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**Intersectionality and Psychological Turmoil in *Invisible Man*  
(1952) by Ralph Ellison**

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## **Dedication**

To my passed away father, “Abderrahmane” whose love remains a quiet strength and an unseen pillar behind every word written here.

To my ever-present angel, my mother, “Abla” your prayers, love and sacrifices are the building stones of this achievement.

To my sister, “Fatima” your gentle warmth has been a solid source of comfort.

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## **Abstract**

The African American experience is identified by its history of racism that has triggered ongoing conflicts of identity. Numerous African American writers like Ralph Ellison, engaged with the issues of identity. Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) stands as a symbolic novel for these traumas. This dissertation reviews the complex themes of identity, race and psychological struggle in *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison. This research explores essential characteristics and themes of African American literature, particularly the depiction of identity and race. It highlights the cultural and historical foundations that shape African American narratives. Its focus is directed towards the role of intersectionality and the multiple aspects of identity in *Invisible Man* along with their contribution to the psychological challenges faced by the protagonist. It views the way main concepts such as race, identity, discrimination and psychological turmoil shape the individual's experiences and struggles.

**Keywords:** *Invisible Man*, Racism, identity, intersectionality, psychological challenges.



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# **General Introduction**

## General Introduction

From slavery to the evolving present, African American literature functioned as both a powerful witness and a voice to the heartbeat of black communities in America. Born out of a legacy of resistance and defiance, African American literature is a fertile cultural space where authors vividly examine questions of identity, race and equality. Tracing painful testimonies in slave narratives through the Harlem Renaissance to nowadays bold movements, the writers of this literary tradition have persistently fought the dominant ideologies. They illuminated the voices of black experiences and made a platform for the encouragement of black empowerment. This means of expression reflects on the richness of black identity in the face of marginalization, in a climate shaped by struggle.

The exploration of identity and fragmented narratives were the spirit of Black Modernism. African American writers often used the main themes of black experiences with a blend of modernist techniques to dive deeper into such complexities. Novelists like Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright and Toni Morrison gave modernism literature a new scope through the use of the vernacular, cultural heritage and African American perspectives.

*Invisible Man* (1952) by Ralph Ellison holds an important place among several works in this literary tradition. The novel is a meditation on the meaning of being seen and unseen not physically but in the symbolic dimension of being accepted in society. It is the journey of a black anonymous protagonist who struggles to define his identity due to societal pressures and racial stereotypes. Race in the novel, is not a static truth but a social contrast that shapes opportunities and perceptions. Through this lens, there is an engagement with central themes of African American literature, while offering a distinctive narrative of resistance to the reductive ideas of visibility and identity.

The protagonist's quest for identity, amid the imposed ideologies that seek to define and dominate him forms the central theme of the novel. The experiences he faced articulate key battles which resonate as an inseparable part from the history of African American literature because it focus on the dissonance between external labels and the urgent human pursuit for recognition in a racially unjust atmosphere. Ellison not only delves into this exterior struggle but also explores the effects of enforced invisibility on the mind. He employs the psychological breakdown of the narrator as a mean of

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illustrating the profound emotional and existential consequences of invisibility on the ability to maintain a coherent sense of identity and self-definition.

By portraying the protagonist as an unseen and racially stereotyped character, Ellison's exposition of the results of mental fractures with systematic racism is clearly shown, along with emotional and psychological instability of self. This is the main thesis statement of this dissertation. Moreover, his final breakdown and alienation reveal the cost of external definitions which is evident in in the prologue of novel as he confirms his invisibility.

On this ground, a number of research questions are raised to investigate the psychological, existential and emotional sides of the narrator's identity issues in *Invisible Man*:

- How does the novel depict the inner conflicts of invisibility and identity on the narrator's mental turmoil?
- In what way modernist narrative devices represent the chaos of psychological disorder and identity fragmentation in the novel?
- To what extent does Ellison expose the mechanisms of racial prejudices that deny the visibility of Black identity?

This dissertation is divided into two chapters. In chapter one there is an overview of the major characteristics of the African American literature. First, it highlights the narrative techniques employed in this literary tradition. It shows articulations of these techniques to the layered depth of internal conflicts in black experience. The chapter considers the two main themes in African American literature which are race and identity, emerged through the weight of socio historical realities with the quest of the search of meaning.

Chapter two delves into the concept of intersectionality in *Invisible Man* which influences the construction of identity through the interplay of connected forces in the life of the protagonist. It helps understanding the narrator's conflicts because of the forms of oppression produced from the interconnected elements of identity like race and class. This chapter goes through the different identity and psychological crisis made him

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achieve an existential awakening, where invisibility is no longer a condition of marginalization but a space of inner freedom.

# **Chapter One: The Characteristics And Themes Of African American Literature**

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### **1.1 Introduction:**

African American literature is a literary tradition that covers a different collection of voices, genres, and narratives that have sculptured the American literary canon. From its roots in the oral traditions of enslaved Africans to the vivid words of contemporary writers, it provides a sincere image of the African American experience. This literary tradition has not only given voice to undervalued communities but has also crucially altered the track of American thought. This literature has delivered a stand for the articulation of the African American experience in all its complexity—joy, pain, resistance, and hope. It has been both a mirror and a map giving voice to the marginalized Black individuals, offering a lens through which to delve into race, class, and identity in America. African American literature has become a dynamic space for the fight of historical oppression and the pursuit of freedom, equality, and belonging due to the works of the African American writers who played an important role in reflecting and shaping the African American events.

African American literature is marked by a special merging of characteristics and themes that allow an exploration of race, identity, history, and culture. Among the numerous features that distinguish African American literature from other literary traditions, there is the innovative use of narrative techniques and devices. They include the stream of consciousness which captured the fragmented and often chaotic experience of African American individuals. Symbolism and imagery also play major roles in African American literature. It provides means to crafty convey the depths of African American history. As well, the vernacular and disruption of language that saves space for the silenced African American voices to express themselves.

### **1.2 The Characteristics Of African American Literature**

The characteristics of African American literature refer to the different themes, styles, and techniques that define the literary tradition produced by African American writers (Ali). These characteristics involve both artistic expression and a well critique of societal norms which are informed by a long history of racial oppression, the desire for identity and self-expression. Also, they created a body of work by African American writers,

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which talk about the suffering and the resilience of African Americans. It shows their use of literature as form of fighting against brutality and defending their humanity, their culture, and their rights “Writers, poets, and activists have played crucial roles in the fight against racial discrimination by using their works to inspire, educate, and mobilize.”(Farhat, *Afro-American Literature and the Civil Rights Movement: A Symbiotic Relationship* 212).

The development of the characteristics of African American literature is deeply tied to the historical, social, and cultural evolution of African American communities in the United States. From the harsh realities of slavery to the fight for civil rights and the pursuit of equality, African American literature has constantly responded to the experiences of its people. “Literature provided a platform for African Americans to articulate their experiences and aspirations.”(Farhat, *Afro-American Literature And The Civil Rights Movement: A Symbiotic Relationship*208). From the Pre-Civil War Period when early African American literature began as a direct response to the institution of slavery. It gave straight accounts of the brutal conditions enslaved people faced and their efforts to challenge oppression. Moving on to the Reconstruction period, the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights Movement and into the contemporary era, African American literature has grown to reflect the multiple experiences and voices of African Americans. “From the era of slavery to the complexities of modern society, African American literature has undergone significant transformations. This evolution reflects the changing realities and aspirations of African Americans as they navigated through various periods of American history.”(Farhat, *Exploring The Roots: The Evolution Of Afro-American English Literature* 1).

The characteristics of African American literature are informed by a long history of racial oppression, resistance and deep desire for identity. Through these concepts, African American writers have shaped a body of work that engages with the suffering and the resilience of African Americans. Their use of literature is a form of fighting against dehumanization. These characteristics serve to communicate the emotions and aspirations of African Americans in their experiences of facing dominant cultural narratives and advocating for social change.

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### **1.3 The Narrative Devices Of African American Literature**

The following is a set of the major narrative devices of the African American literature. These devices mirror the depth of African American experience and not only enhance the storytelling but also serve as a means of cultural preservation and impact of the literary work.

#### **1.3.1 The Stream Of Consciousness In African American Literature**

Stream of Consciousness is used by African American writers to offer a more personal lens on the lived realities. “Stream of consciousness is a narrative technique that captures the continuous flow of thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of a character” (“Stream of Consciousness” (African American History)). This technique often revolves on the inner experiences and mental processes in a raw real way in which thoughts emerge and change. Through this technique, writers can delve deeply into the emotional and mental states of their characters during the struggle with issues like memories of slavery or racial discrimination.

