

December 1, 1966

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by R. Stewart Lillard, Jr. entitled "Ralph Waldo Ellison's Use of Music." I recommend that it be accepted for nine quarter hours of credit in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Samuel Z. McMillan Jr.
Major Professor

We have read this thesis and
recommend its acceptance:

A. R. Penner

Nathalia Wright

Accepted for the Council:

Hilton A. Smith
Dean of the Graduate School

RALPH WALDO ELLISON'S USE OF MUSIC

A Thesis

Presented to
the Graduate Council of
The University of Tennessee

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

R. Stewart Lillard, Jr.

December 1966

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to express appreciation to Dr. Samuel H. McMillan, whose penetrating lectures on the contemporary American novel unraveled for me some of Ellison's enigmatic paradoxes and whose encouragement and often helpful suggestions made this study of Ralph Ellison's use of music a formalized reality.

I wish also to thank Dr. A. R. Penner and Dr. Nathalia Wright for their encouragement.

R. S. L.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION.	1
I. ELLISON'S MUSICAL AFFINITY.	2
II. ELLISON'S USE OF A TECHNICAL MUSIC DICTION IN <u>INVISIBLE MAN</u>	12
III. ELLISON'S USE OF MUSICAL LYRICS IN <u>INVISIBLE MAN</u>	32
IV. ELLISON'S PARALLELS TO MUSICAL FORM IN <u>INVISIBLE MAN</u>	55
V. CONCLUSION.	76
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	81

INTRODUCTION

The short stories, novels, and critical reviews of Ralph Waldo Ellison repeatedly reflect the author's concern for and his knowledge of music; and readers of Ellison's Invisible Man (1952), so far his most successful work, readily sense the author's own appreciation of both traditional themes and informal folk lyrics.

Although the readers of Ellison's short stories and novel may have recognized his obvious use of music, only one critical study has established a relationship between Ellison's adolescent musical training and his use of a music form in his novel.¹ Robert A. Bone's treatment of Ellison's use of blues and jazz in the novel, however, is not a definitive article on Ellison's use of music and neglects Ellison's musical diction and use of lyrics.

An examination of Ellison's numerous musical allusions in his novel Invisible Man will be construed to emphasize his excessive use of a technical music jargon and his direct usage of lyrics borrowed from folk rhymes, spirituals, blues and jazz, and symphonic compositions. These technical investigations are, however, a forerunner for a systematic inquiry into the parallels between the structure in the novel and contemporary musical form.

¹Robert A. Bone, "Ralph Ellison and the Use of Imagination," Anger, and Beyond, ed. Herbert Hill (New York, 1966), pp. 86-111.

CHAPTER I

ELLISON'S MUSICAL AFFINITY

When Ralph Waldo Ellison delivered his acceptance speech following the presentation of the fourth National Book Award for fiction on January 27, 1953, an award that selected Ellison's Invisible Man over novels that included Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea, he envisaged himself as "being an aborted musician who approached fiction on the rebound."¹ Behind this revealing quip lay an adolescent adherence to a resplendent musical discipline.

The musician mangué, who along with American fliers and jazz musicians once frequented Leroy Haynes' restaurant in the Rue de Martyrs, Paris, paralleled American blues and jazz as the New World's equivalent of Spanish Cante Flamenco:

Flamenco, while traditional in theme and choreography, allows a maximum of individual expression, and a democratic rivalry such as is typical of a jam session; for, like the blues and jazz, it is an art of improvisation, and like them it can be quite graphic. Even one who doesn't understand the lyrics will note the uncanny ability of the singers presented here to produce pictorial effects with their voices.²

Four years later, the man-of-letters toyed with the potential buyers of stereophonic tape-decks:

Ah, but then came the development of stereophonic tape. . . .
Not only was it possible to have "presence" in one's sound

¹Ralph Ellison, "Light on 'Invisible Man,'" Crisis, LX (1953), 157.

²Ralph Ellison, "Introduction to Flamenco," Saturday Review, XXXVII (December 11, 1954), 39.

reproduction, to hear the fiddle string's snap and scrape, the conductor's grunt, the secret texture of a score's most transient "transient modulations," but one could follow simultaneously, left-ear-right-ear, the development of the composer's ideas as they moved from one section of the orchestra to another, could hear in depth the counterpunal interaction of the various orchestral choirs.³

When, in his youth, had Ellison developed an unremitting interest for flamenco music and stereo tapes and was this interest to shape his future development as a novelist?

Ellison was in his youth a musician who, in high school in Oklahoma City, played first trumpet in the school band and studied four years of harmony--not to mention his exposure to "the driving beat of Southwestern jazz, of which Kansas City, Dallas, and Oklahoma City were acknowledged centers."⁴

In 1964, Ellison, in an address sponsored by the Gertrude Clarke Whittall Foundation and delivered in the Library of Congress, Washington, enlightened his audience with a sketch of his youth in Oklahoma City:

Orchestras which were to become famous within a few years were constantly coming and going. As were the blues singers--Ma Rainey and Ida Cox, and the old bands like that of King Oliver. But best of all, thanks to Mrs. Zelia N. Breaux, there was an active and enthusiastic school music program through which any child who had the interest and the talent could learn to play an instrument and take part in the band, the orchestra, the

³Ralph Ellison, "The Swing to Stereo," Saturday Review, XLI (April 26, 1958), 37.

⁴Robert Penn Warren, ed., Who Speaks for the Negro? (New York, 1965), p. 325; Robert Bone, "Ralph Ellison and the Uses of Imagination," Anger, and Beyond, ed. Herbert Hill (New York, 1966), p. 88.

brass quartet. And there was a yearly operetta and a chorus and a glee club. . . .

I tell you this to point out that although there were no incentives to write, there was ample opportunity to receive an artistic discipline.⁵

Ellison had, previous to his 1964 address, revealed his youthful fascination and growing dedication to a formal music discipline in a 1961 interview with Richard G. Stern. This interview also concerned the Oklahoma City era:

I grew up in a school in which music was emphasized and where we were taught harmony from the ninth through the twelfth grades, and where much time was given to music appreciation and the study of the shorter classical forms but where jazz was considered disreputable.
.....

I wanted to be a composer but not a jazz composer, interestingly enough. I wanted to be a symphonist.
.....

I can't remember when I first wanted to play jazz or to create classical music.
.....

Such men as [Icky] Lawrence and [Walter] Page--and there were several others--had conservatory training as well as a rich jazz experience and thus felt no need to draw a line between the two traditions. Following them, our [Ellison and Oklahoma contemporaries] ideal was to master both.⁶

And yet, Ellison began his college training with a desire to master primarily the classical expressions, for between 1933 and 1936 Ellison "studied composition under William Dawson, the Negro conductor and

⁵Ralph Ellison, "Hidden Name and Complex Fate," Shadow and Act (New York, 1964), p. 154.

⁶Ralph Ellison, "That Same Pain, That Same Pleasure: An Interview," December Magazine, III, ii (Winter 1961), 32, 37, and 38.

composer"⁷ at Tuskegee Institute, Alabama, before leaving for New York City where he continued his musical career under Wallingford Riegger and broadened his interests in the plastic art of sculpturing under Richmond Barthe.⁸

I rode freight trains to Macon County, Alabama, during the Scottsboro trial because I desired to study with the Negro conductor-composer William L. Dawson, who was, and probably still is, the greatest classical musician in that part of the country.⁹

At Tuskegee I had handled manuscripts which Prokofiev had given to Hazel Harrison, a Negro concert pianist who taught there and who had known him in Europe, and through Miss Harrison I had become aware of Prokofiev's symphonies. I had also become aware of the radical movement in politics and art, and in New York had begun reading the work of André Malraux, not only the fiction but chapters published from his Psychology of Art. And in my search for an expression of modern sensibility in the works of Negro writers I discovered Richard Wright.¹⁰

The Tuskegee years, moreover, provided Ralph Ellison with the means for literary contact with T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land, and with the works of "Pound and Ford Madox Ford, Sherwood Anderson and Gertrude Stein, Hemingway and Faulkner. . . ." ¹¹

⁷Bone, "Ralph Ellison and the Uses of Imagination," p. 88.

⁸Rochelle Girson, "Sidelights on Invisibility," Saturday Review, XXXVI (March 14, 1953), 20; Ellison, "That Same Pain, That Same Pleasure: An Interview," December Magazine, p. 40.

⁹Ralph Ellison, "A Rejoinder," in "The Critic and the Writer-- An Exchange," The New Leader, XLVII, iii (Feb. 3, 1964), 20.

¹⁰Ellison, "Hidden Name and Complex Fate," Shadow and Act, p. 161.

¹¹Ibid., p. 160.

After he arrived in New York City and was initiated into the intricate maze of its social and artistic environment (primarily literature, sculpture, and jazz music), Ellison's own musical talents were soon buried beneath his desire to read literary criticism and to perfect his technique as a writer under Richard Wright's guidance. It was also during this formative period of Ellison's career that Langston Hughes recommended the novels of André Malraux to Ellison, who later adopted Malraux as a literary ancestor.¹²

Strikingly enough, Malraux, to whom Ellison offered a nod of literary recognition ("Two days after arriving in New York I was to read Malraux's Man's Fate and The Days of Wrath. . . ."),¹³ manipulated in The Days of Wrath the communist agent Kassner to recognize in music his panacea, his means of sustaining sanity, as his mind tumbled into near chaos while he was held by the Nazis. Ellison the young musician, perhaps similar to Kassner, found his salvation in an art form, but the novel instead of music. Ellison wrote in "Society, Morality, and the Novel" that

Perhaps the novel evolved in order to deal with man's growing awareness that behind the facade of social organization, manners, customs, myths, rituals, religions of the post-Christian era, lies chaos. Man knows, despite the certainties which it is the psychological function of his social institutions to give him, that he did not create the universe and that the universe is not at all concerned with human values. Man knows even in this day of marvelous technology and the tenuous subjugation

¹² Ibid., p. 162.

¹³ Ralph Ellison, "The World and the Jug," The New Leader, XLVI, xxv (December 9, 1963), 25-26.

of the atom, that nature can crush him, and that at the boundaries of human order the arts and the instruments of technology are hardly more than magic objects which serve to aid us in our ceaseless quest for certainty. We cannot live, as someone has said, in the contemplation of chaos, but neither can we live without an awareness of chaos, and the mean through which we achieve that awareness, and through which we assert our humanity most significantly against it, is great art. And in our time the most articulate art form for defining ourselves and for asserting our humanity is the novel. Certainly it is our most rational art form for dealing with the irrational.¹⁴

Possibly Ellison was defending his move from a musical to a novelistic expression; but he was not able to achieve total separation from his wealth of musical expressions.

In Ellison's attempt to perfect the novel form, to express the "irrational" in "rational" terms, Richard Wright became an influential companion who invited Ellison to write his first review of Waters Edward Turpin's These Low Grounds for New Challenge, 1937.¹⁵ Following this first review, Ellison's career as a writer had been temporarily established; and after the death of his mother in Dayton, Ohio,¹⁶ during the 1937 recession, he returned to New York and began to publish both reviews and short stories in some of the lesser circulated journals. The literary influence, that Ellison insisted was a latent theme in his

¹⁴Ralph Ellison, "Society, Morality, and the Novel," The Living Novel: a Symposium, ed. Granville Hicks (New York, 1957), pp. 64-65.

¹⁵Ralph Ellison, "Creative and Cultural Lag," The New Challenge, II, ii (Fall 1937), 90-91.

¹⁶Dayton, Ohio, is the suggested setting for Ralph Ellison's "February," Saturday Review, XXXVIII (January 1, 1955), 25.

personal development even in Oklahoma City, finally overshadowed his potential musical career;¹⁷ but his music background provided Ellison with a technique, a stratagem which he wielded sometimes staccato, sometimes with schmaltz, to achieve a rich prose, primarily in Invisible Man (1952).

When Ellison joked with the stereophonic tape-deck buyers that they would be able to "follow simultaneously, left-ear-right-ear, the development of the composer's ideas as they moved from one section of the orchestra to another,"¹⁸ he may have ironically tipped-his-hand and exposed his own method of employment of musical diction. Irving Howe, a sometimes "Joby" comforter of Ellison,¹⁹ was quick to recognize Ellison's ear for sounds even in a novel:

No other writer has captured so much of the confusion and agony, the hidden gloom and surface gaiety of Negro life. His ear for Negro speech is magnificent: a sharecropper calmly describing how he seduced his own daughter, a Harlem street-vender spinning jive, a West Indian woman inciting her men to resist an eviction.

¹⁷Ellison, "That Same Pain, That Same Pleasure: An Interview," December Magazine, p. 41; Ellison, "The World and the Jug," The New Leader (1963), p. 25. Ellison said in 1963 his college dream was to write a symphony and have it performed by his twenty-sixth birthday like Wagner whom he admired during his college days.

¹⁸Ellison, "The Swing to Stereo," Saturday Review, p. 37.

¹⁹See the following three magazines in order of publication to develop the verbal feud between Irving Howe and Ralph Ellison: Irving Howe, "Black Boys and Native Sons," Dissent, X, iv (Autumn, 1963), 353-368; Ralph Ellison, "The World and the Jug," The New Leader, XLVI, xxv (December 9, 1963), 22-26; Howe's "A Reply to Ralph Ellison" and Ellison's "A Rejoinder" in "The Critic and the Writer--An Exchange," The New Leader, XLVII, iii (February 3, 1964), 12-22.

The rhythm of the prose is harsh and tenses, like a beat of harried alertness. . . . It is drenched in Negro life, talk, music. . . .²⁰

Ellison's characters frequently chanted out their life's struggle or intoned with "hoarse contralto voices." They sermonized in "smooth articulate tones" and were entertained by an orchestra of clarinets that vibrated sensuously accompanied by mechanical umbilical cords that "twang like a bass viol." Sometimes they enjoyed the "groovy music on the juke." First, it is this barrel of musical cant that will be poured out and etherized before the reader's of this thesis eyes AND EARS as a preface to a detailed investigation of Ellison's direct use of musical lyrics.

