only action in which he participates while underground is putting "invisibility down

in black and white." Evidently, "P" believes the process of writing itself to be contributive to the struggle. Rabble rousing and writing are different kinds of protest than Bigger's murder act. To some the former kind of protest does not seem as valid or effective as the latter. William Walling comments:

The material inequities of the racial situation are so real, the deviations from social and political justice so obvious, that any reasonably thorough analysis of Ellison's novel will probably leave that hypothetical construct--the black in the street--with a sense of instinctive resentment. In spite of its quite powerful depiction of racial injustice in America, Invisible Man still suggests, inescapably through its ending, that any form of direct protest¹⁷ is inappropriate for the situation of its narrator.

In defense of the kind of action "P" is taking, Larry Neal points out that "the poet, the writer, is a key bearer of culture. Through myth, he is the manipulator of both the collective conscious and unconscious. If he is good, he is the master of rhetorical imagery. And as such, he is much more psychically powerful than the secular politician."¹⁷

Through his rabble rousing and writing "P" makes sarcastic, ironic statements about America, reveals the shadow that whiteness casts, voices universal protest against mechanization and exploitation, decries the poverty of two dispossessed people, and illuminates his own invisibility. Herein is where Melville and Ellison diverge. Melville keeps asking deeper and deeper questions, always

approaching the metaphysical; Ellison keeps giving sociological answers, always approaching the psychological. There is a conversation in Invisible Man between Emerson Jr. and "P" which best describes the difference between an Ishmael or Ahab and Ellison's protagonist:

Emerson Jr. (alias Melville): 'Aren't you curious about what lies behind the face of things?'

"P" (alias Ellison): 'Yes, sir, but I'm mainly interested in a job' (p. 166).

"P"'s protest is both racial and universal, for on the lower frequencies he does speak for us all.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER V

¹John Clarke, "Ellison and His Novel: The Visible Dimensions of Invisible Man," Black World, 20, No. 2, (December 1970), 30.

²Clifford Mason, "Rinehart vs. Bigger: Ralph Ellison and the Underground Man," Black World, 20, No. 2 (December 1970), 21.

³Berry, Abner W. Review of Invisible Man, Daily Worker, (June 1, 1952).

⁴Neal, "Ellison's Zoot Suit," Black World, 20, No. 2 (December 1970), 35.

⁵Ernest Kaiser, "A Critical Look at Ellison's Fiction and at Social and Literary Criticism By and About the Author," Black World, 20, No. 2 (December 1970), 83.

⁶Mason, p. 25.

⁷T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World), Pp. 4-5.

⁸Shadow and Act, p. 139.

⁹Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 114.

¹¹Ibid., xxii.

¹²The poems for Dunbar, McKay, and Lee are from Black Writers of America, ed. Richard Barksdale and Kenneth Kinnamon (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972). The poems from Randall, Durem, and Giovanni are from The Black Poets, ed. Dudley Randall (New York: Bantam Books, 1971).

¹³F. W. Dupee, "American Fiction: The Post War Years, 1945-64" in Book Week, The Washington Post, September 26, 1965, 4.

¹⁴Robert Bone, "Ralph Ellison and The Uses of the Imagination," in Anger and Beyond, ed. Herbert Hill (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 101.

¹⁵Dupee, p. 4.

¹⁶Shadow and Act, p. 105.

¹⁷William Walling, "'Art' and 'Protest': Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man Twenty Years After," Phylon, 34, No. 2 (June 1973), 133.

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