Stream of consciousness allows for an expression of the fragmented nature, “Fragmentation involves breaking up the narrative into disjointed and often non-linear sections”(Lee). This fragmentation refers to how African Americans’ lives are often shaped by the unsettling realities whether from the legacy of slavery, the psychological impact of systemic racism, or the constant navigation of binary identities. It also reflects on the nonlinear nature of black experiences, presented through the characters developed thoughts. It adds “suspense, create surprise, or convey the fragmented nature of human experience”(Lee).

It includes an internal monologue of characters that jumps from one idea to another. For example: the way trauma and personal identity are not easily compartmentalized or expressed in a straightforward manner. In the context of African American literature, stream of consciousness often serves to capture the complexities of psychological depth, racial identity, and the historical trauma experienced by black individuals, as it was explained: “This technique immerses readers in the character’s psyche, illustrating how trauma disrupts thoughts and perceptions.”(Farhat, *Resistance and Resilience: Exploring Trauma and Healing in Afro American Literature* 226).

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This style provides a deeper understanding of the cognitive states of the characters. African American writers often utilize stream of consciousness to give voice to the psychological turmoil and of individuals living in a racially oppressive society, like in the semi-autobiographical novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* by James Baldwin that shows permutations between past and present, highlighting the complexity of his inner world. It allows for a deeper engagement with the emotional and psychological reverberations of racism and the effort to articulate a complex, often contradictory sense of self and fractured identities

Stream of consciousness in African American literature describes a sincere depiction of racial identity that provides a strong and intimate exploration of how race creates the inner lives of characters. Writers focus on the mental and emotional struggles of African American characters as they navigate the complexities of racial identity in a society built on racial divisions. This illustrates that racial identity is not a single, coherent thing, but formed by external forces, historical contexts, and internal struggles through African American characters, particularly those living under the weight of racism. Often find their sense of self conflicted, as they must navigate many contradictory expectations placed upon them by society, like in *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: an American slave* (1845), when he talked about how his identity is effected by racism " You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man"."(Douglass 57).

Another point is the emotional tension that comes with internalized racism—self-hate, shame, or a sense of scarcity that is vividly conveyed through the stream of consciousness. These are depicted in the way African American characters interiorize the racialized expectations and stereotypes imposed on them by society. The stream of consciousness is a floor for African American characters to resist the racial conceptions and societal beliefs that define them. Through this narrative form, characters can throw back or reject the limiting roles that others place on them as a form of defiance. As they move through the process of self-discovery of their true identities, stream of consciousness often portrays moments of racial affirmation and empowerment, "I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man's

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power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom.”(Douglass 29).

Through the stream of consciousness in African American literature there is a huge analysis of the way trauma confuses memory and creates a chaos for characters. It permits authors to express the lingering effects of historical and personal traumas by delving in the shocking image of how trauma is not only experienced in moments of crisis but also deeply embedded in the psyche of African American individuals. “Stream of consciousness writing is used in *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison to reflect the fragmented and chaotic nature of the protagonist's traumatic experiences” (Farhat, ). The stream of consciousness becomes a device for learning about the psychological scars left by slavery, racism, violence, and social oppression which are forces that have shaped and continue to shape the African American experience.

Trauma in African American literature often shows the painful, lasting effects of segregation, and racism. These traumas are not only external but also deeply internalized, impacting a character's sense of self, identity, and their relationship to the broader world. Stream of consciousness clarifies how these traumatic experiences manifest in the characters' thoughts, feelings, and memories. Moreover, memory plays a crucial role in the stream of consciousness, as it often involves fragmented recollections and intense emotional associations. For African American writers, memory is often tied to the collective history of Black people enslavement and survival. Memories that come to the surface in the moments of trauma that may not be linear or orderly but instead may emerge in bursts, evoking strong emotional responses like in the novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) by James Baldwin.

Stream of consciousness in African American literature affects the form and content addressing the problems of African American experiences providing an extraordinary way to dive in the inner lives of characters, particularly in the context of racial trauma and identity. Especially in the context of a society that has historically degraded Black individuals with the mirroring of the traumatic experiences that do not always follow a coherent or linear timeline in the mind of the survivors. This technique enables authors to

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note not only the exterior battles of Black people but also their interior lives which makes this technique serves both artistic and ideological goals.

### **1.3.2 Symbolism And Imagery**

Symbolism and imagery are dynamic literary devices in African American literature and very essential for conveying the emotional depth and complicatedness of Black experiences, especially in relation to history. Symbolism in African American literature refers to the use of symbols, objects, characters or events that hold vast meanings beyond their literal interpretations, often tied to themes of identity, resilience and the African American experience. The application of symbols tests the transformative power of African American identity and helps to bridge personal participations with collective memory and social justice.

For imagery in African American literature, it is to the descriptive language that appeals to the senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell) to create effective mental pictures and transforms abstract themes into tangible experiences. Imagery is a key tool for indicating the emotional or psychological realities of Black individuals and communities and this is by appealing to the senses and crafting realistic and clear pictures that transmits the joy and the struggles of the African American experience. This rich, sensory language serves to articulate themes of identity, defiance and survival. Symbolism and imagery are often implemented in African American literature to represent rich parts in meaning rooted in African American experiences, and serve to extract sentiments and highlight the continuing combat against oppression like:

Resilience and survival in African American literature are voiced through symbolic image that ties the characters' problems to heavy cultural, historical, and emotional truths particularly in the face of slavery, systemic racism. In this sense important symbols and images like the broken chain is an influential symbol of both the literal and metaphorical breaking of slavery's hold which signifies the moment of freedom, the struggle to break free from the chains of oppression for example, in *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: an American slave*(1845) by Frederick Douglass when he says:

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I have been frequently asked how I felt when I found myself in a free State. I have never been able to answer the question with any satisfaction to myself. It was a moment of the highest excitement I ever experienced. I suppose I felt as one may imagine the unarmed mariner to feel when he is rescued by a friendly man-of-war from the pursuit of a pirate.(92)

Significantly, the musical genres of Jazz and Blues in African American literature: are deeply settled in African American culture, symbolize emotional expression and the ability to transcend suffering. In African American literature they are not just musical forms but dynamic symbols of resilience and pain. Through the improvisational freedom of Jazz or the emotional depth of the Blues, they are a view of what the black individuals went through, offering a language for talking about both sorrow and hope. Showing that despite oppression, African Americans continue to create and find ways to heal and survive which is shown in *Invisible Man* (1952) by Ralph Ellison:

There is a certain acoustical deadness in my hole, and when I have music I want to feel its vibration, not only with my ear but with my whole body. I'd like to hear five recordings of Louis Armstrong playing and singing "What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue.(Ellison 6)

Music genres in African American literature are artistic elements but also function as cultural expressions and vital tools of resistance.

### **1.4 Innovative Narrative Techniques**

African American literature has consistently pushed the boundaries of traditional narrative forms by using innovative techniques. They are the creative and unconventional methods employed by writers to tell stories that demonstrate the layered realities of African American life, identity, history, and culture. These innovative techniques have new ways to understand personal and collective memory, identity. They reflect both the exceptional cultural experiences of African Americans and desire to break free from established literary traditions.

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### **1.4.1 Nonlinear Narrative Structure**

This innovative narrative technique in African American literature offers a dominant implement for grappling and engaging with the difficulties of race and identity. This innovative technique emphasizes not only the fractured and long lasting effects of historical trauma but also on adaptability of African American storytelling traditions. It gives layered explorations of personal and collective experience with an emphasis on the interconnectedness of past and present. Instead of following a traditional, linear sequence from beginning to end, the nonlinear narratives often jump between different times, perspectives, or realities or weave multiple storylines together which allows for more fluid explorations of characters and themes.

These narratives can mirror the cyclical nature in relation to the African American experience with slavery, oppression, and the fight for justice and equality through the multifaceted portrayals of characters' inner lives and their relationships to social, political, and historical contexts. Nonlinear narratives in African American literature serve also to create a more involving narrative experience by Offering multiple perspectives and voices like in Douglass's *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: an American slave* (1845):“I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out” (35), when he describes the emotional nature of his discovery to reading.

### **1.4.2 The Implementation Of Music And Rhythm**

Music is one of the most important innovative narrative techniques in African American literature. It constitutes an important aspect of African-American culture and literature. The history of African-American people in the United States is linked to suffering, slavery and humiliation. These components describe their history, but they also give the strings of hope and strength to overcome the burden of these struggles . This technique enriches the storytelling by revealing the cultural and historical significance of music in African American life. These elements connect the literary work to the broader African American experience and evoke emotional resonance with an exploration of identity and social issues in innovative ways.