Second, Ellison's audience need scrutinize only two of his early short stories, "That I Had the Wings" (1943)²¹ and "In a Strange Country" (1944),²² to realize the continuous mold of musical lyrics that has shaped his short stories and novel; and there is even sufficient evidence to suggest an extension of lyrics and folk sermons in his second novel, not yet published.²³ From Beethoven to Dvořák, Handel's Messiah to Jack the Bear or "London Bridge's Fallin' Down,"

²⁰Irving Howe, "A Negro in America," Nation, CLXXIV, xix (May 10, 1952), 454.

²¹Ralph Ellison, "That I Had the Wings," Common Ground, III, iv (Summer 1943), 30-37.

²²Ralph Ellison, "In a Strange Country," Tomorrow, III (July 1944), 41-44.

²³Ralph Ellison, "And Hickman Arrives," The Noble Savage, I (1960), 5-49.

the worlds of Ellison's heroes become levels of spirituals and jazz. Even a Welsh "pub-club" can end an evening of brotherhood with stanzas of the Welsh national song, "God Save the King," and "International," and the "Star-Spangled Banner." For the sake of this thesis, however, only the novel Invisible Man (1952) is considered. (The novel considered here represents both the novel that was published in 1952 and the additional chapter that was removed from the novel's midsection before its publication.)²⁴ Nor will allusions to symphonies and to Louis Armstrong's "What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue" be slighted in this second part study of Ellison's use of music.

If Ellison foresaw a relationship between his musical diction and his use of lyrics, this synthesis may have been consciously interwoven in Ellison's construction of Invisible Man, so far his most finished and sustained work. From his own musical background, Ellison may have conceived himself as a symphonist developing a three movement score for an orchestra of Negro society. Over-all, it is Ellison's

²⁴Ralph Ellison, "Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar," Soon, One Morning, ed. Herbert Hill (New York, 1963), pp. 242-290. Ellison wrote the following note to preface this chapter from the original version of Invisible Man: "The following narrative formed a part of the original version of a novel called Invisible Man, and it marked an attempt to get the hero of that memoir out of the hospital into the world of Harlem. . . . For those who would care to fit it back in Invisible Man let them start at the point where the explosion occurs in the paint factory, substitute the following happenings, and leave them once the hero is living in Mary's hope." Ibid., p. 243.

parallels to the symphonic structure that excite a true forte possibile from the critical readers.

Any study of this kind, especially a systematic investigation of Ellison's use of music in his prose works, should anticipate Robert Penn Warren's astute comment that often critics who are not schooled from an early age in the richness of American blues and jazz "move in and grab, as it were, the other man's soul."²⁵ Ellison himself, whose command of Negro rhythms and folk tradition is extensive, warned of the Negro's "resentment . . . because all too often that idiom, that style, that expressiveness for which we've [the Negroes] suffered and struggled and which is a product of our effort to make meaning of our experience--is taken over by those who would distort it and reduce it to banality."²⁶ It is anticipated that reference to Ellison's musical diction and use of lyrics, not to omit his thematic structure, will create a renewed interest in the author of Invisible Man and future novels that he may be in the process of completing.

²⁵Warren, Who Speaks for the Negro?, p. 338.

²⁶Ibid.

CHAPTER II

ELLISON'S USE OF A TECHNICAL MUSIC

DICTION IN INVISIBLE MAN

Ralph Ellison, in his attempt to construct contrasting settings for his invisible hero that would provide opportunities for the hero's search for identity, consciously directs his musical jargon to reflect changes in tempo corresponding to the geographic and emotional shifts in the novel. While the invisible youth is under the spell of a "reefer" (p. 7)¹ in the Prologue of Invisible Man, he "discovered a new analytical way of listening to music. The unheard sounds came through, and each melodic line existed of itself, stood out clearly from all the rest, said its piece, and waited patiently for the other voices to speak" (p. 7). Then, in his Dantesque descent, the youth reaches four levels in the depths of a cave that appears in his soporific vision.

On the lowest level of the cave a congregation listens to a shouting preacher amid a rapid tempo of a sermon. Overhead, there are two faster tempo levels in the cave, one where a naked girl pleads before a group of slaveowners and another where the invisible hero hears "an old woman singing a spiritual as full of Weltschmerz [mental depression caused by comparison of the actual state of the world with

¹Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (New York, 1952). All internal page references refer to this edition of the novel.

an ideal state] as flamenco" (p. 7). The top level rings with the "swiftness of the hot tempo" (p. 7).

When the hero begins his exit from the bottom level, the physical description becomes muddled: "And I tore myself away, hearing the old singer of spirituals moaning. . . ." (p. 8) The spiritual singer formerly was on the third level and not the lowest level. Whatever the incongruity of levels as the hero leaves the cave, the most striking contrasts are achieved through the descriptions of the singer of spirituals, who poisoned her master to achieve her freedom and prevent her rebellious sons from tearing the master to pieces with their home-made knives, and her sons who live in the hot tempo above and are bitter towards white folks (p. 9). After the invisible hero's indoctrination into the levels of Negro history, he is overcome with "a profound craving for tranquillity, for peace and quiet, a state I [the hero] felt I could never achieve" (p. 10). In his stupor, the hero is caught up in a "rhythm . . . too hectic. A tom-tom beating like heart-thuds began drowning out the trumpet, filling my ears" (p. 10). This Prologue introduction is similar, therefore, to a dream-parallel of the hero's flight in the main section of the novel as he breaks the Negro's code toward the white man at his college campus and is politely expelled, an act that forces him to journey to New York and attain an ascent to a hotter and faster rhythmic pace than the spiritual oriented chapel choir of the Southern college. Overtly, Ellison's musical diction reflects these contrasting rhythms in the slow solemnity of the Southern Negro spirituals and the fast chaotic

jive of Harlem streets. A detailed survey of Invisible Man will substantiate Ellison's use of musical diction and reflect the musical nuances that correspond to the development of the hero's search for identity.

The first major geographical setting that Ellison uses in the body of his novel (not to include the Prologue or Epilogue) is that of the Southern United States. Here the youthful hero is subjected to discrimination both in his high school and college training. From the Battle Royal scene, convened to honor the hero's superb high school record, to the confrontation of the hero with Dr. Bledsoe which led to his college expulsion, the prevailing mood is that of the South with its pastoral surroundings and entrenched racial limitations.

The Battle Royal episode of Chapter 1 constitutes the invisible hero's first contact with the reality of the white man's world. The contact, veiled in chaos for the young Greenwood high school orator, erupts in an impromptu maul among the Negro youths. As the genocidal boxing match and electric rug saps the Negro youths, collectively, of their manhood, their self-respect, the young orator blurts out the words "social equality" in place of "social responsibility" (pp. 24-25).

Beneath the uproar of the smoker, "a clarinet was vibrating sensuously" (p. 15) encouraging a white stripper. The clarinet then changes to a "low-registered moaning" (p. 16). During the boxing match the blindfolded Negro youths stumble "like drunken dancers weaving to the rapid drum-like thuds of blows" (p. 19). The briefcase with the scholarship to the state college for Negroes, however, is a gift to

the Negro youth that soon alters this rapid and sensual music theme and relocates the invisible youth in a campus of quiet songs. It is Ellison's method of motivating his hero's search for identity that will lead the hero through a variety of musical tempos.

Once in residence at the state college, the youth responds to its beauty: "The buildings were old and covered with vines and the roads gracefully winding, lined with hedges and wild roses that dazzled the eyes in the summer sun" (p. 27). It is similar to an Eden of pastoral innocence where "the bell in the chapel tower rang out the precious short-lived hours" (p. 27) and where in winter "the chimes in the steeple" and the "sonorous choir of trombones rendering a Christmas carol" (p. 28) blend in the ears of the former Greenwood high school youth.

At the edge of the campus "the black powerhouse with its engines droning earth-shaking rhythms in the dark" (p. 27) symbolizes the stable rhythm and beauty of the campus. This beauty is described by the invisible youth in musical details:

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, Oh, drum that
 marched us militarily at noon--what was real, what solid, what
 more than a pleasant, time-killing dream? (pp. 28-29)

On a spring evening Ellison's protagonist recalls "the sudden arpeggios of laughter liltng across the tender, springtime grass" (p. 85) or the "pyramided heads of the student choir . . . and above them, stretching to the ceiling, the organ pipes looming, a gothic hierarchy of dull gilded gold" (p. 86). Ellison's description at

this point assumes musical proportions as his sentences become a crescendo of rising adjectivals and phrases that reach a vibrant peak of resonant sounds, only to be silenced by the "Dong! Dong! Dong!" of the chapel bells that penetrate the Southern college campus environment (similar, almost to the matin bells that silenced the witches' ruckus of demonic sacrilege in Modest Petrovich Musorgski's symphonic fantasy "A Night on Bald Mountain") and the disquieted mind of the hero. The arpeggios of laughter "gay-welling, far-floating, fluent, spontaneous, a bell-like feminine fluting," portrayed in the successive chain of adjectives, become literally a chord of rising notes:

At the sound of vespers I moved across the campus with groups of students, walking slowly, their voices soft in the mellow dusk. I remember the yellowed globes of frosted glass making lacy silhouettes on the gravel and the walk of the leaves and branches above us as we moved slow through the dusk so restless with scents of lilac, honeysuckle and verbena, and the feel of spring greenness; and I recall the sudden arpeggios of laughter lilting across the tender, springtime grass--gay-welling, far-floating, fluent, spontaneous, a bell-like feminine fluting, then suppressed; as though snuffed swiftly and irrevocably beneath the quiet solemnity of the vespers air now vibrant with somber chapel bells. Dong! Dong! Dong!
(p. 85)

The sermons in the chapel are usually "intoned . . . in smooth articulate tones" (p. 86) that perpetuate an atmosphere of restraint among the Negro college students. On Founders Day, old Mr. Barbee, the guest speaker from Chicago and close associate of the late Founder of the college, "droned" (p. 92) and "intoned" (p. 92) a living tribute to the memory of the Founder: "He bugled, his head raised to the ceiling, his voice full-throated" (p. 99).

And also on that day a melodious message seems to sway and charm the congregation and then slink back into its basket of restraint:

As the organ voices died, I saw a thin brown girl arise noiselessly with the rigid control of a modern dancer, high in the upper rows of the choir, and begin to sing a cappella. She began softly, as though singing to herself of emotions of utmost privacy, a sound not addressed to the gathering, but which they overheard almost against her will. Gradually she increased its volume, until at times the voice seemed to become a disembodied force that sought to enter her, to violate her, shaking her, rocking her rhythmically, as though it had become the source of her being, rather than the fluid web of her own creation. . . . I could not understand the words, but only the mood, sorrowful, vague and ethereal, of the singing. It throbbed with nostalgia, regret and repentance, and I sat with a lump in my throat as she sank slowly down; not a sitting but a controlled collapsing, as though she were balancing, sustaining the simmering bubble of her final tone by some delicate rhythm of her heart's blood, or by some mystic concentration of her being, focused upon the sound through the contained liquid of her large uplifted eyes. (pp. 90-91)

The crescendo, excessive vibration, and final decrescendo of the singer's voice and Homer A. Barbee's speech habits, along with his description of Dr. Bledsoe who could command an audience with "great gut-tones of his magnificent basso" (p. 97), tend to strengthen the readers' appreciation of Ellison's knowledge of music and his sincere craftsmanship in construction of the novel.

The Negro youth seated in the audience is reminded of his own deliveries from the platform while he was a student leader:

. . . directing my voice at the highest beams and farthest rafters, ringing them, the accents staccato upon the ridgepole and echoing back with a tinkling, like words hurled to the trees of a wilderness, or into a well of slate-gray water; more sound than sense, a play upon the resonances of buildings, an assault upon the temples of the ear (p. 88).

But the beauty and the slow rhythm of the campus are pierced by staccato accents only in the student debates that sap the potentially incendiary spirit of the campus and delay the student action. Even the Negro communities surrounding the college town are permeated with the restraint of centuries which is reflected in their songs.

Mr. Norton, the Northern philanthropist, scheduled to hear only "the decorous thunder of [the] organ" (p. 89) in the Founder's Day chapel service, listens attentively as the incestuous hero, Trueblood, "cleared his throat, his eyes gleaming and his voice taking on a deep, incantatory quality, as though he had told the story many, many times" (p. 42). A symbol of primitive slavery morality, Trueblood thrives on the older music forms heard along the river near Mobile: "They used to have musicianers on them boats, and sometimes I used to wake her [Margaret, his first wife] up to hear the music when they come up the river" (p. 43). Trueblood's second wife, also a representative of the older Negro type character, possesses a "woman's hoarse contralto" voice and "intoned a hymn" (p. 52). She is, in a sense, submissive to her husband's will following her and her daughter's return to Trueblood's cabin. There is no music of rebellion in her voice.

The Golden Day Inn remains beyond the pale of the beautiful and sonorous atmosphere of Negro restraint. It symbolizes the frustrated hopes of the rising educated middle-class Negroes: doctors, lawyers, teachers, Civil Service workers, cooks, preachers, politicians, and artists who are patients at the mental hospital nearby. The Negro

youth, uninitiated to the tavern's chaos, fails to hear the music of quiet and restraint near the Golden Day Inn: "And sometimes I listen to hear if music reaches that far, but recall only the drunken laughter of sad, sad whores" (p. 28). But this occurs prior to his first association with the mental patients and whores of the Golden Day Inn.

The youth's appreciation for the beauty and restraint of the Southern college campus does not endure forever, and it is the youth's adventure in the tavern with Mr. Norton that begins to alter his attitude toward the college and the Southern atmosphere in general. In this encounter Ellison capitalizes on musical allusions to suggest chaos.

As the youth drives the black limousine toward the tavern, he is confronted by the unrestrained antics of an insane drum major.

Up ahead I saw the one who thought he was a drum major strutting in front, giving orders as he moved energetically in long, hipswinging strides, a cane held above his head, rising and falling as though in time to music. (p. 55)

And as the music rises and falls, Mr. Norton and his chauffeur are torn between order and chaos, between the restraining rules of society and the organic energy of life.

When the inmates of the hospital overcome their attendant Supercargo (a symbolic superego) inside the tavern, the alleged composer, and a patient, begins his form of personal expression, ". . . banging away the one wild piece he seemed to know on the out-of-tune piano, striking the keyboard with fists and elbows and filling in other effects in a bass voice that moaned like a bear in agony" (p. 65). The "juke

box [is] baying, the piano thumping . . . "; and Supercargo "lay like a spent horse upon the bar" (p. 68). Ellison produces a swirling kaleidoscope of musical sounds and physical gestures that accompany the psychological struggle between the downstairs and upstairs portions of the inn--between the lower and overhead sections of the brain. The internal struggle that apparently is a reality to the Negro inmates serves as an unforgettable sermon for the hero. His naivete destroyed, the youth can never remain in the confines of the artificial Southern college campus for Negroes.

When the youth returns with Mr. Norton to the campus following the tavern bout, the once "somber chapel bells" no longer add their sonorous regality to the "spring greenness" of the earlier scene; but they harrow the youth's "turmoil" (p. 86) and agitate his psyche following the encounter with Dr. Bledsoe: "But in the hereness of dusk I am moving toward the doomlike bells through the flowered air, beneath the rising moon" (p. 86).

The established order of the Southern campus soon vanishes from the invisible hero's mind after his encounter with the hospital patients at the Golden Day Inn and his Northern migration to Harlem. His first indoctrination into the "new world of possibility" and "city sounds" (p. 122) comes in the form of a cacophonous "shirt-sleeved crowd" (p. 123) listening to Ras the Exhorter, a potential Marcus Garvey: "And I saw the squat man shake his fist angrily over the uplifted faces, yelling something in a staccato West Indian accent, at which the crowd yelled threateningly" (p. 122). It is an occasion for verbal violence

outside the restrictive walls and ceiling of the campus chapel, and it is a second major setting for the hero's search for his identity.

The first encounter with the exhilarated tempo of Harlem only stuns but fails to convince the young hero of the realities of the New York situation, for the next day after his arrival the youth plans to adopt Dr. Bledsoe's Southern buffoonery as a supposedly proper executive mannerism: "Then he'd clear his throat and give a deeply intoned order, as though each syllable were pregnant with nuances of profoundly important meaning" (p. 125). When he responds to an appointment arranged by a letter from Mr. Emerson, one of the financial supporters of the Negro youth's Southern alma mater, the Negro job applicant is made aware of the economic strength of the Northern white philanthropist. Ellison parallels this capitalistic economic might to Mr. Emerson's physical strength over the tropical birds imprisoned in the cage that is located near a window in the reception lobby.

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
.....

These folks are the Kings of the Earth! I thought, hearing
the bird make an ugly noise. (p. 138)

Ellison may have in mind T. S. Eliot's ravished Philomel that made an ugly "'Jug Jug' to dirty ears" (Waste Land, II, l. 103).² The capitalists

²T. S. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950 (New York, 1962), p. 40.

like Mr. Emerson are "Kings of the Earth" who have the power to ravish the earth of its natural resources for profit and to imprison the large birds. Mr. Emerson will soon accept control over the Negro college youth and imprison him to a subservient economic position; Emerson and his son will "pick poor Robin clean" and leave the youth without his "tail feather of protection" to the vicious New York economic chaos. The Negro youth is adrift in an ugly and rapid tempo. The quiet songs of the college campus have been lost.

In order to remain in New York and not admit defeat at the hands of the white philanthropists and Dr. Bledsoe, who tricked him into making his exodus from the South, the youth accepts non-union employment at the Liberty Paint Factory and is the object of contention between white union members and Lucius Brockway whose association with the owner of the factory and his employment experience assure him of a job although he professes no union membership. Lucius Brockway, perhaps a potential "Uncle Tom" figure in the eyes of the not-so-democratic union members, is to the Negro hero a continuation of the New York hysteria that confronts the youth. Lucius' voice is "a high-pitched Negro voice" that "rang out above the machine sounds" (p. 157). And the boilers in Lucius' basement produce a "shrill hissing" (p. 174) sound before the "clear new note arising" (p. 174) foretells the explosion that injures the hero and accelerates him "into a wet blast of black emptiness that was somehow a bath of whiteness" (p. 175). The bath of whiteness is caused by the explosion of a boiler used to mix the white paint.

Whether the reader chooses to accept Chapter 11 of Invisible Man, the hospital scene, or "Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar," the lengthy section in Ellison's original manuscript that developed the plot following the paint factory explosion to the hero's association with Mary Rambo, the tempo remains rapid and chaotic.

In Chapter 11 of Invisible Man the youth is fastened in an accordion-like hospital machine that crushes and stretches the youth's body and perpetuates the rapid tempo of Harlem and the chaotic relationship that existed between Lucius Brockway and the hero following their hand-to-hand fight and the hero's negligence that caused the explosion in the paint factory. The youth reflects upon his imprisonment in the electronic machine: "A flash of cold-edged heat enclosed me. I was pounded between crushing electrical pressures; pumped between live electrodes like an accordion between a player's hands. My lungs were compressed like a bellows and each time my breath returned I yelled, punctuating the rhythmical action of the nodes" (p. 177).

Following the electronic shocks that attempt to erase the youth's memory of his existence that occurred before this operation and shock treatment, the Negro hero becomes nostalgic as he recalls events and scenes from his youth; but the shock treatment does not achieve a total or lasting loss of memory on the part of the patient. The rhythm is slowed for a short period of time and the hero remembers his slower tempoed Southern heritage; however, the prefrontal lobotomy machine soon revives the motion. The experiment has failed to deaden the youth's past identity.

The static sounds became a quiet drone. Strains of music, a Sunday air, drifted from a distance. . . . The voices droned harmoniously. Was it a radio I heard--a phonograph? The vox humana of a hidden organ? If so, what organ and where? . . . Scenes of a shaded lawn in summer drifted past; I saw a uniformed military band arrayed decorously in concert . . . hear a sweet-voiced trumpet rendering "The Holy City" as from an echoing distance, bouyed by a choir of muted horns; and above, the mocking obbligato of a mocking bird. (p. 178)

The beautiful but sluggish rhythm soon regains its original accelerated tempo: "The pulse came swift and staccato, increasing gradually until I fairly danced between the nodes" (p. 180). Sardonicly the experimenting physician comments on the antics of his patient, "'They really do have rhythm, don't they? Get Hot, boy! Get hot!'" (p. 181). Less concern was given to the hero's recovery than to the experiment. The hero's discharge from the hospital, with a "light head" and "ringing" ears, symbolically and medically represents for the hero a second birth. The shock treatment initiates the new-born baby's pulse but it fails to destroy his old identity.

Not to be outdone, Ellison's original hospital scene in "Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar"³ is also permeated with a rapid and dissonant musical diction. At first, Mary Rambo, the hospital attendant, moves about as in a "dream-waltz"⁴ as she facilitates the delivery of her unofficially adopted son from the clutches of the glass, machine-like womb. Her agile movements are soon replaced by

³Ralph Ellison, "Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar," Soon, One Morning, ed. Herbert Hill (New York, 1963), pp. 244-290.

⁴Ibid., p. 258.

the invisible hero's tug of war to sever the mechanical umbilical cord that connects him to the machine: "Turning, my hand struck the cord, making it twang like a bass viol. I gave it a sharp tug, and again, this time hearing the creak of rolling wheels, the machine!"⁵ As the youth cautiously stands behind his hospital room door contemplating his flight, he is frightened by alien mechanical and human voices: the hospital room door "seemed as though the surface had come alive with the roar of invisible tides; the muffled and rhythmical thunder of remote machinery. Voices, other sounds, washed underneath, creating a near sub-aural harmony."⁶ He is alone among the noises of the hospital. Flight becomes an effective means of potential relief.

The naked hero's flight from the hospital, by way of the hospital's basement, to a man-hole outlet and finally to Mary Rambo's apartment in Harlem is accompanied by the "huge loping rhythm of an engine [that] whirled into motion beneath the sound of an out-of-tune tympany . . . setting up a shrill vibration within the dark. . . ."⁸ As he nears his destination, the invisible hero, clothed by Bridgewater, who took an interest in his safety, hears someone begin "a poorly executed flourish upon a tinny trumpet."⁹

Chapter 11 of Invisible Man ends as the young hero is confronted by a "young platinum blonde" (Eve type) who "nibbled at a red Delicious apple" (p. 190) before plunging "into the late afternoon Harlem"

⁵Ibid., p. 265.

⁶Ibid., p. 266.

⁷Ibid., p. 271.

⁸Ibid., p. 275.

⁹Ibid., p. 289.

(p. 190). Although not a musical reference, the obvious reference to the Garden of Eden myth and mankind's expulsion from the garden following the disobedient act of eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is structurally placed in the novel to parallel the hero's movement from the second major setting of the Men's House in Harlem to the apartment house of Mary Rambo and then to the downtown (southern Manhattan as opposed to Harlem and the uptown or northern section of Manhattan) New York environment of the Brotherhood that constitutes the third major setting for the hero's search for identity.

The remainder of the novel shifts between the securities provided by Mary Rambo (a Southern mammy figure) and the Brotherhood that uses to advantage or discards music under the baton of its leader, Brother Jack.

Mary Rambo's words of comfort are directed to the invisible hero in "a husky voiced contralto" (p. 191) part, "Boy, is you all right, what's wrong?" (p. 191) On the morning when he leaves Mary's apartment to join in the training required by the Brotherhood, he remembers that Mary was "singing something sad and serene. . . ." (p. 248) Mary remains throughout the remainder of the novel a symbolic enduring force within the swift moving pageant of Harlem life.¹⁰

A mood of confusion offset Mary's enduring spirit. The invisible youth's head, after a night of entertainment and drinking with the

¹⁰Jonathan Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (New York, 1965), p. 84.

members of the Brotherhood, is a chorus of "contradictory voices shouting" (p. 197) but not "in unison." "Whatever it was I wouldn't care as long as they sang without dissonance; yes, and avoided the uncertain extremes of the scale" (p. 197). To achieve harmony in his mind he attempts to find identity in a socio-political organization.

Within the framework of the Brotherhood, music is both an effective instrument for wielding mass responses and something to be avoided for its own aesthetic quality or when it is not in the scientific interest of the whole Brotherhood. Ellison perhaps suggests this function for music within the Brotherhood as he describes the Chthonian Club's wall decorations, the club where the organization frequently met to achieve its social goal:

We [Brother Jack, hero, etc.] entered a room lined with books and decorated with old musical instruments: An Irish harp, a hunter's horn, a clarinet and a wooden flute were suspended by the neck from the wall on pink and blue ribbons. There were a leather divan and a number of easy chairs. (p. 228)

The instruments were pinned on the wall for microscopic scrutiny but were not used for producing music. The Brotherhood's use of music is both pragmatic and hypocritical.

Inside the Chthonian Club "a series of rich arpeggios" (p. 230) are played in succession while Emma and other members of the Brotherhood carelessly snicker about the color of the invisible hero's skin. Through the arpeggios sounded on the piano, Ellison's cant diction forces an audible parallel between the sound of the piano and the laughter associated with the arpeggios on the Southern college campus (p. 85). The Brotherhood, like the Southern campus, offers the hero

a secure environment until it wishes to expell him. Only after incessant appeals by Brother Jack on this first night of entertainment are the members persuaded to act in a civil and "highly developed" (p. 238) attitude toward their Negro brother; but the strained association destroys any basis for musical harmony. A female New England member apologizes for the racist remarks leveled at the Negro brother: "'I would never ask our colored brothers to sing, even though I love to hear them. Because I know that it would be a very backward thing. You are here to fight along with us, not to entertain. I think you understand me, don't you, Brother?'" (p. 238)

From that first encounter with the Brotherhood, the music, its volume and its tempo are regulated by an insidious hierarchy that manipulates the organization in a method similar to that of the Greenwood town officials who organized the "smoker" and the high school oratorical contest. The "roar and clapping of hands [that] became a song" (p. 256) are the Brotherhood's "signal" for their Harlem crusade. At this point "songs flared between speeches, chants exploded as spontaneously as shouts at a southern revival" (p. 257); and the invisible hero "felt as though [he] had wandered into the percussion section of a symphony orchestra" (p. 258). The excitement is again the tympany and "drum-like thuds" like the Battle Royal that preceded the Greenwood speech. The Negro youth is exploited by the Southern white men and the Northern Brotherhood; but it is the "primitive . . . tom-toms beating in [his] voice" (p. 312), that attracts biracial attention to him and not his own identity. When Ellison's hero uses his personal

initiative and organizes in Harlem an efficient and even ostentatious Brotherhood chapter that is strong enough to parade through the streets ("Then came the flags and banners and the cards bearing slogans; and the squad of drum majorettes, the best-looking girls we could find, who pranced and twirled and just plain girled in the enthusiastic interest of Brotherhood," p. 287), he soon receives a terse warning not to progress too rapidly in the Brotherhood. The rhythm of the hero and his Negro culture are no more congruous to the pace of the Brotherhood than they were to the Greenwood white society.

The invisible hero's return to Harlem, to reorganize the declining position of the Brotherhood following the defection and death of Brother Clifton, is met by a renewal of rhythm and music in his life. An open breach between the Brotherhood and the interest of their invisible Negro leader becomes apparent as the prosaic dictates of Brother Jack clash with the sounds of Harlem. Although the downtown Manhattan pace of life moved rapidly, Harlem's uptown tensions are mysteriously suppressed under a slower way of life until they burst forth in local protests or full scale riots:

I had been away long enough for the streets to seem strange.
The uptown rhythms were slower and yet were somehow faster;
a different tension was in the hot night air. (p. 320)

Barrelhouse's Jolly Dollar tavern reverberates with the "'groovy music on the juke'" (p. 321), and the "hipster" friends of Rinehart walk with "long jaunty strides that caused their heavy silk sport shirts to flounce rhythmically upon their bodies" (p. 366).