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African American literature is often shaped by oral traditions, which have a strong musical component. Music, particularly genres like Blues, Jazz, Gospel, and spirituals has long been a form of resistance and a tool in literature for narration. It reinforces the lived experiences of African Americans, especially those related to suffering, survival and joy. Rhythm and songs are passed down through generations which influenced African-American writers to craft their poetry or novels. “Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong because he's made poetry out of being invisible.”(Ellison 7). From the rich implementation of music and rhythm, African American literature embraces magical realism to reframe lived truths.

### **1.4.3 Magical Realism**

Another innovative narrative technique used in African American literature magical realism. It is a Blend of the supernatural with realistic setting, often presented in straightforward manner, as if these magical events or phenomena are part of the normal world. It created a space where the magical and the real share space seamlessly. In magical realism, “the fantastical is treated with familiarity and becomes a part of daily existence” (Lessmann). It is characterized by the supernatural elements such as such as ghosts, spirits, or mythical creatures presented as completely normal or unremarkable, with no explanation or questioning of their existence and .

When applied to African American literature, magical realism it becomes a remarkable technique to weave together personal, collective, and historical narratives. It allows a reclamation and re-imagination of history, particularly the traumatic histories of slavery, segregation, and racial violence which can give voice to the past or symbolic qualities, like in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*(1987) and *Song of Solomon* (1977). This genre provides a way to externalize the emotional pain and historical trauma of African American communities, often by making these traumas manifest as supernatural or mystical phenomena and the best example is *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison that used supernatural elements to showcase the trauma of slavery and its lasting effects .

### **1.4.4 Psychological Realism**

It focuses on representing the inner workings of a character's mind. It delves strongly in the psychological richness of individuals. It captures the tones of how characters

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perceive the world and interact with it on a personal level. It dives in the inner thoughts, emotions, motivations, and consciousness of characters by the focus on internal psychological forces such as fear, guilt, love, or trauma. It is often marked by deep emotional conflict, subtle or hidden feelings and profound personal change.

In African American literature, psychological realism has been used to explore how race, trauma, and identity shape the mental and emotional landscapes of black characters. This technique delves into the psychological effects of slavery, segregation, racism experienced by African Americans as they stand in face of systemic oppression and false identity formation. John A. Williams is known for exploring the psychological realities of African American life in novels like *The Man Who Cried I Am* (1967) which shows characters are frequently portrayed suffering with the psychological consequences of being marginalized in a racially divided society.

### **1.4.5 Vernacular And The Disruption Of Language**

The vernacular and the disruption of language in African American literature are innovative narrative techniques that reshape the way stories are told and enrich the narratives by addressing cultural identity, subverting societal norms. Through language, these techniques offer a unique form of expression and resistance that redefines the literary canon and resist linguistic hegemony. They are not only stylistic choices but they feature the importance of oral traditions, identity and the assertion of African American cultural agency, "I yam what I am!"(205)

The vernacular is a distinct dialect with its own grammatical rules, vocabulary, and pronunciation, often influenced by a combination of African languages, the speech patterns of enslaved Black people, and the English spoken by white Americans. The origins of African American Vernacular can be traced back to the era of slavery in the United States. Enslaved Africans were torn from diverse linguistic backgrounds and forced into English-speaking environments. They developed a form of communication that merged African linguistic structures with English by combining elements from West African languages and the English dialects of their enslavers.

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This new form of communication was influenced by the African languages which contributed to syntax and rhythm. African slaves were isolated from English-speaking whites, developed a distinct dialect due to limited interaction with the dominant culture. This allowed their language to evolve independently and adapt to their cultural needs and following emancipation. The Great Migration<sup>1</sup> of African Americans to urban centers in the early twentieth century further shaped African AAVE<sup>2</sup>. It became influenced by regional dialects within the Black community and interactions with other marginalized groups. It enriched its linguistic complexity and cultural significance. AAVE has developed significantly since its inception through African American music genres like Jazz and Blues.

The vernacular in African American literature is more than just a mode of speech. It serves as a symbol of resistance and cultural preservation. It reflects also the cultural identity and experiences of Black Americans. Through the vernacular in African American literature, language is not just about words, but about the weight of history, the flow of community, and the richness of lived experience. It has a heavy impact on the development of Black literary traditions because it served many social purposes such as the affirmation of the value of the African American culture and linguistic heritage which gives a sense of stating African American identity. The deliberate use of vernacular in literature claims the authenticity of black culture and refuses the imposition of white cultural norms or the dominance of Standard American English (SAE).

By using vernacular, black writers break away from literary traditions and misrepresented African American voices. It makes their works a form of cultural reclamation. American author W.E.B. Du Bois made many of his works rich with vernacular such as *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) to convey the raw and painful reality of the black experience, “The niggers were jealous of me over on the other place, he said, and so me and the old woman begged this piece of woods, and I cleared it up

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<sup>1</sup> The Great Migration was one of the largest movements of people in United States history. Approximately six million Black people moved from the American South to Northern, Midwestern, and Western states roughly from the 1910s until the 1970s.

<sup>2</sup> African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

Fernández Beobide, Ainhoa. Sociolinguistic Issues on African American Vernacular English (AAVE). 2020, p. 35

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myself”(126). Through vernacular, black experience is reclaimed and literature is transformed.

### **1.4.6 The Disruption of Language**

It refers to the intentional manipulation or alteration of conventional language structures, grammar, syntax like W.E.B. Du Bois did in his work *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) in sentences like “One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings” (14). Language in African American literature is a way of challenging traditional narratives, offering new ways of expression and understanding. This happens through the implementation of AAVE as a form of resistance to the mainstream, the use of metaphor and symbolism to give a closer picture, the representation of not only reality but also the psychological state of characters, along with the Nonlinear storytelling and stream-of-consciousness techniques that allow for a better understanding of the effects of racism.

Vernacular and the disruption of language form a cornerstone of African American literature. These strategies form the preservation of cultural shared identity and fostering a sense of community. They show the value of Black experiences. Both of them form space for African American voices to be heard through pushing the boundaries of language for conveying truths about race, identity, history, and resilience.

### **1.5 Race and Identity in African American Literature**

Born from a legacy of enslavement, African American literature stands as a reflection on a history of pain and strength. “African American literature, in particular, is regarded as an outstanding kind of literature that born from the suffering of the blacks from enslavement and ill treatment of the whites that stripped them of any rights” ( Mardhanan 12). It narrates the racial oppression the black communities went through in there continues fight to achieve their equality. This suffering became the spark for a bold literature of resilience.

The experiences of African Americans, from slavery to present , have shaped this literary tradition that serve as a mirror to the hardships of black individuals to understand and define oneself within a society that often defines Black people through a lens of

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racial stereotypes. In this struggle the quest of identity and defend of race is woven into the very fabric of African American literature.

These two fundamentelements,intertwined literary concepts that work as a definition to the experiences of African Americans. They shape this literary expression in a way that studies the meaning of the pursuit of self-definition and liberation. As for Race, as a social construct, has always played a central role in forming the African American experience, while identity reflects the ways individuals and communities understand themselves in relation to their racial, cultural, and historical contexts. Race and identity, are not just individual concerns but are so tied to a shared history which makes these two concepts foundational to understanding African American literature.

The presentation of race and identity as concepts in African American literature starts in response to the historical journey of African Americans, then evolves through the lens of slavery where the origins African American literature begun with the coming of African slaves in the early seventeenth century. Early African American writing was primarily written by slaves or freed Black individuals, often as autobiographies, poems, or letters that responded to the brutality of slavery which was named slave narratives.

Memorable works from this period include Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), where he describes the development of his personal and racial identity, as well as Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). These themes continued to emerge and be more impactful during the fight for civil rights when American literature became a strong source for the objection against racial segregation, disenfranchisement, and violence. Writers used their work to underline the psychological and social price of racism, as well as to declare their right and impose their dignity of their identity, like in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* when he witnessed a psychological transformation, as he said: "The silver trump of freedom had roused my soul to eternal wakefulness"(Douglass 35).

In the decades following the Civil Rights Movement, African American literature continued to interact with race and identity, but in a more detailed way. Writers like Toni

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Morrison analyzed the psychological wounds of racism, and the complications of Black identity in a changing world (Farhat 209).

In African American literature, race and identity are totally linked because they are a looking glass to the sore realities of racial exploitation and a framework for the celebration of Black identity and culture. The connection of race and identity is central in this literary tradition, it reveals how race affects personal identity forms and shape new understandings in America. This close connection between these themes speaks to the heart of African American history and the lasting operation of self-discovery and recovery.

Race serves as a primary function in forming identity in African American literature, generally pictured as a source of each energy and problem. There are several influential works in African American literature that sharply demonstrate this connection of race and identity and through these texts, African American authors have not only documented the pain and struggle that comes with racial discrimination, but also celebrated the complexity and fertility of Black identity in the face of obstacles like Ralph Ellison's works such as: *A Party Down at the Square* (1955), *Juneteenth*(1999) and *Going to the Territory*(1986).