The Rinehart revival service in Harlem recalls to the hero the lyrical sermon method developed by the Negro community in the South even from slavery days:

Behind me I heard the rise and fall of an old-fashioned prayer such as I hadn't heard since leaving the campus; and then only when visiting country preachers were asked to pray. The voice rose and fell in a rhythmical, dreamlike recital--part enumeration of earthly trials undergone by the congregation, part rapt display of vocal virtuosity, part appeal to God. (pp. 374-375)

The rhythm of music and the oratory of the prayer are intertwined, producing the lyrics to accompany the electric guitar that "Rine the runner and Rine the gambler and Rine the briber and Rine the lover and Rinehart the Reverend" (p. 376) bought for the congregation.

Ellison, humorously or inadvertently, reemphasizes the dehumanizing influence of the Brotherhood with its absence of sincere musical expression when his hero in the novel visits the home of Brother Hambro. Ambiguously Ellison's description records that the "distant child [Hambro's child] had stopped singing now, and it was dead quiet" (p. 378). The hero soon realizes that his association with the Brotherhood is also dead. The Brotherhood is playing "an antiphonal game" (p. 379), and the musical tempo of Harlem moves in opposition to the directives of Brother Jack as though the Negroes of Harlem are attempting to "upset the tempo of the master plan" (p. 381).

In the remaining chapters of the novel, Brother Jack and Mr. Norton and Mr. Emerson merge "into one single white figure" (p. 384). The invisible Negro rejects their solutions for identity and experiments with his own identity through self-reliance. The musical debate between

the Brotherhood and the Harlem Negro community extinguishes itself in the mind of the invisible hero.

The invisible Negro has wandered from a chaotic high school rhythm, to the inert and lethargic meter of a Southern college campus, and on to the staccato pace of Harlem. His Brotherhood experience tends to repress his rhythmic response; instead, the invisible hero seeks his destiny outside of a formal organization. In the closing Epilogue the hero remains in his underground one-room flat and continues to listen to Louis Armstrong's music as he did in the Prologue. The levels of future caves in dreams caused by "reefers" and the tempos of their music are unpredictable. It is possible that there will be no more "reefers" for the hero, for they are not safe: "I might forget to dodge some bright morning and some cluck would run me down with an orange and yellow street car, or a bilious bus! Or I might forget to leave my hole when the moment for action presents itself" (p. 11).

CHAPTER III

ELLISON'S USE OF MUSICAL LYRICS

IN INVISIBLE MAN

An analysis of Ellison's use of a technical musical jargon isolated by itself produces a stark scenery for the invisible hero's autobiographical search for his identity. Ellison's use of music in his novel, however, is not limited to a technical cant but includes allusions to and lyrics from Negro folk songs, ballads, spirituals, intoned sermons, and games. Nor does the novelist neglect Negro jazz or modified symphonic compositions.¹

Rochelle Girson, in her review of Invisible Man, quotes Ellison as saying in 1953 that successful writers often inherit a "verbal tradition" that they use in their novels:

". . . they knew all the ways in which stories were told verbally, and they incorporated that into their writings. They knew all the tricks of the fairy tales, which have a magic about them. A lot of people are trying to get back to this big sense of the narrative--big in the sense that it can draw upon all the age-old sources of the storyteller."²

Ellison's novel becomes proof of his adherence to this tradition, for it includes a folk story related by Trueblood, an address by the

¹Edgar Hyman, "The Negro Writer in America: An Exchange--The Folk Tradition," Partisan Review, XXV (Spring 1958), 198.

²Rochelle Girson, "Sidelights on Invisibility," Saturday Review, XXXVI (March 14, 1953), 20.

Reverend Homer A. Barbee of Chicago, a thunderous verbal sermon attributed to Dr. Bledsoe, and numerous folk songs and spirituals that reflect the American Negro's past folk culture.

Again, in 1958, Ellison attempts to associate himself with the mainstream of western literature through his use of Negro music and speech idioms:

. . . I try to do my part in keeping the American language alive and rich by using in my work the music and idiom of American Negro speech, and by insisting that the words of that language correspond with the reality of American life as seen by my own people.³

It is this ebullience, this "music . . . of American Negro speech" included in the more than sixty jazz and spiritual lyrics, the hymns, and folk rhymes, that will be scrutinized in an attempt to ascertain its position in the novel and the significance of its use in relation to the structure of Invisible Man.

The invisible hero begins his narrative while he is hibernating in his New York underground room and listening to Louis Armstrong's blues lyric, "What did I do / To be so black / And blue?" (p. 10) Louis Armstrong's music is relatively new in his repertoire; he was previously subjected to spirituals, blues, hymns, jazz, and symphonic compositions before his final and temporary adoption of Armstrong's blues. A close reading of Invisible Man may reveal the hero's cycle of interest in musical forms and Ellison's use of lyrics in his novel.

³Ralph Ellison, "Ralph Ellison, Davidson Nicol, Gilbert Gratiant, Richard Wright, Richard Gibson, Beauford Delaney," Preuves, No. 87 (May 1958), n.p. See Ralph Ellison, "Some Questions and Some Answers," Shadow and Act (New York, 1964), pp. 266-267.

The discussion of Ellison's use of a technical music diction in the novel has already referred to the parallel between the three major structural settings for the body of the novel and Ellison's shifting of a technical vocabulary. Again these three major divisions--the hero's experience in the South, his uptown Manhattan (Harlem) episode and search for employment, and the Brotherhood association--bear scrutiny as the author's direct use of lyrics is developed.

Most striking of all aspects of the Southern college is its addiction to music. On crisp wintery nights the students are accompanied by "chimes in the steeple ringing and a sonorous choir of trombones rendering a Christmas carol" (p. 28), or they sing "'A Mighty Fortress Is Our God'" beneath the "majestically mellow . . . trombones, and then the organ. The sound floats over all, clear like the night, liquid, serene, and lonely" (p. 28). On special occasions "members of a country quartet" sing "'their primitive spirituals'" in the college chapel; and as Jim Trueblood leads the group of singers, the Negro student body is "embarrassed by the earthy harmonies they [the quartet] sang" (p. 36). The college atmosphere holds, apparently, an air of repression for the students, who are forced to listen to embarrassing spirituals and sing songs enjoyed by their white guests. But Jim Trueblood does not repress his desires when he is dealing with his family.

On the campus Jim Trueblood leads a quartet as they sing spirituals. At home his spirituals become the blues after his incestuous act with Mary Lou, his daughter:

"Finally, one night, way early in the mornin', I looks up and sees the stars and I starts singin'. I don't mean to, I didn't think 'bout it, just start singin'. I don't know what it was, some kinda church song, I guess. All I know is I ends up singin' the blues. I sings me some blues that night ain't never been sang before. . . . I made up my mind that I was goin' back home and face Kate; yeah, and face Mary Lou too." (p. 51)

While Trueblood is relating his story to Mr. Norton, the "younguns" are playing, "'London Bridge's Fallin' Down'" (p. 53). But why this British rhyme? Perhaps Ellison is attempting casually to describe the antics of the children, but the "London Bridge"⁴ nursery rhyme with its incremental stanza structure suggests a persistent will to endure under an ominous threat of destruction. Likewise, the Negro cabins in Trueblood's neighborhood and Trueblood's incestuous act are symbols of the enduring slavery types among the illiterate Southern Negroes. Mr. Norton exclaims, when he first views the cabins, "'I would never have believed that they were so enduring. Since slavery times!'" (p. 37)

Also outside of the restraint of the campus spirituals is the "juke box" (p. 57) inside the Golden Day Inn. In the opening chapters of the novel, Ellison, in a sense, sets the spiritual and hymn expressions in opposition to the blues and juke box jazz of unrestrained Negro life. The novel further extends this musical dichotomy as the plot progresses.

⁴See "London Bridge," The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book, assembled by Iona and Peter Opie (New York, 1955), p. 76.

The invisible hero, during his confusing confrontation with Dr. Bledsoe following his and Mr. Norton's return from the Golden Day Inn, begins to develop an awareness of Dr. Bledsoe's clownish role as a servant to white men's interests. The Negro youth's concept of a Negro educator crumbles: "Everything was upset inside me" (p. 81). The respect for the white man that Bledsoe preaches and his favorite spiritual "'Live-a-Humble'" (p. 82) are only shallow facades to insure the white man's respect. Even the hymns sung by the students during chapel services are "songs the visitors loved. (Loved? Demanded. Sung? An ultimatum accepted and ritualized, an allegiance recited for the peace it imparted, and for that perhaps loved. Loved as the defeated come to love the symbols of their conquerors. A gesture of acceptance, of terms laid down and reluctantly approved.)" (p. 86). The hymns and spirituals, as well as the sermons, deny the existence of a sincere Negro expression.

Gradually the Negro youth's naivete is removed, for the youth recognizes the true nature of the wealthy white speakers: ". . . their delight in our songs more sincere seeming, their regard for our welfare marked by an almost benign and impersonal indifference" (p. 87). Homer A. Barbee continues his sermon, "slapping his hands," (p. 97); and the student body sings an old hymn, "Lead me, lead me to a rock that is higher than I" (p. 91). But the hymns serve no longer as a consolation for the Negro student body. The college's founder is dead; and with his decline and death, the older order of hymns has lost its savor.

Homer Barbee lauds Dr. Bledsoe as the

". . . loyal champion, his [the Founder's] adjunct, that marvelous singer of the old songs who had rallied his spirits during times of distress and discouragement, who with his singing of the old familiar melodies soothed the doubts and fears of the multitude . . . those still wrapped in the rags of slavery. . . ." (p. 100)

The founder, however, led the Negro community that arose from the bonds of slavery; but like the Founder, the old songs and customs are now dead. The Negro youth will have to forget his college past and seek after new ideas and progressive musical forms.

As the chapel service comes to a close, the orchestra plays "excerpts from Dvořák's New World Symphony" and the hero hears "Swing Low Sweet Chariot' resounding through its dominant theme--my mother's and grandfather's favorite spiritual" (p. 104). For the Negro youth, the hero of the novel, Dvořák's symphony is a new and creative expression of old themes, a working solution to his baffled mind. Ellison's use at this point of a symphonic musical allusion (symphonic allusions are rare in the novel) may be his signal for a change of pace in the novel; the hero's last reflections of the campus following his expulsion include the sounds not of spirituals or hymns but of the blues: "From somewhere across the quiet of the campus the sound of an old guitar-blues plucked from an out-of-tune piano drifted toward me like a lazy, shimmering wave, like the echoed whistle of a lonely train. . . ." (p. 112) The following day the Negro youth is on a bus headed for New York City. Paralleling the geographic shift from the Southern campus to New York City and the shift in a plaintive technical diction for the

faster Harlem tempo, the spirituals and hymns are replaced by blues and jazz.

Harlem, the supposed land of opportunity and equality for the Negro, is a mixture of blues and jive that arouses the Negro youth's former method of expression developed before he attended college. The music of Peter Wheatstraw, who pushes a cart of blueprint paper through Harlem, is a rhythmic expression unrestrained by social pressures and custom--"things I [the hero] had long ago shut out of my mind"

(p. 131):

"She's got feet like a monkey
Legs like a frog--Lawd, Lawd!
But when she starts to loving me
I holler Whoooo, God-dog!
Cause I loves my baabay,
Better than I do myself . . ."

(p. 131)

His primitive rhymes initiate the novel's hero into the pace of Harlem:

" . . . look me up sometimes, I'm a piano player and a rounder, a whiskey drinker and a pavement pounder. I'll teach you some good bad habits" (p. 134). But the hero is not yet ready to accept the fast pace of Harlem.

Following Mr. Emerson's rejection of the Negro job applicant, the youth, himself, reverts to the blues structure to express his personal feeling of rejection:

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. 147)

Ellison, in his memorial to Charlie Parker who was humorously known as the "Bird," adds his interpretation of "They Picked Poor Robin Clean":

It was a jazz community joke, musically an extended "signifying riff" or melodic naming of a recurring human situation, and was played to satirize some betrayal of faith or loss of love observed from the bandstand. . . .

Poor robin was picked again and again and his pluckers were ever unnamed and mysterious. Yet the tune was inevitably productive of laughter--even when we ourselves were its object. For each of us recognized that his fate was somehow our own. Our defeats and failures--even our final defeat by death--were loaded upon his back and given ironic significance and thus made more bearable.⁵

The lyric, however, deserves some attention, for it is rich in meaning. The actions in the lyric leave poor robin without any protection from the cold and from other animals--an excellent description of what Mr. Emerson and Dr. Bledsoe do to the invisible hero. Ellison has effectively borrowed a blues lyric from his childhood experiences and converted it into literature.⁶

Ellison again relies on a childhood jingle common to the Negro community as his Uncle Tom figure in the novel, Lucius Brockway, boasts about his contribution to the Liberty Paint slogan, "If It's Optic White, It's the Right White." The original blues rhyme of the Negro

⁵Ralph Ellison, "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz," Saturday Review, XLV (July 28, 1962), 62.

⁶Ralph Ellison, "The Art of Fiction VIII: An Interview," Paris Review, No. 8 (Spring 1955), p. 61. Ellison stated in the interview that a writer should ". . . take a look at some of the slave songs, blues, folk ballads; their possibilities for the writer are infinitely suggestive."

community that acted as both complaint and social comment rhymes as follows:

They say if you's white, you's all right;
If you's brown, stick around,
But as you're black, mmm mmm, brother git
back, git back, git back.⁷

At the mid-point in the novel following the explosion in the paint factory, Ellison gives his reading audience two versions of the hospital episode; the second of these versions appears in Chapter 11 of Invisible Man. The episode itself blends well with the musical structure of the novel; and both versions arrive at a similar climax, suggesting a deliberate and skillful revision by the novelist. His original "Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar" will be considered first, followed by a paralleled discussion of Chapter 11 of the novel.