### **1.5.1 Race In African American Literature**

Race is a significant theme in this literature that proposes a meaningful critique of racism and its effects that created the narratives, characters, and the ways in which African American authors reflect on oppression and resistance in the face of the problems against their race. African American literature also critiques the ways in which Black people have been mis-stated or stereotyped based on their racial roots and reveals the psychological and social toll of being marginalized.

African American literature has conveyed race as a driving force of the need for resistance. Several authors used their voices to create narratives as forms of activism to address and abolish systems of racial oppression through their works. These writers helped inspire future generations of writers dedicated to racial justice, among them:

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The American author W.E.B Du Bois, who was a multidimensional figure and author, also a pivotal figure in the civil rights movement in the United States. He was deeply committed to pushing for racial equality, preserving the black identity in his works and encouraging an intellectual culture within the African American community. His writing style characterized by a blend of sociological style and implementation of cultural elements.

Richard Wright is another American author who used his literary works to shed light on racial injustices, oppression, and the African American experience in the United States. Wright's writing confronted the cruel truths of racial violence and the struggle for survival under a racially oppressive system and most of his works sought to expose the systemic and institutionalized nature of racism like the novel of *Native Son* 1940. He used race as both a personal and societal lens to examine the crushing realities of oppression showing that Race is the driving power behind the violence, fear, and alienation in the novel

### **1.5.2 Identity In African American Literature (Philosophical Drives)**

The examination of Black identity in African American literature is guided by a history of struggles, racial discrimination and freedom. This examination was started from the early period of slavery. It made huge impact on African American individuals because slavery sought to strip them of their humanity and reduced them to property, also, formed the reclamation of one's own identity.

Even after the unchaining, black individuals were forced to battle with the remnants of slavery and to live in a world where they are captured through the eyes of a society that underestimates them. African American writers have long dealt with the complexities of what it means to be Black in America, both in relation to white society and within the Black community itself. Identity in African American literature is a point of strength and a sensitivity that gives a sense of displacement and division along with the search of belonging. This is widely known especially through the literary works during the great migration to northern cities or the psychological distance created by racial segregation. The theme of identity makes the African American literary works full with the notion of returning to one's roots, whether physically, spiritually, or emotionally.

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Through the representation of Black identity, writers continue to highlight the complexities of the African American experience through their notable narratives like the novelist James Baldwin. His works question identity from various perspectives with a large focus on how society's racial expectations are the basis of both individual and collective identities. His works are overflowing with the key concept of the search of identity through many ways like family or religion.

Among his famous narratives that tackle the theme of identity is his first nonfiction book *Notes of a Native Son* (1955) which is a complex assessment of how personal identity is created by social and racial forces. It describes the way African American identity is molded in a society that constantly tries to impose a limited and negative identity on them. He illustrates on how being Black is not just a personal matter, but a condition informed by centuries of systemic racism. He tackles the need for Black people to form their own sense of self apart from the prejudices imposed by a racist society.

The philosophical drives that come with the theme of identity are based on problems that have a philosophical dimension posed by the African individuals in America, like Toni Morrison did in her work *The Bluest Eye* (1970). These philosophical drives highlight the interplay of personal and collective experience, history, and the social impacts on the definition of the black identity. The concept of double consciousness is a key element in black experience. It captured the struggle of the split identity for many individuals.

### **1.5.2.1 The Double Consciousness**

African Americans live with two competing identities, one as they see themselves and one as they are seen by a racially biased society (Lee). The double consciousness is expressed in the first essay in *The Souls of Black Folk* by W E B Du Bois.

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring

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one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (Du Bois<sup>8</sup>).

Double consciousness in African American literature is a tool to reflect on the impact of the impact of resistance and self-definition on the inner self.

### **1.6 Cultural References in African American Literature**

African American literature is filled with cultural references to offer an insightful preservation and record the unique history and experiences of black people in America that mixed pain, resilience, and victory from slavery to the present. Their usage makes literature a reflection of history and a developed way of addressing the serious racial issues in America. These references in African American literature are elements drawn from the history, traditions, values, and experiences of African American legacy. They are used to convey deeper meanings of identity and foster a sense of pride in African American heritage. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* puts an emphasis on racial discrimination in his work. His words were deeply into the historical fabric and influenced by the concept of political movements like the civil rights movements, "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line."<sup>(3)</sup>

#### **1.6.1 The Harlem Renaissance**

The Harlem Renaissance is a transformative point in the African American literary tradition. It came with new energy that brought creativity to the black writers, as it was stated:

It represented a significant shift in the way African Americans were perceived and represented in mainstream society. Through literature, art, music, and intellectual discourse, African Americans asserted their humanity and challenged the prevailing racial hierarchy (Farhat et al. *The Harlem Renaissance: Cultural Rebirth And Literary Expression* 27)

The Harlem Renaissance (1917-1930s) was an artistic explosion when African American writers, musicians, and artists crafted a new cultural identity and created a body of work that celebrated Black culture while challenging the pervasive racial prejudice in American society. It gave a sense of acceptance for African-American

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writers into mainstream America focusing mainly on arts, including poetry, prose, painting, sculpture and Jazz.

The voices of African Americans during that time period left a lasting mark of hope and ambition felt by many Black poets and talented individuals. It encouraged future African American generations to voice their literary expressions in various arts medium. It was seen as a movement that could elevate African Americans in the realm of art, politics, and culture. Black writers reclaimed a power to share their perspectives and honored their voices away from the white approval. Moreover, it created a huge bond between black intellectuals to support one another, which fosters a vibrant dialogue of innovative viewpoints.

### **1.6.2 Black Social Movements**

Black social movements in African American literature are evocative cultural references that document the history of racial struggles and oppressions. These movements are the collective efforts by African Americans to achieve social justice. It serves as an intellectual and emotional foundation for writers. They used it as a source for empowerment. As a reference, it is a way in literature to assert the value of Blackness. Many of these movements provided a profound cultural backdrop for many significant African American works.

#### **1.6.2.1 The Abolitionist Movement**

The abolitionist movement in African American literature is one of the main cultural references and historical footnotes. This movement was intertwined with African American literary traditions. Its influence can be seen in works from the nineteenth century to the present. Many prominent figures were abolitionists and used this movement as a bridge from the exploration of the legacy of slavery to the long search for freedom. The abolitionist principles such as liberation, the power of education and resistance are repeatedly central in African American writings.

#### **1.6.2.2 The Civil Rights Movement**

During the Civil Rights Movement which spanned from the 1950s to the 1960s, literature helped documenting the experiences and sentiments of African Americans and

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spreading awareness. Its use a cultural reference in this literary tradition made literature became a dynamic medium for expressing the pain, resilience, and aspirations of African Americans during this sensitive period in history. It left a permanent trace on African American literature in terms of addressing the need for the end of racial discrimination against African Americans.

Many literary works interact openly with the Civil Rights Movement and its cultural impact like *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison which delivers a searing critique of the systemic racism and social injustices faced by African Americans. He wrote it to challenge the stereotypes placed on black people and to argue that the true crime lies in the societal structures that perpetuate inequality which the Civil Rights Movement sought to dismantle. He mentioned “Life is to be lived, not controlled; and humanity is won by continuing to play in face of certain defeat” (Ellison 447).

### **1.7 Conclusion**

The Use of stream of consciousness, symbolism and imagery along with the numerous innovative narrative techniques as the vernacular and the disruption of language are the main narrative devices that characterized the African American literature. They are stylistic choices. However, they are forceful means for expressing the complexities of African American experiences. The stream of consciousness allows for an intimate exploration of characters' inner lives, while symbolism and imagery enrich the narrative by inspiring it with cultural and historical significance that connects beyond the individual, drawing on collective memory. Meanwhile, the innovative use of vernacular and the disruption of language assert the authenticity of African American voices. These narrative devices create a distinctive literary tradition that not only highlights the resilience of African Americans but also reshapes how stories of race, identity, and history are told in American literature.

Themes of race and identity in African American literature are artfully woven into the fabric of the narratives, reflecting the enduring struggle for recognition, dignity, and equality in a society built on racial hierarchies. These themes are often expressed through the lens of historical trauma, the legacy of slavery, and the constant negotiation between

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individual identity and collective heritage that made the cultural references of the African American experience essential to understand them. African American literature along with its narrative characteristics and techniques that beautify its works not only critiques racial inequality but also celebrates the resilience and strength of Black individuals and communities, shaping a discourse that remains necessary in conversations about race and identity today.

## **Chapter Two: Intersectionality And Psychological Turmoil In *Invisible Man***

### **2.1 Introduction:**

*Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison crafts the fragile construction of identity along with the formation and deformation of selfhood under the pressures of intersecting systems. These pressures caused social oppression and psychological turmoil. The novel lifts the veil on the multidimensional complexity of marginalization in the protagonist's lived experiences through interconnected racial, social and economic tensions. His invisibility is the product of multiple oppressive systems dictating how others see him and who he can be.

While traversing a society that denies his individuality and repeatedly sidelines him, the novel maps the exact heavy psychological burdens of societal invisibility. These burdens give rise to the growth of emotional detachment and a fractured sense of self-concept. Ralph Ellison's evocative account pioneers an unprecedented insight into the aftermath of racism on victims and advocates.

### **2.2. Overview of the novel:**

Recognized by its impact, *Invisible Man* stands as a cornerstone in twentieth-century literature due to its exploration of the imposed challenges of racial, ideological and social forces on African American individuals. The story sheds light on the human desire to connect with the authentic self. It followed the experiences of an unnamed black man who seeks to have his place in a racially torn society. It explores his quest for self-realization. The novel starts with the narrator recalling to a painful incident from his youth in the south, where he is invited to deliver his graduation speech in a formal event. The speech was before an audience of powerful white men. However, the event turns out to be highly humiliating for him. In his early life, the words of his grandfather were a voiceless guide, a fusion of wisdom and rebellion. These words informed his outlook on the world and triggered the restless fire that encourages his journey toward identity and survival.

In pursuit of fresh beginning and brighter future, the protagonist moves to Harlem in New York, only to find himself drawn in turbulent social and ideological dynamics. The deeper his path becomes in Harlem, the more he crosses paths with figures with

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diverse life philosophies and a range of conflicting mindsets. Amid these interactions, the protagonist struggles become constant, to understand his true identity in a world of contrasting viewpoints.

As the narrative advances, the protagonist becomes a student at a black college. They gave the responsibility of chauffeuring a white trustee from the north named Mr Norton. This role was graced with honor and burdened with heaviness. The narrator`s drive with Mr Norton through marginalized neighbourhoods breaks the idealized illusion the college has built. Despite acting in good faith, he was expelled and blamed for revealing the fragile image of the college. This incident sparks the start of his disillusionment with power.

With his evolving bond with the brotherhood, his feelings of alienation solidified. Both white and black individuals manipulated him. They treated him as a tool to reach their gains. Eventually, he realized the flaws of the movements he followed and the obstacles that consumed his journey.

In the novel resolution, the narrator finds refuge in a basement in Harlem. It was a destination where he reflected on his previous experiences. He has matured to comprehend the necessity of accepting his own identity, embracing the power of his inner self while challenging the society that denies him. He apprehends that his quest for seeking approval from others is pointless.

### **2.3 Intersectionality In *Invisible Man***

Intersectionality refers to the idea that various forms of oppression such as racism and classism, are linked together and cannot be analyzed in isolation, to understand individual`s experiences of discrimination fully. In the intersectionality of race, race does not function alone but in conjunction with other kinds of oppression and mixed with other sides of one's identity like class, gender and ability to produce compounded sorts of discrimination and privilege. It means that when individuals encounter racism, their own experience is highly shaped by factors like economic position, class background, disability status and social characteristics. This intersectional lens of race permits an

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explanation of the multidimensional nature of oppression and its dependency on a diversity of social contexts.

Intersectionality is a concept coined by pioneering scholar, writer on civil rights and critical race theory Kimberle Crenshaw. It made its first appearance in her foundational and seminal article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” in 1989. In it, she aimed to emphasize the limitations of the narrow scope of anti-racist and feminist theories often ignored the distinctive patterns of oppression. She introduced intersectionality as “a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking”(Scottish Government). Her demonstration clarifies how social forces act in coordination to shape identities. She drew attention to the applicability of the concept to all individuals whose identities touched by the convergence of a range of intersecting power structures.

While Ralph Ellison wrote *Invisible Man* before the term intersectionality existed, the novel richly portrays it. It shows extensively the intersections of different repressions that define the life of the protagonist. In the whole plot, the protagonist suffered from neglect. These disadvantages were imposed on individuals whose complex identities are existed at the line of intersections of social forces. Society did not confine them to a single category like black or man. “I could glimpse the possibility of being more than a member of a race”(Ellison 275).It confirms that: “Many individuals possess multiple characteristics for which they may be disadvantaged (e.g., race, gender, age, socioeconomic status) and these identities often interact in ways that govern the type of experiences an individual has”(Potter et al.).

For example, the unnamed protagonist was subjected to systemic racism by both black and white institutions across racial lines, along with manipulation within educational settings and class-based oppression. Such oppressive practices collided to silence his identity. He was overshadowed and seen as a reflection of external assumptions. His lack of power is not from his race or his class alone but from both.

### 2.3.1 Race As The Core Of Oppression

In *Invisible Man*, race is more than a central theme. It is the primary angle and the organizing principal of the protagonist's subjugation alongside other modes of segregation. The anonymous black man path reveals the functionality of race as a base for other dimensions of injustice, from political control of identity suppression. His passage through layers of biased institutions pictured their denial to the complete personhood of black individuals, especially when compounded with different disadvantages.

For too long, the narrator dwelled beneath the heaviness of refusal. The basis of this refusal is racism which tends to strip black individuals of their identities and reduce them to a bunch of stereotypes. In every place he went, society continually boxed him in the boundaries of racial restrictions. The narrative casts blackness as a social construct that rises in the heart of the systems that enforce invisibility and recognition.

The intersection of race with class and status produced many weaknesses in the narrator's life. His fragilities are recognizable by several obstacles, from his blackness to his poverty and mind control, each enriched his subaltern position. Even with the interconnection of these elements, it was the weight of his race that determined intensity of persecutions he felt. The protagonist said "I wanted to deliver my speech more than anything else in the world, felt that only these men could judge truly my ability, and now this stupid clown was ruining my chances." (20). During his fight in the battle royal he recognized that he is not there just to be a part of the event. He understood that his race is the main cause of the event.

*Invisible Man* is a powerful depiction and description of the many types of abuse African Americans suffered from under the control of white oppression. "African Americans were made to feel their skin, culture and way of life are inferior to that of the white man. This is particularly demonstrated during the battle royal at the beginning of the novel" (Mayfield .N). The battle royal is an unforgettable representation of the violent entanglement of race and systemic oppression, each forming the brutality of the barbaric spectacle. By intertwining focus areas of racialized violence, structural class inequality and physical brutalization, Ellison

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stresses about the fundamental nature of race as a defining element in the sufferings of black communities. Race is used as a justification to the degradation of Black individuals. It was the source of entertainment and control to the white elite.” I was told that since I was to be there anyway I might as well take part in the battle royal to be fought by some of my schoolmates as part of the entertainment”(14). His physical body was the cause beyond the violent treatment against him.

In the battle royal scene, young black men were forced to participate in a boxing fight while blindfolded for the amusement of white elites. The pain and degradation they suffered during this event are the results of a system of dehumanization. It used race to justify physical and psychological harm toward black people. The protagonist describes “Blindfolded, I could no longer control my motions. I had no dignity”(Ellison 18). This level of humility explained the view of white people to black individuals in America as inferior and reduced them to roles of subservience. (Mayfield .N).The black boys were transformed to instruments for the entertainment of the white audience in a theatre of dominance. Their humanity was controlled by the white gaze. It signals racially targeted violence as the result of systemic discrimination against black communities.

Intersectionality of race occurred again in the Battle Royale. “This event brings to light the idea that even though there are different lived experiences of black people, they are formed by the same race driven system of white supremacy”(Literary Analysis of Ralph Ellison’s “the Battle Royal”). The white audience demanded not authenticity but submission from the protagonist. In his graduation speech, he was supposed to be an evidence of his academic achievement but instead it was as a reflection of their prejudices and insecurity of their dominance. They concentrated on how he fits in the bubble of their racial roles of deference and not in the content of his speech.

Despite being formally afforded the chance to speak, his position as a black man left him extremely vulnerable, “Sounds of displeasure filled the room” (Ellison 25). Ellison gave an illumination of the relationship between racial inequality and power dynamics. As explained “The Invisible Man’s difficulty speaking and his error in

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saying “social equality” in the place of “social responsibility” illustrate the limitations a White, wealthy power-structure place on the Black individual”(Maroney). The fragile boundaries imposed on the protagonist as a black individual limited their equality and right for true autonomy.

### 2.3.2 At The College

The college setting in *Invisible Man* crystalizes race as the core foundation of marginalization. Its force linked to institutional control and belief-based conformity. The narrator’s optimistic vision of educational uplift shattered by Dr Bledsoe outburst to him. He declared: “Norton is one man and I'm another, and while he might think he's satisfied, I know that he isn't! Your poor judgment has caused this school incalculable damage. Instead of uplifting the race, you've torn it down”(Ellison 110).The narrator’s prior admiration for Dr Bledsoe fades as the man he held once in high regard unveils the grim truth about race and power at the college. Bledsoe’s words illuminate the connection between race and authority.