Mary, the hospital assistant, is presented as the daughter of a Southern mammy midwife who "'useta sing alto, grow the best crops in the county, and right now she knows more about roots and herbs and midwifery and things than anybody you ever seen."⁸ She, moreover, identifies in an interrogative manner the patient (invisible hero) with Jack the Bear, the subject of a Southern work song.

Extending Mary's suggestive identification ("'Who they think you is, Jack the Bear of John Henry or somebody like that?'"⁹), the hero

⁷Harold Courlander, Negro Folk Music, U.S.A. (New York, 1963), p. 136.

⁸Ralph Ellison, "Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar," Soon, One Morning, ed. Herbert Hill (New York, 1963), pp. 260-261.

⁹Ibid., p. 247.

sings the following "crazy prayer" as he forces open the machine shell of glass and electrical chords and hatches himself into a second existence:

"Lord, give me the strength of Jack-the-Bear," grunting and straining against the lid.

Jack the rabbit
Jack the Bear,
Lift it, lift it,
Just a hair . . .

Make poetry of it, sing it--no, they might hear. Sing a song in silence. Sing a song of silence in a strange land. Jack it up, bear it in the dark. It's heavy as the world.¹⁰

At this point in the original manuscript, Ellison's transcendent Christ figure, with the assistance of Mary, frees himself from the machine, brakes the electric belt fastened to his waist to symbolize an umbilical chord, and flees cautiously from the hospital room to the strains of a country choir's rendition of Handel's Messiah:

Hallelujah--Boom! Hallelujah--Bong!
Hallelujah--Crash!¹¹
He's risen--Smash!

Strikingly enough, Handel's Hallelujah Chorus concludes Act II of The Messiah, the nativity section.

The hero, running naked through the corridor, then startles a small blonde nurse who exclaims, "'Oh, my God!'"¹² descends into the depths of the hospital basement where it is "' . . . even hotter. . . .'"¹³ scares and harrows the furnace attendant; assumes new powers; escapes

¹⁰Ibid., p. 263.

¹¹Ibid., p. 266.

¹²Ibid., p. 269.

¹³Ibid.

through a deceptively hung door "'For Christ's sake--!";¹⁴ is revived by "rasping insinuations of trumpets and saxophones"¹⁵ that sounded from the juke box overhead like Jack-the-Bear; and is vomited forth from a manhole on to the streets of Harlem before two women who moan, "'Lawd, God, have mercy, Jesus!'"¹⁶ Or possibly Ellison should have entitled this section "The Birth of the Blues"!

Ellison uses only two allusions to symphonic scores in the entire novel, regardless of which version is followed. After the reference to Dvorák, the Southern college episode comes to a sudden close. The modified lyrics from Handel's Messiah (in the original manuscript) announce the symbolic rebirth of the hero; and following his escape from the hospital, the hero moves from the second stage of geographic development into the Mary Rambo and Brotherhood (third) stage of the novel. It seems more than coincidence that the only two references to symphonic scores occur just preceding these geographical shifts in the apparent structure of the novel. At this point, however, the original version of the hospital scene must be replaced by Ellison's finalized version that is included in Invisible Man as Chapter 11, for it was this second version that appeared in the novel during the ten years that preceded the publication of "Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar."

Rather than waiting until the prefrontal lobotomy climaxed the hospital episode before he introduced the classical theme, Ellison

¹⁴Ibid., p. 275.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 276.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 277.

alters the Handel selection to an allusion to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and places the allusion in the opening scenes of the chapter following the hero's x-ray: "They were holding me firm and it was fiery and above it all I kept hearing the opening motif of Beethoven's Fifth-- three short and one long buzz, repeated again and again in varying volume, and I was struggling and breaking through, rising up, to find myself lying on my back with two pink-faced men laughing down" (pp. 176-177). Following this opening scene when an electronic version of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony stimulates the patient's mind, he begins to recall musical selections of his early youth. First he hears "a sweet-voiced trumpet rendering 'The Holy City' as from an echoing distance, buoyed by a choir of muted horns; and above, the mocking obbligato of a mocking bird" (p. 178). Ellison may have inserted into the novel a jazz concept with his allusion to the mocking bird (a bird whose song ". . . arouses one's sense of the mystery, the promise and the frustration of being human, alive and hot in the blood")¹⁷ that mimics "other jazzmen's styles" and interpolates "motifs from extraneous melodies. . . ."18

And then as the tones of "The Holy City" are lost, the patient hears childhood folk rhymes reverberating from his youth when his grandmother taught him songs of endurance:

¹⁷ Ellison, "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz," p. 48.

¹⁸ Ibid.

"Godamighty made a monkey
Godamighty made a whale
And Godamighty made a 'gator
With hickeys all over his tail. . . ."
 (p. 178)

Gradually, during the interrogation conducted between the doctors and the patient, the hero begins to identify himself with his past "when as children we danced and sang barefoot in the dusty streets":

Buckeye the Rabbit
Shake it, shake it
Buckeye the Rabbit
Break it, break it. . . .
 (p. 184)

His "birth from the machine" leaves the patient (the newborn child) with a mechanical parent. His only identity is his past experience. In the future, he must by necessity depend upon self-reliance.

The obvious question arises as to what effect Ellison's omission of "Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar" from the novel and its replacement by Chapter 11 have on the unifying theme of the hero in search of his identity. Symbolically the youth's hazardous and extraordinary escape from the hospital machine in the earlier version portray the hero as an ironic Christ figure; but the parallels of the hero and the Christ figure are transient and occur nowhere in the beginning or remainder of the novel. By omitting these ironic parallels in Chapter 11 and by substituting Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and references to "The Holy City" in place of a modified version of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus, Ellison minimizes the mythical insinuations of his novel. Structurally the climactic importance of the hospital scene is also reduced, although not to the point of losing its climactic position within the architecture of the novel.

The remaining chapters of Invisible Man cast the invisible hero into a wide assortment of exotic situations from a dispossession scene in Harlem to several invitations for incest with sisters of the Brotherhood. Paralleled to these experiences, the musical lyrics offer an inviting array of comforting solutions to the hero, solutions in which he might have achieved his own identity. In the aftermath of the action, the novel returns to the setting of the Prologue where the hero listens to Louis Armstrong's "What did I do / To be so black / And blue?" One cycle of musical lyrics has run its course.

Following the protagonist's dismissal from the hospital, he is confronted with several overt references to his Southern heritage; but he is attracted to the Brotherhood because of its financial rewards.

As the youth stands in the crowd watching a dispossession of an elderly Negro couple in Harlem, he sees among their personal possessions that are dumped along the sidewalk "a pair of crudely carved and polished bones, 'knocking bones'" (p. 205), revealing the elderly couple's rural background in the South--a heritage of minstrels and folk banjo music.

After the hero's flight from the dispossession riot and his initial confrontation with Brother Jack, he returns to Mary's apartment house and hears Mary singing the "Back Water Blues." Folk traditions motivate Mary's singing of the "Back Water Blues" during the period of financial difficulty, for these specific blues are associated essentially with times of distress and floods along the back waters of the

Mississippi River during the disasters of 1927.¹⁹

The invisible protagonist, when Brother Jack introduced him to the Brotherhood at the Chthonian Club, again is confronted by Negro folk songs, but in a harsh and embarrassing manner. When the Negro enters the group that is gathered around the piano singing folk songs, the traditional method for producing an effective brotherhood among divergent cultures, he is challenged, even invited by one intoxicated member, to sing "'one of those real good ole Negro work songs. . . . Like this: Ah went to Atlanta--nevah been there befo'!" or "Go Down Moses!" (p. 236-267). Upon Brother Jack's insistence that such songs of slavery and the Negro's degraded past in the South are not proper songs for the Brotherhood and that the new Brother does not sing, the intoxicated member is escorted from the room singing "St. Louis mammieeee--with her diamond riings. . . .!" (p. 237) The organization that decorated its club walls with unused musical instruments also dictates the moods of expression for each of its members. Although totally independent of the repressive atmosphere of the Southern college campus, the Brotherhood, likewise, destroys the inner personal expressions of its members.

Following the Brotherhood's social engagement (Chapter 14), the Negro youth returns to Mary's unheated apartment house where the inhabitants have exploded into a "ragged rumba rhythm" on the radiator pipes: "Knock! / Knock-knock / Knock-knock! vibrating the very floor"

¹⁹"Blues," The Book of Negro Folklore, ed. Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps (New York, 1958), p. 377.

(p. 243); but the newly indoctrinated Brother will seek his identity within the confines of the party for a short season of growth. He flees the freedom of Mary's apartment house and assumes a new identity. It is not a permanent means of achieving identity.

The activities of the Brotherhood and their mass rally in Harlem revive a theme similar to the Battle Royal arena of the opening chapters of the novel; and the Negro hero, once the center of vulgar jests by participants of a Southern white smoker, becomes the spokesman of the party to whip the Harlem audience into a near explosive situation that can be directed for and by the Brotherhood.

As the Negro youth and his fellow party members enter the arena of shouting Harlemites to initiate a period of social revolution in Harlem, songs from the Civil War days ring in their ears--"old songs sound new" (p. 256):

The song burst forth like a rocket to the marching tempo
of clapping hands:

John Brown's body lies a-mold'ring
in the grave

.....

--His soul is marching on!

Imagine that, I thought, they make the old song sound new.

(p. 256)

Apparently, at this point in the novel, Ellison begins a redevelopment of his principal theme of a search for identity on the part of his main character, a theme that first introduces the young Negro into the ritual of Negro life in a Southern community and which continues with his initiation into the Brotherhood in New York City. The rhythm that explodes from the Harlem crowd ("No more dispossessing of the

dispossessed!" p. 257) and the applause although sympathetic to the speaker and contrary to the ribbing of the white Southern audience ("'Louder.' . . . 'Repeat!' . . . 'What?'" pp. 24-25), attempts to weld the speaker into a prearranged form that will repress his own human responses to his immediate environment. The musical references which appear in the episode of the Harlem speech, by appearing to the hero as old songs revived, are a device on the novelist's part for adding unity of form to his novel. The opening scene of Chapter 1 and the high school address return in a slightly altered form.

The period of Brotherhood indoctrination is striking for its absence of direct allusions to musical lyrics. Except for the Harlem bar scene in which the juke box plays "Media Luz" (p. 255) and "four men argued in Spanish over glasses of beer" beneath cheap posters depicting a Spanish bullfight--an obvious swipe at Ernest Hemingway's exotic vacations to Spain recorded in The Sun Also Rises (1926)--musical lyrics are omitted by the novelist for over thirty consecutive pages following the Harlem rally. The hero has accepted an alien identity and neglects the value of his youthful experience. During this section the hero associates with Clifton and Tarp of the Brotherhood and feels the verbal wrath of Ras the Exhorter who accuses Clifton and the rest of working in the interest of white power--to the destruction of Negro youth.

This sterile and prosaic episode with the Brotherhood narrows the Negro youth's energies and channels his interests into immediate causes of dispossessions and social equality and miscellaneous rather than the overall search for his identity. In order for the hero to

revive the hero's restless concern for his own identity and cause him to embark from the repressive and lethargic Brotherhood on a new episode in his quest for identity, he admits in Chapter 18 and 20 selected lyrics from and references to the environment of the hero's youth. These siren melodies and references destroy only a temporary identity of the hero, that of his membership in the Brotherhood, and ironically rescue the youth from a foreign sojourn.

To begin with, Brother Tarp presents the hero with a link torn hastily from a leg-chain, the symbol of Tarp's Southern prison work-gang experience. This slight reference to the South and Brother Tarp's personal account of escape revive a dormant homesickness in the youth and reinstate within his mind the causes for his flight from the South. These occurrences also instill a mood of questioning and disillusionment in the mind of the hero concerning the motives of the Brotherhood:

I could feel the air from the window hot against my neck now
as through the smell of morning coffee I heard a throaty
voice singing with a mixture of laughter and solemnity:

Don't come early in the morning
Neither in the heat of the day
But come in the sweet cool of the
Evening and wash my sins away . . .

A whole series of memories started to well up, but I threw them off. There was no time for memory, for all its images were of times passed. (p. 294)

But the hero cannot silence his memory nor his questioning of the motives behind certain of the hostile members of the Brotherhood.

Ellison reemphasizes this underlying aggressiveness on the part of the protagonist toward the Brotherhood and its means of his seeking

a personal identity when he concluded Chapter 20, following the death of Clifton, with two references to the hero's musical past. The two nuns on the subway train, an incongruity of white in black cloth and black in white cloth, suggest to the dejected leader an old blues theme familiar to the chaos of the Golden Day Inn:

Bread and Wine,
Bread and Wine,
Your cross ain't nearly so
Heavy as mine . . .
 (p. 334)

He left the subway at the central Harlem station on 125th Street and was further confronted by a chorus of childhood memories from the South:

I looked into the design of their faces, hardly a one that was unlike someone I'd known down South. Forgotten names sang through my head like forgotten scenes in dreams. I moved with the crowd, the sweat pouring off me, listening to the grinding rear of traffic, the growing sound of a record shop loudspeaker blaring a languid blues. I stopped. Was this all that would be recorded? Was this the only true history of the times, a mood blared by trumpets, trombones, saxophones and drums, a song with turgid, inadequate words? My mind flowed. It was as though in this short block I was forced to walk past everyone I'd ever known. . . . (p. 335)

Two more important, and several minor, episodes follow this summation section of the novel: the funeral of Clifton and the Harlem Riot. The funeral oration parallels in part Homer Barbee's Founder's Day address in Chapter 5 or the Brotherhood speech in Chapter 16, and the crecive riot scene concludes a rapid moving situation of chaos and Harlem turbulence. The relentless Rinehart confidence act and the moral maceration of the Sybil scenes further strengthen the construction of the novel by continuing to redevelop themes introduced previously in the novel.