The college stands as a monument molded by Booker T. Washington ideals. It is constrained by a model of racial progress that involves the philosophy of humility and hard work as the keys to black advancement and conformity to white norms. It trains students to present a particular black identity, the crafted one to suit the white approvals. “The college perpetuates hierarchical ideology, where the individual talents and thinking are prohibited”(Yadav).This institutional mindset made the students conditioned to a view of social progress shaped by white hegemony and bound to the ideals of class.

College is the perfect embodiment of black individuals in spaces of elite and prestige. They remained limited by the boundaries of race. Mainly when the values of these spaces are dictated by white power and authority, as pointed in the journal article entitled Racism Reflected in *Invisible Man*:

He was obedient to the arrangement of the teachers in the school and the rule of whites in whites club. When he began to understand the world

and himself step by step, American Racism and apartheid policies of the United States make the boy's growth alienation (JING and PENG 133).

This was also exemplified in the narrator's assignment at the college as a driver for white trustee Mr. Norton and chaotic events that come after at the golden day. The narrator had a vision in his mind of education as the path of development and elevation "I believed in the principles of the Founder with all my heart and soul, and that I believed in his own goodness and kindness in extending the hand of his benevolence to helping us poor, ignorant people out of the mire and darkness" (Ellison 78). Nevertheless, he uncovers the unpleasant truth that his blackness is a significance of inferiority. He realized the obligation of performing no matter regardless of his intellectual capacities.

### **2.3.3 The Chains Of Class And Race**

Through an intersectional perspective, class operates actively in devising the circumstances of black invisibility and interconnecting with race to cancel the black identity. It produced a further aspect of repression within systems of authority. Both of them are metaphors for the entrenched marginalization of the black working class, where class and race connect to affirm invisibility and disempowerment. The journey of the narrator testifies that class is not an independent chain but is tied to the heaviness of racial inequalities. He was reduced to a racialized and classed figure and his class and race are used as a cause to explain his social marginality.

### **2.3.4 The Factory And The Sambo Doll**

The factory and the Sambo doll pictured the mechanism of class<sup>3</sup> oppression and ethnic generalizations. At Liberty Paint Factory, black bodies were reduced to objects of hard labour in cycles of abuse. As stated, "The dangerous atmosphere of the working environment indicates that those black workers are not only a second option for the owner, but they are also an experiment tool that can be used to test the safety of the work environment"(Mohammed and Hassan 249).The protagonist's role at the

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<sup>3</sup>The systems that maintain economic and social structures .These layers work together to preserve the advantages of dominant groups and limit social advancement.

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factory symbolizes this kind of abuse in order to sustain the white stability and economic dominance.

Blackness is utilized blindly for a perfect pure whiteness, like in the production of the optic white or the perfect white paint, “If It's Optic White, It's the Right White” (Ellison 168). It depends on a black chemical which is a paradox of the way black efforts are essential to maintain white ideals, “The paint can only be made by mixing ten drops of a secret formula into buckets of murky black paint”(Bloom 26).

The Sambo doll, unveils a dehumanizing system of the misuse of black people for amusement and profit of the white community. The static, artificial expressions of the doll's along with its grotesque exaggerated features and animated through intangible control, symbolizes the legacy of slavery in the United States. The unnamed narrator said about it:

A grinning doll of orange-and-black tissue paper with thin flat cardboard disks forming its head and feet and which some mysterious mechanism was causing to move up and down in a loose-jointed, shoulder-shaking, infuriatingly sensuous motion, a dance that was completely detached from the black, mask-like face.

This imagery explained the representation of the oppressed black people through its appearance and dance. The sambo doll face is a representation of the forced cheerfulness from black individuals even under oppression. The sensuous dance and its detachment from the face shows that the doll is controlled, which refer to the inner realities of black experience.

### **2.4 The Quest Of Identity**

The first two decades the narrator lived were about establishing an understanding of his identity amid a society that projects a different version for his, “The nameless, first-person narrator begins by suggesting that for the first twenty years of his life, he has looked to others to answer questions of self-definition”(Overview: Battle Royal or the Invisible Man). His evolution from naive boy to one with sobering self awareness

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and his passage across the racially fractured America becomes symbolically a quest to peel away the imposed external expectations and a battle to uncover his true sense of self. His self-awareness started to grow and shifted from the belief of obedience as key to success to a discomfort about these ideals. In the Golden Day scene he encountered many chaotic black patients and veterans but a turning point in his self-awareness. Particularly, when a former doctor and veteran told him the truth directly "Play the game, but don't believe in it" (Ellison 119). Their random discussion challenged the protagonist's way of thinking and turned down his illusions of obedience.

From the outset of the novel, the narrator articulates his ultimate realization that his invisibility lies in the society's refusal to recognize him as a whole person "I am invisible simply because people refuse to see me" (Ellison 3). The failure lies not within him but in the narrow eyes that were blinded to recognize his complexity. This verity propels him to chart his course in reclaiming his own identity. Each frame of his memory convinced him to validate that the world he inhabits can only perceive his exterior, not his soul. "The narrator himself feels the presence of whiteness and aware that whiteness defines his identity, of who he is" (Zulfikar and Bukhori Muslim 8).

In the opening chapters, the identity of the narrator is heavily influenced by the values of submissiveness and nonresistance at the black college where he studied. In hope of pleasing white folks like Mr. Norton, he plays the part of the obedient person expected from him. He follows the philosophy and ideals of Booker T. Washington of accommodation "Here within this quiet greenness I possessed the only identity I had ever known, and I was losing it. In this brief moment of passage I became aware of the connection between these lawns and buildings and my hopes and dreams" (Ellison 78). He drifted apart from his real essence in order to be validated. This accommodationist approach offered momentary safety and approval but at the same instant it generated identity crisis. It was observed that:

Booker T. Washington promoted vocational education as the solution to racial issues in the United States. He painfully acknowledged that the value of African Americans is determined by the standards white America. Embracing a "pull your-self up by your own bootstraps"

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mentality, he believed that through occupational success the value of African Americans could be proven not only to the white community but also to the larger African American community.(Digication EPortfolio).

He witnessed another transformation for his selfhood and another involuntary disguise in the brotherhood. "I had been transformed"(Ellison 273). He was treated as a role or concept and not as a person, to make him a ready made poster for their campaign. The leader of the brotherhood, Brother Jack first asked him if he wants to be the new Booker T. Washington (Ellison 236). "The narrator realizes the big mask game of the Brotherhood that betrayed him, Clifton, and all African Americans" (Muhammad). The rollercoaster of experiences he lived, forced him to question his true identity and the reasons beyond people's freedom to define him. "In this case, the narrator fails to construct his identity because his passion for the identity construction through black culture is utilized by the wickedness of the Brotherhood"(Wang). His struggle to reclaim his true identity was at the end shaped by the understanding that his selfhood can emerge from within.

The novel chronicles a change from a black individual whose voice was silenced to an individual who reclaimed his voice on his terms. He visualizes a remarkable act of resistance. The protagonist discovers that identity can not be prescribed but it is a self crafted definition of human dignity. The reclamation of his identity comes at a painful price to him. It was a long destination characterized by invisibility and confusion. In due course, he regained his voice and embraced his fluid nature of identity in the underground hole as he left the whole world to reflect on who he truly is.

### **2.4.1. Self discovery in *Invisible Man***

Self-discovery emerges as an important element in the protagonist's life stages, as he restores his identity and craves a more profound sense of his truth, away from the masks of a discriminatory society. In Ellison's vision, self discovery is an ambiguous process rather than a clear one. It is influenced by a maze of outer stressors of society, like the internal wrestles and contradictions surrounded the protagonist.

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The narrator begins as a black individual who sees himself in need of pleasing society in order to flourish. However, he discovers that he can not be entirely successful in an atmosphere of white leaders, unless he serves their interests. It was a moment of realization that came to his mind after he participated in the cruel battle royal. Despite this, his beacon of hope for elevation remained the same. Unfortunately, the numerous betrayals he sensed invented a plot twist in his mission of self-discovery. He awakened to the fact that: the institutions he relied on as sources of guidance complicit in his suffering and mutism. His awareness drifted when he comprehended the devious nature of others. It urged him to define his identity apart from societal praise.

His engagement with the brotherhood is an image of his repeated hope to uncover the essence of who he is. The organization smartly gave him recognition as an activist and a speaker. "I was publicized, identified with the organization both by word and image in the press" (Ellison 295). While at the same time, demeaning him to a mouthpiece to benefit their program, which he accepted "I had intended only to make a good appearance, to say enough to keep the Brotherhood interested in me" (Ellison 273). He admits that his misplaced hope is indicative to his youthful naivety, "I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer" (Ellison 12).