The funeral procession that snakes its way through the streets of Harlem to the Mount Morris Park intones a tribute in "slow-paced music" (p. 340) to their Brother Clifton who had been shot by a white policeman following a sidewalk argument:

It was a slow procession and the band played sad, romantic, military marches. And when the band was silent the drum corps beat the time on drums with muffled heads. It was hot and explosive. . . . (p. 340)

Even this tribute reflects a juxtaposition between the Harlem life and the older heritage of the South and the Negro hero's childhood:

. . . an old, plaintive, masculine voice arose in a song, wavering, stumbling in the silence at first alone, until in the band a euphonium horn fumbled for the key and took up the air, one catching and rising above the other and the other pursuing . . . the pure sweet tone of the horn and the old man's husky baritone sang a duet in the hot heavy silence. "There's Many a Thousand Gone." . . . It was a song from the past, the past of the campus and the still earlier past of home. And now some of the older ones in the mass were joining in. . . . It was not the words, for they were all the same old slave-borne words; it was as though he'd changed the emotion beneath the words while yet the old longing, resigned, transcendent emotion still sounded above, now deepened by that something for which the theory of Brotherhood had given me no name. (pp. 341-342)

Clifton's death and funeral are then the cessation to the hero's search for identity within the Brotherhood. Ellison's use of musical allusions at this point and throughout the Brotherhood section seems to prompt the hero to revive and to "push off" from the Brotherhood in his endless search.

Following the Brotherhood's refusal to capitalize on the Negro discontent generated by the shooting of Tod Clifton, Harlem is a city area without restraint, without leadership. In the vortex swirl the

raucous cries of Ras and the voluptuous arabesqueness of the worldly Rinehart figure, as the juke box at the Jolly Dollar, "lit up like a bad dream of the Fiery Furnace, [shouted]":

Jelly, Jelly
Jelly,
All night long. (p. 367)

Inside the "HOLY WAY STATION" Sister Harris' euphoria over the "new kind of guitar music I told you Rever'n Rinehard got for us" (p. 375) and the service itself fill no void but enhance the chaos, this time in "unknown tongues":

. . . a slender woman in a rusty black robe played passionate boogie-woogie on an upright piano along with a young man wearing a skull cap who struck righteous riffs from an electric guitar which was connected to an amplifier that hung from the ceiling above a gleaming white and gold pulpit. A man in an elegant red cardinal's robe and a high lace collar stood resting against an enormous Bible and now began to lead a hard-driving hymn which the congregation shouted in the unknown tongue. (p. 376)

The void of Harlem continues precariously to swirl, its ineffability causing an imposing uncertainty.²⁰

A short interlude from the chaos of Harlem is provided in the last of Chapter 23 and Chapter 24 with the hero's visit to Brother Hambro's home and his escapade with Sybil. The few musical allusions that appear in these pages are rather difficult to explain. Hambro's child is singing Humpty Dumpty when he enters the apartment, and the hero further overhears a verse of Hickory Dickory Dock. Both nursery

²⁰For a further explication of the name Rinehart, see Ralph Ellison, "The Art of Fiction VIII," Paris Review, pp. 69-70.

rhymes suggest a rise and sudden fall by Humpty Dumpty and the mouse, possibly a reference to the hero who has risen fast within the Brotherhood only to have his illusion of brotherhood shattered so that it can never be reconstructed again. In the incestuous relationship with (Sister) Sybil of the Brotherhood, the hero realizes she desires his body for the myth and taboo involved in a white girl's seduction of a Negro man, not from a personal attraction: ". . . I was expected either to sing 'Old Man River' and just keep rolling along, or to do fancy tricks with my muscles" (p. 390). For the hero, there is nothing more for him to do but return to the chaos of Harlem.

Shot at and chased through the rioting mobs, the protagonist of the novel pauses to view the inhibitions of Harlem released from all restraint as the puppets of tumult drag a milk wagon through the streets with an intoxicated circus-like "broad" perched on top and dropping milk by the quarts. The woman, in turn, "shouted passionately in a full-throated voice of blues singer's timbre:

If it hadn't been for the referee,
Joe Louis woulda killed
Jim Jefferie
Free beer!!

--sloshing the dipper of beer around" (p. 411). Again, the "referee" at the Joe Louis and Jim Jefferie fights acts (from the information in the song) as a restraining force over the uninhibited animal desires lauded by the drunken singer.

The final musical allusion of Chapter 25 and the major portion of the novel inject a humorous note into the concluding chaos that finally drives the hero into a coal cellar. The riotous confusion

is equated to the "coming of the Lord," so common a belief in the older religious expression of the South:

"Time's flying
Souls dying
The coming of the Lord
Draweth niiiigh!"
(p. 418)

A counterpoint between two rhythms, one of the South and the other of Harlem, this section ends the hero's first annual search for identity. A winter of hibernation will occur before he attempts another search.

Ralph Ellison, in 1957, wrote that the novel thrives on social change and chaos, a "social turbulence."²¹ Possibly Ellison enhanced the social chaos by his use of musical allusions. From the spirituals of slavery days to the blues and jazz of Harlem, and through the perils of the Brotherhood that suppress an aesthetic interest in music altogether, Ellison effectively correlates an amazing wealth of source material on Negro life to produce a work of art with a discerning interest in music. He has also produced literature from an oral folk culture through his use of descriptive lyrics that reveal both the Southern and New York geographical settings of the novel's numerous episodes.

²¹Ralph Ellison, "Society, Morality, and the Novel," The Living Novel: A Symposium, ed. Granville Hicks (New York, 1957), p. 63.

CHAPTER IV

ELLISON'S PARALLELS TO MUSICAL FORM

IN INVISIBLE MAN

Ralph Ellison, in an interview for the Saturday Review of Literature (1953), compared the novelist's craft to that of the musician's:

"A musician, for instance, will learn the possibilities of his instrument: he will study the various traditions of interpretation, and if he is a composer he will learn the various forms, the various styles of different periods. The writer works very much the same way. Technique in terms of the novel is a way of thinking, feeling, seeing, and hearing. It gives you an instrument with which to approach experience."¹

What is striking about Ellison's Invisible Man is not that the novel reflects only Ellison's awareness of the prose art form but that the structure of the work and its alternating rhythmical moods parallel in part the contemporary tripartite sonata form of exposition, development, and recapitulation.

The twentieth-century sonata form has developed from a three part structure. Frequently, an introduction and final coda accompany the central composition:

The exposition, development, and recapitulation are three main structural divisions of approximately equal length. The material of the exposition returns with codified modifications in the recapitulation.

¹Rochelle Girson, "Sidelights on Invisibility," Saturday Review, XXXVI (March 14, 1953), 20.

An introduction frequently precedes the exposition proper. It may be merely a brief passage leading to the announcement of the first theme, or it may have an extensive sectional structure. It may introduce elements of thematic significance, foreshadow future themes, or be an independent section without thematic relationship to the rest of the movement. . . .

The coda may be no more than a brief cadential passage which serves to bring the movement to a close, but it may have an extended sectional structure and amount practically to a second development section. The coda may use material from any of the themes and introduce new ideas as well. The recall of elements from the introduction is an effective unifying device.²

Although this concise definition is subject to modifications by the composer, Ellison's Invisible Man, strikingly enough, structurally parallels the general concept of the contemporary sonata form.

Similar to the introduction of the sonata form, the Prologue is a relatively short section of the novel, but it anticipates the problems that prevail throughout the major section of the work and thwarts a surface understanding of the events that baffle the reader first on the realistic level and then on a surrealist plane following the "reefer" dream.

In an interview with Alfred Chester and Vilma Howard in Paris, 1954, Ellison attempted to explicate the structure of Invisible Man which he supposedly used eight years before the interview to construct his novel. Perhaps he was being frank with his interviewers; perhaps he was analyzing a finished novel in retrospect. In the discussion he explained that

²Leon Dallin, Techniques of Twentieth Century Composition, ed. Frederick W. Westphal, 2nd ed. (Dubuque, Iowa, 1964), pp. 215 and 217.

The Prologue was written afterwards, really--in terms of a shift in the hero's point of view. I wanted to throw the reader off balance--make him accept certain non-naturalistic effects. It was really a memoir written underground, and I wanted a foreshadowing through which I hoped the reader would view the actions which took place in the main body of the book.³

The Prologue was for Ellison a potential means of producing effect and of baffling the reader's first impressions with such a strident set of events (throwing the reader off balance) that he, Ellison, would be obliged to give close attention to the entire midsection of the novel in an attempt to understand the experiences that forced his hero into such a dilemma in the first place.

Initially the Prologue establishes the paradoxes and asks the questions that when answered will reveal the hero's purpose for living underground. From the first sentence the reader is led into a paradoxical riddle, "I am an invisible man" (p. 3). And before the reader can solve the first riddle, the narrator begins by identifying himself with a hibernating Jack-the-Bear that sleeps in an underground room on the border area of Harlem, a room that is lighted and heated by 1,369 light bulbs and permeated with the rhythm of Louis Armstrong. At this point Ellison introduces, most casually, the major conflict of the novel that involves the position of the artist to his society, a conflict which remains unanswered by the hero until the concluding Epilogue where the hero likens himself to Louis Armstrong. Louis

³Ralph Ellison, "The Art of Fiction VIII," Paris Review, No. 8 (Spring 1955), p. 66.

Armstrong "made poetry out of being invisible" (p. 6) and refused to give expression to his unrestrained racial animosities (old Bad Air). Armstrong "wouldn't have thrown old Bad Air out, because it would have broken up the music and dance, when it was the good music that came from the bell of old Bad Air's horn that counted" (p. 438). The narrator resolves in the Epilogue to "be up and around with mine" (p. 438)--to make an artistic expression rather than embittered vindictiveness out of his experiences. The reader, however, does not receive the impact of the initial conflict from his scrutiny of the Prologue alone, for the Prologue only foreshadows the dilemma as it also foreshadows in the "reefer" dream the divergent tempos and levels through which the hero must travel during his attempted search for his identity.

Although Louis Armstrong perhaps makes poetry of his invisibility, of his fated position in the white man's society, he continues to express his personal catastrophe by singing "What did I do / To be so black / And blue"; Ellison's invisible narrator anticipates a return to the streets of New York City, but he first must relate four hundred pages of his experiences (those episodes that beset his life and forced him to ask what he had done to deserve his fate) on which his decision is based.

The Prologue of Invisible Man startles the reading audience as the Introduction for the contemporary sonata form may, on occasion, arouse the curiosity of a listening audience. Paralleling the general definition of a sonata introduction, Ellison's prose beginning is both

brief in length and amount of details and is a literary device for announcing the overall significance of the novel, that of the hero's attempting to narrate what he did to be "so blue" (p. 12). Resolution may be effected only after this codification of episodes is first accomplished.

The central segment of the sonata form is dominated by a tripartite concept, or three subordinate sections within the entire sonata form. The first of these subordinate sections is the exposition:

The exposition presents all of the thematic material, customarily with three divisions designated principal theme, subordinate theme, and closing group or first theme, second theme, and third theme. . . . Contrast between the themes is essential to the modern concept of sonata form. The means of achieving the contrast, whether by changes in tonality, mood, tempo, or style varies with the period, the composer, and the work. The first theme is usually the more dramatic and energetic of the three, though exceptions occur.

The statement of the principle theme is followed by a passage of varying length and importance which leads to the mood, tempo, and tonality of the second or subordinate theme. . . . In styles where tonality is obscure, other contrasting factors compensate. Traditionally the second theme is lyric in quality, contrasting with the first.

. . . The closing theme, which originally grew out of the second, may continue in the same tonality and mood of the preceding section, but the trend is toward greater individuality and autonomy.⁴

Ellison's Invisible Man, likewise, is constructed about the episodes that involve one Negro narrator; and these episodes are connected through the linear revelation of the protagonist's biography. The autobiographical episodes (for the protagonist narrates his own life's

⁴Dallin, Techniques of Twentieth Century Composition, pp. 215-216.

raucous cries of Ras and the voluptuous arabesqueness of the worldly Rinehart figure, as the juke box at the Jolly Dollar, "lit up like a bad dream of the Fiery Furnace, [shouted]":

Jelly, Jelly
Jelly,
All night long. (p. 367)

Inside the "HOLY WAY STATION" Sister Harris' euphoria over the "new kind of guitar music I told you Rever'n Rinehart got for us" (p. 375) and the service itself fill no void but enhance the chaos, this time in "unknown tongues":

. . . a slender woman in a rusty black robe played passionate boogie-woogie on an upright piano along with a young man wearing a skull cap who struck righteous riffs from an electric guitar which was connected to an amplifier that hung from the ceiling above a gleaming white and gold pulpit. A man in an elegant red cardinal's robe and a high lace collar stood resting against an enormous Bible and now began to lead a hard-driving hymn which the congregation shouted in the unknown tongue. (p. 376)

The void of Harlem continues precariously to swirl, its ineffability causing an imposing uncertainty.²⁰

A short interlude from the chaos of Harlem is provided in the last of Chapter 23 and Chapter 24 with the hero's visit to Brother Hambro's home and his escapade with Sybil. The few musical allusions that appear in these pages are rather difficult to explain. Hambro's child is singing Humpty Dumpty when he enters the apartment, and the hero further overhears a verse of Hickory Dickory Dock. Both nursery

²⁰ For a further explication of the name Rinehart, see Ralph Ellison, "The Art of Fiction VIII," Paris Review, pp. 69-70.

search), moreover, unify the divergent episodes under a topical and geographic structure: the Southern residence (high school and college experiences), the uptown Harlem of Men's House (Northern industry), and the downtown Brotherhood (new identity and further training). Each major opportunity for discovery of his identity is tried and rejected by the Negro youth just as the youth continues to wander from one geographic location to another before he is forced into his underground room that remains apart from all the overhead locations.

While the hero resides in the South before his journey to New York City in Chapter 7, Ellison introduces the three major themes that recur several times during the remainder of the novel. These themes--quite similar to the principal, subordinate, and closing themes of the first division (exposition) of the sonata form--rapidly delineate themselves in the first three chapters of the novel.

The primary theme of the novel is recorded in the prophetic words of the hero's grandfather on his deathbed: "'Son, after I'm gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war. . . .'" (p. 13) Yet the war must be entered into in a surreptitious manner, for espionage rather than overt conflict effects greater change. Attempting to overcome the white society of Greenwood with "yeses" and to undermine and agree them "to death and destruction" (p. 13), the hero delivers a high school oration in which he hypocritically recommends "humility" (p. 14) as the working solution for the Negro community. Underneath the oratory lies the declared war between Negroes and whites, a struggle that the hero accidentally

announces during the rudeness shown him as he delivers the same address to the white civic club: as previously noted, at one confusing point he yells "social equality" rather than the permissible "social responsibility" (pp. 24-25).

This war is the central theme that pervades the central section of the novel, although at times it is fought on divergent levels. The first round which precedes the luncheon engagement and is a repeat delivery of the high school address, this time for the white community, develops in the form of sensual rhythms and prurient maneuvers that attempt to repress the hero's sexual desires, to castrate his social and political potency. Second, the white officials at the smoker in the Battle Royal episode organize a boxing match where blindfolded "Negro boys . . . flail one another to entertain the sexually aroused stag audience. . . ." ⁵ Often during the covert war the white leaders are able to stir up chaos within the Negro community and then be entertained by the Negroes who contend with each other.

In the first confrontation of the smoldering war, symbolic castration and genocidal destruction are Ellison's means of portraying the struggle. The narrator's oratorical skill is first introduced in this first chapter. Together, his oratorical skill, the castration theme, and the interracial conflict form the initial elements of the racial warfare, and they recur singularly throughout the remainder of the novel.

⁵Jonathan Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmares: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (New York, 1965), p. 102.

The primary theme concludes with the white community winning the first encounter; but this encounter is the hero's first attempt to "agree 'em to death and destruction," and he won a valuable college scholarship from the white community. His success soon turns into defeat as he unwittingly discovers that the scholarship is one method the white community uses to "'Keep This Nigger-Boy Running'" (p. 26).

Within the surreptitious martial conflict there are several pragmatic methods for the Negro hero. He may act as a spy against the white society as his aged grandfather did throughout reconstruction, he may endure the restrictions imposed on the Negro society and act within its limitations in a self-reliant manner toward the rest of the Negro world (as did Trueblood), or he may openly resist white controls and run the risk of wasting his talents as an inmate of an asylum, an outcast of the white society, like the patients at the Golden Day Inn.

In the opening section of Chapter 2, the setting of the Battle Royal episode has been totally replaced. The vivid punches of the boxing ring and the confusion of the electric rug shock treatment are no longer present; instead Ellison's hero begins an emotional description of his Southern college campus, a lyrical interlude to the graphic details and strident action of the first chapter. The pastoral countryside near the college is also the setting for a secondary theme of endurance and self-reliance.

Mr. Norton, by chance a New Englander, directs the attention of his and the hero's conversation to Ralph Waldo Emerson, the author of an American self-reliant philosophy. Mr. Norton contributed to the

Southern Negro college largely to enable the Negro students to obtain an education and thereby become self-reliant in a predominantly white society. The Negro college students' success is closely aligned to Mr. Norton's destiny. The success of his contributions lies in the success of each of the individual college students, including the invisible hero. The concept of self-reliance is further developed by Trueblood in his narrative to Mr. Norton during this same chapter.

In order to disassociate the second theme of self-reliance from the first theme of a secret war, Ellison changes the point-of-view of the major portion of Chapter 2 in a parallel manner to the way the sonata form might be changed in tonality, mood, tempo, or style variations. The Battle Royal scene is developed through the eyes of the hero, but the hero listens quietly and ashamedly as Trueblood willingly expounds upon his incestuous affair with Mary Lou.

Trueblood, a remaining symbol of slavery, endures only by his own wit. His forceful resolution reunites his family following his incestuous cohabitation with his daughter, Mary Lou. Although Kate's anger causes her to scar Trueblood's face with an ax, like the lightning of heaven that scarred the face of John Milton's Satan during his fall from heaven,⁶ Trueblood's own self-reliance bolsters him to reorganize his life following the bedroom fight with Kate (his wife) and to remain recalcitrant to Kate's suggestion that Aunt Cloe, a midwife, perform an

⁶The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton, ed. Harris Francis Fletcher (Cambridge, Mass., 1941), p. 168. See Paradise Lost, I, ll. 600-601.

illegal abortion on Mary Lou. Trueblood, who accompanies his misery by singing the blues, has constructed a situation and narrated a tale suggestive of man's struggle against the boundaries of the fate that governs him. His blues theme interrupts the turbulence of the Battle Royal and the chaos that follows in the Golden Day Inn. It serves structurally as a lyric pause; and it is recalled through the eyes of Trueblood, not through the experience of the hero. The author's internal point of view (the invisible hero) must remain silent while Trueblood digresses in his own primitive method of first person point of view. Whereas the first chapter theme of castration of the Negro at the hands of the white community is violent and turbulent, the second theme moves at a slower pace that blends reality with rhapsodic accounts of incestuous struggle.

The closing or third theme of the sonata exposition tends to develop from the second or subordinate theme. Ellison's third and final theme in the Southern setting depends directly on Trueblood's incestuous tale, for Mr. Norton is physically weakened by his subjection to the lengthy narrative. Norton's desire for a stimulant of whiskey forces his chauffeur (the invisible hero) to take the philanthropist to the riotous Golden Day Inn. In the psychological struggle that ensues, the inhibitions of the hospital patients are unfettered by the symbolic knockout of Supercargo, their attendant who acted as a physical restraint over the patients.

The hospital patients had in their early careers fought openly for their positions in a white society, a society that had defeated

their futile attempts. There were no spies among them, no cowards like the hero's grandfather; they were soldiers who had fought under the command of General Pershing (p. 56) or had been trained to serve in a variety of professions:

Many of the men had been doctors, lawyers, teachers, Civil Service workers; there were several cooks, a preacher a politician, and an artist. One very nutty one had been a psychiatrist. . . . They were supposed to be members of the professions toward which at various times I [the hero] vaguely aspired myself, and even though they never seemed to see me I could never believe that they were really patients. Sometimes it appeared as though they played some vast and complicated game with me and the rest of the school folk, a game whose goal was laughter and whose rules and subtleties I could never grasp. (p. 57)

Inside the tavern this group of professionally trained Negro patients overcome their restraining influence (Supercargo, who is a symbolic superego figure) and act as though they are victors in the war between Negroes and whites. But this brings the reader back to limited elements of the primary theme that includes scenes of Negro chaos as the Negro boxers battle each other. The Golden Day Inn scene reflects Negro disorder without effective leadership; and like the closing theme from the exposition of a sonata form which may be composed of "distinctive motives some of which may be derived from previous themes,"⁷ the Negro genocidal tumult continues.

In the initial geographic region (the South), the Negro youth has been kept running. The themes of Negroes fighting among themselves for the entertainment of whites, Trueblood's incest and self-justification,

⁷Dallin, Techniques of Twentieth Century Composition, p. 216.

and the unconstrained Negro chaos are all means of forcing the Negro youth out of his home community into college, and finally, to New York City. The hero's flight, however, does not end there. But Chapters 4-6 are needed as transitional material to clearly justify the hero's movement from the college setting to Harlem.

The fourth chapter prolongs Dr. Bledsoe's expulsion of the youth from the Southern Negro college until Chapter 6, but Mr. Norton's statement of self-reliance ("Self-reliance is a most worthy virtue." p. 84) reiterates Trueblood's justification of his incestuous act and records a question of doubt concerning Mr. Norton's own relationship with his deceased daughter.

The interspersed fifth chapter is Ellison's attempt to capture the effects of the emotionally intoned Negro sermon, and a revival of the sermon method recurs in Chapter 21 with the hero's funeral oration over the body of Brother Tod Clifton. Finally, the expulsion from college under the guise of Dr. Bledsoe's aiding the hero to obtain summer employment was a repeat performance of the letter delivered by the grandfather's apparition and the briefcase stuffed with a harmless and benevolent scholarship that initiated the hero's search for identity.

The end of the Southern experience may be anticipated when Ellison introduces the orchestral allusion to Dvořák's New World Symphony (Chapter 5) and the hero soon leaves for New York City (Chapter 7). The musical diction shifts from the words of quiet restraint to the staccato violence of Harlem and the hymns and spirituals are replaced by the Harlem jive and blues. The primary divisions of the

novel rest upon the major geographical areas described in the novel: the South, the Harlem of the Men's House, and the downtown New York association with the leaders of the Brotherhood. Moreover, Ellison's use of a technical music cant reveals an interest in a faster and staccato tempo following the hero's adjustment to uptown New York (Harlem) and during his encounter with the industrial North. The spirituals and hymns also give way to the blues and jazz rhythms of New York that are outside the protective walls of the Southern campus and chapel services.

Ellison has, in the first geographical setting of Invisible Man, constructed three major episodes, and more transitional ones, in his presentation of the central theme of the novel--that of a continual war between Negroes and whites. He then develops two examples of individuals who learn to live within the white man's restrictions or who are overcome by the repressive social restrictions. It seems to be a battle between the principles of endurance, seen in Trueblood, that have existed from slavery days and the concepts of personal expression by the younger professionally trained Negroes who are repulsed at the sight of the older type characters. In a consistent parallel to the sonata form of musical composition, all the themes of Invisible Man have been introduced in the first major section; and the extension of the musical composition or the extension of the plot in the novel depend solely upon a further development of these initial themes.

In the second major section of the sonata form (the development of the exposition), a great number of technical devices may be used in

order to extend the themes presented in the exposition: "There are, of course, no set rules as to any of the details of procedure. In the development section more than anywhere else the composer is free to use his ingenuity in forming a dynamic body from the building materials at his disposal."⁸ Even new material may be introduced without violating the limits of the development section:

The structure of the development is sectional. It builds up to one of the main climaxes of the movement and usually has other, secondary climax points. . . . The development may end and the principal theme make its re-entrance with a climax, or the climax in the development may subside prior to a quiet return of the first theme.⁹

The second major section of Ellison's Invisible Man, which begins with the hero's geographic relocation in Harlem following his expulsion from the Southern college, is terminated with the hero's revival of his oratorical skill during the dispossession scene in Chapter 13 and his subsequent association with the Brotherhood. This major section also progresses along a pattern similar to the development movement of the sonata form. In the second geographical section the principal and subordinate themes reoccur and are given expanded treatment, thereby producing many structural similarities between this section and the events that occurred in the Southern environment.

A direct reference occurs in Chapter 9 between Mr. Emerson's receiving of a letter and Dr. Bledsoe's writing of that same letter to introduce the youth to New York and keep him fleeing from the white

⁸"Sonata-form," Harvard Dictionary of Music, ed. Willi Apel (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), p. 697.

⁹Dallin, Techniques of Twentieth Century Composition, p. 216.

man's society. Even the briefcase with a college scholarship that relocated the Greenwood high school youth on a quiet Southern college campus is duplicated by Dr. Bledsoe, who offers the expelled student several sealed letters, letters that also accompany him on a trip of relocation. And Chapter 10 is concluded by the Liberty Paint Factory explosion that results from Lucius Brockway and the hero's failure to regulate properly the valve mechanism on the boilers, a failure that occurs during their hand-to-hand fight (similar to the boxing match of the Battle Royal) as each Negro employee (Lucius and the hero) fights to retain his position before his white employer.

The protagonist's reliance upon Mary Rambo during the manuscript version of the hospital scene and his searching for her apartment following his dismissal from the hospital in Chapter 11 of the novel and also the manuscript copy of "Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar" reemphasize a theme of incest--the hero's reliance upon a mother figure during a short period of his convalescence following his symbolic second birth. Moreover, the castration theme of the smoker preceding the Battle Royal is reenacted clearly in the dialogue of the attending physicians and nurse before the prefrontal lobotomy: "'Why not castration, doctor?' . . . 'There goes your love of blood again . . .'" (p. 180). The following electrical shock in the machine vividly restates the experience on the electrified rug which contained the reward money for the boxing match in the Battle Royal.

Along with the apparent parallels between events in the Southern environment and those represented in this uptown New York period of

residence, Ellison attempts to construct a rising and falling off in the plot structure that produces both secondary and important climactic scenes. The three strikingly climactic scenes that are of importance during this section are Mr. Emerson's refusal to interview the young Negro job applicant, the hero's flight from the hospital in the original manuscript, and the explosion in the Liberty Paint Factory.

Foreseeing an explosion at the paint factory in New York, Lucius Brockway hurries up the steps--hurries to the sanctuary of order--leaving the assistant employee to the mercy of the machine; and the flight of the hero from the hospital (in "Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar"), moreover, ends when the escaping patient descends into the basement of the hospital--suggesting the basement of the mind--and is sought by several doctors and the furnace attendant in a wild and turbulent, but unsuccessful, dragnet filled with strident themes and a human menagerie of mythological representatives. Even the protagonist's rejection by Mr. Emerson causes him to identify himself with Poor Robin, the subject of Ellison's most descriptive blues lyric.

But the primary climax of the novel as a whole necessarily begins at the scene of explosion in the paint factory and the plot gradually declines in significance while the hero lies in the prefrontal lobotomy machine at the hospital.

The significance of the paint factory explosion cannot be over-emphasized. The only thread that unifies the many episodes of the novel is the major character, the invisible man, whose migrations from one geographic location to another are in response to the college

with other means, and typical freedom of tonality is exercised in the recapitulation as elsewhere.¹⁰

In the final geographic setting, that of downtown New York and the hero's association with the Brotherhood, all of the themes that were present in the Southern environment are repeated during the hero's Brotherhood association and in the final riot scene in Harlem.