Moreover, the death of Tod Clifton, a charismatic organizer who tragically devolved into a seller of Sambo dolls. His death shattered the narrator's glorified illusions of a genuine progress. "My ambition and integrity were nothing to them and my failure was as meaningless as Clifton's" (Ellison 392). These twists and turns pushed the narrator to examine the unsettling truth formed by a gallery of prefabricated selves, where his complexity has no place. "Only after Tod Clifton is murdered, and he recognizes the Brotherhood's complicity in the Harlem Riot, does he understand the falsity of human nature" (Mendy).

When the narrator reached a developed phase in his quest for identity, the unexpected emergence of the figure Rinehart delivered a moment of inflection in his self-discovery. He was a mysterious, complex character who encapsulated the

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evolving and adaptable nature of identity. He dressed in dark glasses and a hat to disguise himself from others. Instead he became Rinehart in their eyes, a man who occupies different roles, from a gambler to preacher to hustler, all merged into a single persona. This accidental change exposed to the narrator the fragile and unstable ground of the self in society. As he reflected in that saying “And sitting there trembling I caught a brief glimpse of the possibilities posed by Rinehart’s multiple personalities and turned away”(Ellison 386). Rinehart experience compelled him to unravel the performative personas he adopted. Ultimately, it inspired him to compel an authentic selfhood. Rinehart nature that composed multiple roles ” Rine the runner and Rine the gambler and Rine the briber and Rine the lover and Rinehart the Reverend?”(Ellison 385), inspired the narrator to search for authenticity and revealed a world where identity is only a performance should be adapted.

Before he was not aware of the split between his authentic buried self and his social self due to the several pressures he suffered. His self discovery steps went bigger as he moved from unconscious acceptance to conscious processing of the self.

his consciousness of self is not always aligned with his unconscious person, because he is turned continuously against his hidden self by external forces to feel accepted by society. It seems complicated for the narrator to look within and trust his intuition (Johnson).

His self discovery course is an ongoing process of breaking the chains of illusion and bitter revelations. He learns that his authentic self demands unstitches itself from the tongue of compliance. This transition is affirmed when “the narrator undergoes a positive development via critical self understanding, and this carries him further from a group identity towards a personal one the blind man cannot see past the stereotypes used to categorize Black Americans”(Rekbi and Saouli 28). The protagonist progressed in his self-reflection as he moved from betrayals to harsh realities and made him distance himself from racial stereotyped groups, in search of a more individual identity of his own.

## 2.5. Racial Identity in *Invisible Man*

The novel presents racial identity as a complex negotiation of the lived experiences of one's blackness within a world that distorts it by reductive and stereotypical representations of race. It illustrates the conflict of self-perception with external judgment for those who are categorized and mistreated by the dominant culture. Rather than being self-oriented, the narrator's racial identity is initially out of his hands sculpted by the expectations of the white dominance, black leadership and manipulative groups like the brotherhood.

Ralph Ellison reveals racial identity as a not fixed label but a changing force reshaped by historical contexts, controlled by power and redefined through the acts of resistance. The Invisible Man's journey is a battle to free himself from the confined identities to understand the meaning of being a black man. This explains his emphasis on increasing the capacity to name himself. His story proves that racial identity is deeply personal and can only exist when someone is free from external expectations.

The narrator's character conveys racial identity through his voice and physical presence. His physical body repeatedly used for abuse and objectification. It details the sincere connection between racial identity and physical existence. As one critic observes, "The bodies of the black boys serve two distinct, though related functions: they serve as the objects of physical violence and also as its agents." (Kim qtd. in Mulligan 22).

The way black individuals were dominated is evident in showing the bond between racial identity and societal power structures. In the plot, the narrator struggled to proclaim his racial identity in the face of power structures that misrepresented him. The ruling class used racial identity strategically to maintain their dominance to assert superiority and oppress the marginalized groups as in the narrator's case. They deliberately weakened potential resistance by promoting racial polarization and propagating views that provoked rivalry among underprivileged communities.

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The narrator was stripped of his individuality in the Brotherhood through acts such as being given a new name by its leader, Brother Jack. His acts and words were controlled by the Brotherhood name. He accepted their judgments and followed it with an embrace of the rules of this political organization (Al-Nuaimi 212). The organization claimed to fight for equality, but instead it turned his blackness into a political possession rather than a personal racial identity. They quit him and capitalized on his image to further their objective conformity. "I was dominated by the all-embracing idea of Brotherhood" (Ellison 295). Such dynamics underscore the profiteering of institutions to advance their goals while ignoring the lives and black experiences.

### **2.5.1. Discrimination and Oppression in *Invisible Man* :**

Oppression and discrimination tormented the narrator throughout his lifetime. When he moves to urban landscapes like Harlem, the land of modernity and progress, he was surprised to find injustice deeply rooted in its structure, particularly targeting black individuals. It placed them under repressive conditions that quieted them. This oppressive landscape acted the part of a mirror of the unhealed racial division frozen in the American life during the twentieth century. Although the narrator idealized his vision of Harlem for empowerment and cultural vibrance, Harlem reveals itself as a site of discrimination and powerlessness where black people are always restricted and pushed to the margins.

In the era of the 1930s and 1940s, when the novel takes place, economic discrimination against the black community was pervasive. They were pushed to the most perilous, lowest-paying jobs and barred from positions of leadership in every sector. Ellison uses the narrator's difficulty in securing a job to explain the entrenched economic systems and racial inequalities that hindered black Americans' economic mobility during the novel's setting. The continued failures of the narrator to access a purposeful labor force serve as a demonstration of his tragedy. It is a reminder of the intentional restriction of black individuals from economic roles. Such economic discrimination blocked black people from achieving self-reliance and financial self-sufficiency.

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Housing segregation is a devastating form of racial oppression. It is more than a geographic separation; it reinforces racial inequalities by obstructing access to safety, visibility and dignity for black communities. One of the most impactful scenes in addressing this form of oppression is the eviction of an aged black couple from their residence in Harlem. The narrator witnessed the forced eviction, marked by public exhibition of their possessions laid bare on the sidewalk. Their possessions were the fruits of lifetime's efforts and they were treated like waste. (Ellison 214) It was a bleak tableau of erasure and abandonment for the narrator. Community's outrage at the eviction echoes decades of collective pain because of injustice that has long dispossessed black families of stable housing. This moment evolves into a political act, as the narrator stirs the crowd and draws attention on this racial discrimination.

### **2.6. Visibility and Invisibility in *Invisible Man***

The prologue of *Invisible Man* opens with an act of vanishing for its hero, a character who is physically present but ignored by those around him. It is not a supernatural invisibility or a product of fantasy but a human cold failure called social omission. The protagonist clarifies:

Nor is my invisibility exactly a matter of a bio-chemical accident to my epidermis. That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality (Ellison 3).

He reveals that invisibility is not a condition nor a personal defect formed by the refusal of society to see him as a full individual.

Each phase of his life, from college to labor to politics becomes a chapter to get people recognize him as a whole person because despite his existence, his feelings and individuality remain a constant pursuit for visibility and presence. The narrator himself explained "When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination--indeed, everything and anything except me" (Ellison 3). Nevertheless, whenever he was invisible, it was always for other people's projections:

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the ideal black student, the faithful employee, the obedient mouthpiece of the brotherhood. The narrator's story illustrates the shared human struggle of invisibility and neglect along with the inability to be noticed by other people. He was seen as an object to serve the socially constructed ideologies" (Bouhadjela26).

Invisibility shifted to both a haunting curse and a strange form of freedom or a paradoxical liberty. Through betrayal and exploitation, the protagonist comprehends the visibility society grants is hollow and built on superficiality. It is an internal fight because whenever he is visible, it comes at the cost of his identity. His visibility was not a liberating source in his life. It costs him the obscurity of his individuality and the devaluation of his humanity into a series of Inescapable stereotypes. He said "I was simply a material, a natural resource to be used" (Ellison 394). In this way, visibility metamorphosed to a mechanism of power that aligns him with movements that are far from his authentic wishes. "

On the other hand, his invisibility serves as a liberating source from performative roles. He persistently showcased as a credit to his race which, caused a deep confusion from his true self. However, it was an intellectual awakening for the protagonist. His retreat to invisibility in his underground lair is an act of readiness to vanish from the roles of the society. It is a kind of liberation and a chance to reshape his identity untouched by the weight of other falsifications. Invisibility gave him a space for self-definition. "To become free of his invisibility, the narrator must learn how to be on his own without the control of corrupt organisations, as he rids himself of fear and reliance" (Wende 24). His state of invisibility is not a sign of weakness but a needed distance to see beyond the narrow judgments of people and toward a valuable understanding of his purpose.