The primary themes established by the hero's grandfather in Chapter 1 ("life is a war" and "keep this nigger-boy running") are again realized during the eviction scene of Chapter 13 when the youth addresses the street crowd in a restrained manner and has to flee over the roof tops of several Harlem buildings in order to escape the police. The constant strife between police and the Harlem crowd was confronted in this incident by flight from the scene of the disturbance.

The Negro youth, who had made his first speech before a drunken civic group in Greenwood and had given the audience what they had expected ("agreed them to death and destruction," at least until he obtained a college scholarship), reestablishes himself as an orator first at the sidewalk eviction scene of an elderly Negro couple in Harlem and then at the massive Brotherhood orientation meeting in Harlem. At the sidewalk scene no electrified rug or boxing ring confront the Negro crowd of onlookers, but the crowd's disturbance is similar to the Golden Day scene when the Negro patients brought their symbol of restraint to the downstairs level of the tavern. Even in Harlem the

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 216-217.

"trusties" who serve the eviction notice are situated on the inside stairway threatening to shoot at the crowd in order to ensure an orderly eviction; nevertheless, they are overpowered by the riotous crowd of Negroes and Brotherhood members similar to the overpowering of Supercargo in the Golden Day.

During the Harlem night rally in support of the Brotherhood, the hero once again regains the position of orator and Negro leader that he dreamed of while he was a student leader at the Southern college for Negroes. These two vocal deliveries by the hero occur in Chapter 13 and 16 and prepare the hero for a period of extensive training (Chapter 16) similar to the Southern college episode provided by the Greenwood college scholarship.

The Southern campus hymns and spirituals that repressed the young Negro students' sincere form of musical expression are reproduced in the Brotherhood portion of the novel for the hero, for the scientific organization pragmatically adopts important musical expressions for organizational assemblies but represses an aesthetic interest in any form of music.

Finally, the hero cannot adhere to the dictates of a one-eyed (half blind) leader; and he rejects the philosophy of Brother Jack as he rejected the sermon of Homer A. Barbee, the aged and blind minister from Chicago who once had served the Founder of the Southern college. But this time the hero has learned to "yes" the Brotherhood to death and destruction as his grandfather commanded in the primary theme of the novel (see p. 388).

Preceding the Epilogue, Ellison recalls in Chapter 25 the major themes introduced in the Southern geographic area. The followers of Ras chase the invisible hero into his cellar home; but it is Brother Jack, Emerson, Bledsoe, Norton, Ras, and high school superintendent, and others who collectively castrate their disobedient member. The hero's affair with Sybil (Chapter 24) ends the incest theme as his "organization" sister attempts to seduce the hero; and the chaos of the Negro mind, pulled between restraint and total expression, is enacted in the chaos of the Harlem Riot--a Golden Day Inn scene magnified.

The third major section of Ellison's novel, dominated by the hero's association with the Brotherhood, ends as ". . . a joke, an absurd joke" (p. 384); and the white leaders downtown watch the Negro community of Harlem destroy itself like the high school youths who boxed in the Battle Royal. This section is concluded soon after the hero has burned his high school diploma, Clifton's doll, an anonymous letter, and the slip on which Brother Jack had written the hero's Brotherhood name.

Finding the right conclusion for a sonata form or a novel may be difficult. The sonata form may introduce a coda, following the three major movements, that will be "no more than a brief cadential passage which serves to bring the movement to a close. . . . The coda may use material from any of the themes and introduce new ideas as well. The recall of elements from the introduction is an effective unifying

device."¹¹ The concluding parallels of Ellison's prose structure in Invisible Man to the sonata form exist primarily in his use of the Epilogue which obviously recalls the setting of the Prologue: the lights, the blues record of Louis Armstrong singing his mournful question, and the sloe gin. But in the Epilogue a new idea is introduced based upon the secondary theme of the Southern environment which stressed self-reliance on the part of Trueblood. The hero's life has been a "war" against the forces that would deny him his identity and that failed to recognize him as an individual, but he realizes that within any oppressive society he must rely upon his own initiative and blame no one for his predicament but himself ("you have to make your own decisions; you have to think for yourself").¹² Neither Louis Armstrong nor the hero would throw "old Bad Air out, because it would have broken up the music and the dance" (p. 438). When the hero realizes his need for self-assertion, his war with society is nearly over. Perhaps he will be able to accomplish his identity in his next episode following his winter of hibernation.

Although there is no conclusive evidence to justify a statement to the fact that Ellison was primarily concerned with developing a prose sonata form in Invisible Man, the structure of the novel with its Prologue, its central body (divided into three major geographical divisions and subdivided into episodes with recurring themes), and its Epilogue suggests a structure that parallels in part the twentieth-century sonata form of musical composition.

¹¹Ibid., p. 217.

¹²Ellison, "The Art of Fiction VIII," Paris Review, p. 67.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The critics who reviewed Invisible Man shortly following its publication in 1952, and Ellison himself in his lectures and critical articles, were eager to construct biographical accounts of the author who at the time was generally unknown to the reading audience. Ellison, by joining in the critical debate and by wishing to capitalize upon his initial literary success, stressed his own artistic development while he lived in Oklahoma City and at Tuckegee College, Alabama, and thereby revealed a portion of his literary craft--his musical affinity. Robert A. Bone's unsubstantiated references to Ellison's use of blues and jazz in the structure of the novel, references based upon Ellison's biography, are a beginning toward an understanding of Ellison's use of music in Invisible Man, a beginning that has been extended in this study to include blues and jazz, spirituals, hymns, and traditional compositions. Moreover, Ellison's own novel contains internal evidence to substantiate the author's knowledge of music.

Ralph Ellison's excessive references to a technical music jargon and his frequent lapses into blues, spirituals, and jazz lyrics suggest to the readers of his Invisible Man his extensive familiarity with musical forms and individual compositions from both folk and traditional sources. Ellison embeds over sixty clearly distinguishable uses of his cant musical diction among the recurring primary theme of continuous warfare between the Negro and Caucasian

1
races, the lyrical secondary theme of endurance in the face of hostilities and the need for achieving self-reliance, and the alternative theme of Negro chaos and genocide if a compromising attitude is not achieved; and he chooses his musical vocabulary most discriminatingly in order to relate his diction to the geographical divisions of the action in the novel. The sudden turbulent rhythm of a high school address before an all white civic organization introduces the hot tempo reflected in the diction, but the sounds associated with the Southern college campus prevail in the first section and are restrained and actually sonorous at times. The rapid pace of Harlem soon takes the place of the slower Southern tempo, for it allows a freedom of expression not permissible at the Southern college or within the New York Brotherhood. Accompanying this shift in diction is Ellison's direct use of lyrics.

Although the Prologue and Epilogue of the novel are filled with Louis Armstrong's blues and jazz, the events in the central portion of the novel vibrate also to spirituals, hymns, and symphonic compositions. The hymns and spirituals of the South, like the slower diction, set off this initial exposition of major themes. The blues, on the other hand, are a means of expressing Trueblood's self-reliant attitude; and they assume chief importance as the hero learns to depend on himself after his sudden exit from the protective Southern campus. When the hero journeys to New York, the tempo changes. The faster tempo of Harlem is accompanied by jazz and jive, to the exclusion of the slower hymns and spirituals. But the jazz and jive lyrics do not exclude

the blues lyrics, for the hero is still searching for his identity and amassing a reservoir of experiences that serve as a basis for his attaining self-reliance. Throughout the novel, Ellison is aware of his excessive use of lyrics and a technical musical diction; and together the diction and lyrics reflect a change of tempo in the novel and a change of attitude on the part of the hero toward the society that surrounds him and that offers him a deluding hope in his search for his identity.

This judicious investigation of Invisible Man clearly defines the extent to which Ellison relies upon his knowledge of a musical vocabulary and the lyrics of Negro spirituals, hymns, blues and jazz, and modified traditional compositions. The high school and college musician, who approached a career in fiction following his abandonment of music, is able to salvage a portion of his musical career and use it to his own advantage in the novel. His musical career, however, includes more from the discipline of music than knowledge of jazz and blues.

Robert A. Bone is correct in his summation that:

When [Ellison] began to write, it was natural for him to draw upon his musical experience for guidelines and perspectives. . . . His experience with jazz was formative; it left a permanent mark upon his style. His controlling metaphors are musical, and if we are to grasp his thought, we must trace his language to its source. There, in the world of Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker, Bessie Smith and Jimmy Rushing, we may discover the foundations of Ellison's aesthetic.¹

¹Robert A. Bone, "Ralph Ellison and the Use of Imagination," Anger, and Beyond, ed. Herbert Hill (New York, 1966), p. 89.

Bone, however, limits his discussion only to jazz form and omits a thorough study of Ellison's preparatory training in traditional musical form. This is a striking omission in itself, for Bone's critical comments include an introductory reference to Ellison's high school training in classical music: "Through one of the ironies of segregation, the Negro school system placed particular stress on training in classical music. Ellison took up the trumpet at the age of eight and studied four years of harmony in high school."² If Ellison were to have made use of his musical training from both his high school and college days, he could have, if desired, depended heavily on a jazz form or upon traditional music diction and structure. By a detailed analysis, this study has determined Ellison's use both of jazz and of additional musical types.

Beyond Ellison's obvious use of a technical musical jargon and portions of lyrics in Invisible Man to substantiate geographical shifts, the apparent structure of the novel seems substantially to parallel the twentieth-century sonata form as though the musical form were an underlying conceit. But no direct evidence exists for the reader to conclude that the sonata form is Ellison's only musical form employed in the novel or that he consciously initiated his composition of the novel with any musical form in mind.

Ellison, whose high school and college musical career terminated before he achieved recognition as an accomplished musician, achieves

²Ibid., p. 88.

a measure of literary success with his novel, Invisible Man. Had Ellison lacked an orientation in the music discipline altogether, it is doubtful that he would have been as conscious of musical lyrics and as prone to introduce an excessive technical cant into his prose work. This detailed survey of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, however, has established the author's knowledge of both folk and traditional music and his method of employment of this knowledge within his prose novel.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Apel, Willi, ed. Harvard Dictionary of Music. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964.
- Baumbach, Jonathan. The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel. New York, 1965.
- Bone, Robert. "Ralph Ellison and the Uses of Imagination," Anger, and Beyond, ed. Herbert Hill. New York, 1966.
- Courlander, Harold. Negro Folk Music, U.S.A. New York, 1963.
- Dallin, Leon. Techniques of Twentieth Century Composition, ed. Frederick W. Westphal. Dubuque, Iowa, 1964.
- Eliot, Thomas S. The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950. New York, 1962.
- Ellison, Ralph Waldo. "And Hickman Arrives," The Noble Savage, I (1960), 5-49.
- _____. "The Art of Fiction VIII," Paris Review, No. 8 (Spring 1955), 55-71.
- _____. "The Birthmark," Negro World Digest, I, iv [?] (November, 1940), 61-65.
- _____. "Creative and Cultural Lag," The New Challenge, II, ii (Fall 1937), 90-91.
- _____. "February," Saturday Review, XXXVIII (January 1, 1955), 25.
- _____. "The Golden Age, Time Past," Esquire Magazine, LI (January 1959), 107-110.
- _____. "Introduction to Flamenco," Saturday Review, XXXVII (December 11, 1954), 38-39.
- _____. Invisible Man. New York, 1952.
- _____. "In a Strange Country," Tomorrow, III (July 1944), 41-44.
- _____. "Light on 'Invisible man,'" Crisis, LX (1953), 157-158.
- _____. "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz," Saturday Review, XLV (July 28, 1962), 47-49, 62.

- _____. "Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar," Soon, One Morning, ed. Herbert Hill. New York, 1963. Pp. 242-290.
- _____. "Ralph Ellison, Davidson Nicol, Gilbert Gratiant, Richard Wright, Richard Gibson, Beauford Delaney," Preuves, No. 87 (May 1958), 33-38.
- _____. "A Rejoinder" in "The Critic and the Writer--An Exchange," The New Leader, XLVII, iii (February 3, 1964), 15-22.
- _____. Shadow and Act. New York, 1964.
- _____. "Slick Gonna Learn," Direction, II, v (September 1939), 10, 11, 14, 16.
- _____. "Society, Morality, and the Novel," The Living Novel: a Symposium, ed. Granville Hicks. New York, 1957. Pp. 58-91.
- _____. "Swing to Stereo," Saturday Review, XLI (April 26, 1958), 37, 39, 40, 60.
- _____. "That I Had the Wings," Common Ground, III, iv (Summer 1943), 30-37.
- _____. "That Same Pain, That Same Pleasure: An Interview," December Magazine, III, ii (Winter 1961), 30-32 and 37-46.
- _____. "The World and the Jug," The New Leader, XLVI (December 9, 1963), 22-26.
- _____. "They Found Terror in Harlem," Negro World Digest, I, i (July 1940), 43-45.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. 5 vols. New York, 1926.
- Girson, Rochelle. "Sidelights on Invisibility," Saturday Review, XXXVI (March 14, 1953), 20, 49.
- Howe, Irving. "Black Boys and Native Sons," Dissent, X, iv (Autumn 1963), 353-368.
- _____. "A Reply to Ralph Ellison" in "The Critic and the Writer--An Exchange," The New Leader, XLII, iii (February 3, 1964), 12-14.
- _____. "A Negro in America," Nation, CLXXIV, xix (May 10, 1952), 454.

Hughes, Langston, and Arna Bontemps, ed. The Book of Negro Folklore.
New York, 1958.

Hyman, Stanley Edgar. "The Negro Writer in America: An Exchange--
The Folk Tradition," Partisan Review, XXV (Spring 1958), 197-211.

Milton, John. The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton, ed. Harris
Francis Fletcher. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1941.

Opie, Peter, and Iona Opie, ed. The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book.
New York, 1955.

Redding, J. Saunders. On Being Negro in America. New York, 1951.

Warren, Robert Penn, ed. Who Speaks for the Negro? New York, 1965.