Visibility and invisibility are examined through the figurative lens of blindness. Blindness is vital to the comprehension of not only the literal condition but also the psychological and social detachments that block the possibility of genuine human relationships. This shows the thriving of systems of power for categorizing people to stereotypes or excluding those who exist outside their mainstream in order to keep their persistence.

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Blindness is embodied by many white characters in the novel. These characters chose to render the protagonist invisible as a black man. Brother Jack is an illustrative example. He used blindness as intentional ignorance to exclude black individuals like the narrator from the society due to their vision on him as an obedient, passive shell. "you were not hired to think" (Ellison 363). Brother Jack claimed giving the narrator recognition as a central spokesman but he ultimately used him to advance his own agenda. The character of Mr Norton also embodied blindness through his paternalism attitude. He saw the protagonist as his destiny and not as a full person, "you are my fate, young man" (Ellison 33). He made the narrator invisible in different form of blindness, which is seeing him as apart from his story and refused to see his humanity.

### **2.7 The Psychological Turmoil in *Invisible Man***

Ralph Ellison in his *Invisible man*, "recreates and represents this world of racial conflict at the physical as well as psychological level of the individual and the society in general" (Kennedy and Enesha 24). This Psychological turmoil is a sore reality mirrored in the highs and lows of the protagonist. It covers a state of intense mental instability with deep internal tensions and emotional disorders. Whether it is a lifelong trauma or methodical cruelty, it gives rise to a persistent sense of anxiety, identity fragmentation and inner conflict as the individual struggles to reconcile the disconnection between himself and his surroundings. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* portrays the psychological disarray of the black narrator as he searches for his true identity amid a massive confusion.

He confessed that he "wanted peace and quiet, tranquillity, but was too much a boil inside. Somewhere beneath the load of the emotion-freezing ice which my life had conditioned my brain to produce..." (Ellison 201). The story traces the narrator's psychological toll as he witnessed challenges because of the fractionality of the society that dealt with him in a biased manner. Driven by a lifetime of contradictions and harsh experiences, he moves through an array of affiliations, jobs and roles, each one of them enhanced his invisibility. "Still I felt that even when they were polite they hardly saw me" (Ellison 130). At times, his invisibility was offset by moments of kindness

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from people. The narrator revealed serious insecurities and identity crises which haunted his conscience.

The psychological chaos of the protagonist tackles many impactful effects and themes during the long way of achieving the freedom of his individuality from the arrogance and dominance of society. His emotional upheaval started with a naive hope and the constant clash of being unseen. “was and yet I was unseen” (Ellison 393). It follows the anguish exhaustion of resisting marginalization and exposes the lasting wounds of racism and social invisibility.

### **2.7.1 Psychological Effects of Racial and Social Invisibility**

Invisibility is a subjective reality and a societal implementation placed on the narrator and absorbed into his psychology. It describes the silence that surrounds a black man in white rooms. Although metaphorical, it is a source of confusion, unsettlement and redefinition of his identity in a crueler kind. His journey ended with a radical path of self realization, however started and formed itself from due to the devastating effects of racial and social invisibility which backfire on his autonomy and psychological well-being.

Invisibility begins as a psychological burden, planted by the narrator’s grandfather’s last words. His words has an unresolved influence on his journey “It was as though he had not died at all, his words caused so much anxiety” (Ellison 13). His grandfather gave him a paradoxical advice which was “Agree 'em to death” (Ellison 445), it deeply left the narrator unsure with his belief of where truth ends and betrayal starts. “It became a constant puzzle which lay unanswered in the back of my mind” (Ellison 13). These final words burdened the Invisible Man with the reality of survival and submission.

The narrator believes that being a self-molder to the ideals of the white society will assume his success and grant him respect. His belief in obedience for an idealized version of himself as a black man shattered into pieces. He was surprised him each time with prejudices and ill treatment of each encounter. This creates a split within his true self and the roles he performs. He was either objectified like a part of furniture or

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ignored. "The cloak of invisibility is thrown over his main character by white and black hands which equally pummel his fragile self" (Shober 260). The more the narrator was close to make a difference or placed himself in a society, the closer he became invisible in a mocking way since was not viewed for his genuine self but as a tool. His presence was not welcomed but tolerated.

This state of obscurity resulted in psychological damage and an atmosphere of emotional numbness, which came as an unconscious response to the pain of racism. The narrator begins to question the validity of social roles, ideology, and even language. He feels trapped in a world that does not accommodate his complexity. Over time, he withdraws inward, becoming more introspective and sceptical. In the end, he retreats to a basement below ground, "Hence again I have stayed in my hole, because up above there's an increasing passion to make men conform to a pattern." (Ellison 447), which symbolized his total rejection of a society that has denied his visibility and his growing sense of cynicism.

When the novel approaches its end, it marks another step towards the psychological development of the protagonist. He comes to a philosophical depth and comprehension of invisibility. He explained it as a power and advantage. "However, in the end, the novel's protagonist discovers that his invisibility might be beneficial at times" (Hendrik et al. 1158). His new philosophical vision is that invisibility can be a potential source of freedom rather than merely a condition of marginalization. He learns that invisibility is not going to make him recognized in society, but it is an advantage, as it permits him to exist beyond the rigid social expectations although this exhausted him mentally, as he admits "It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves" (Ellison 3).

### **2.7.2 Internalized Racism**

This concept describes the internal acceptance and adaptation of marginalized individuals to the the negative beliefs stereotypes directed to their own ethnic identity, culture or racial group regarding their intelligence, appearance or worth by the white supremacy. By absorbing these racial prejudices, they uphold and reproduce

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unconsciously discriminatory attitudes against them. It leads to a vast cultural disconnection, self-doubt and the devaluation of their own race.

Through the course of the novel, the narrator undergoes different stages of internalized racism. It is reflected through his life, the influence of both the contradictory standards of white society and the complex demands of his black community. The narrator's growing awareness of the racist beliefs he internalized becomes pivotal to his eventual rebellion. The presence of internalized racism within the protagonist's journey serves as a lesson about recognizing one's own prejudices which serves as a departure to a greater oppressive force" (Budd 80).

The narrator's initial worldview is shaped by a desire of gaining validation from white supremacy. He was convinced that personal excellence would win him recognition. This is evident in his speech in front of the white audience after the humiliating fight in the scene of the battle royal, "There was still laughter as I faced them, my mouth dry, my eye throbbing" (Ellison 24). He reflects on how he sticks to the illusion of acceptance in the middle of humiliation, "I had only to work and learn and survive in order to go to the top" (Ellison 275). It was a moment that exemplifies his internalized mindset that his identity and worth are validated only through the standards of white figures.

Despite his degradation, he did not challenge the system. Instead he was grateful for the opportunity and saw it as a privilege regardless of the shameful circumstances. By internalizing racism, he becomes blinded from understanding the oppression he faces. His assimilation of racist inferiority kept him emotionally tied to hierarchies that made him invest in the misguided idea that submission will bring success.

The black college president, Dr Bledsoe represents the internalization of the ideals of white power structures. He strategically built his success on the embracement of the white elite interests and the manipulation of others to secure his authority. "The only ones I even pretend to please are big white folk, and even those I control more than they control me. This is a power set-up, son, and I'm at the controls" (Ellison 111). It explained that Dr Bledsoe "never reveals his true intention. His value lies in his

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success in a world that rejects his race leading to a skewed self-loathing psychological” (Muthanna 6203). To the narrator, he is described as: “he was the example of everything I hoped to be: Influential with wealthy men all over the country; consulted in matters concerning the race; a leader of his people; the possessor of not one, but two Cadillacs” (Ellison 79). Dr. Bledsoe is the embodiment of black success and what a black man can achieve in a racially oppressive system, unaware of the corrupted compromises.

When the narrator innocently believed he was helping the institution by escorting a white trustee through the black neighborhood, he was not aware of the consequences. The result was Bledsoe's punishment to him as a way of discipline. “Regardless of what I said, as the leader of this institution I can't possibly let this pass. Boy, I'm getting rid of you!” (Ellison 110). His reaction was a proof that his primary concern is prioritizing appearances and a facade of respectability for white eyes over honoring the harsh truths of black community. This episode denotes how Dr. Bledsoe continues the degrading expectations implicit in the white society even when he is a leader of a black college of people from his own race (Muthanna 6206).

The psychological consequences of internalized racism, as explored in *Invisible Man* have damaging, lasting impacts on the individual identity. The story showcases this issue is not boundless to social inequality. It has further effects as it instills itself in the soul and consciousness. The narrator suffered through the novel from feelings of insecurity and unworthiness. Over time, he comes to believe the stereotypes that undermine his dignity. He accepted the inferiority imposed on him which caused him ignorance of his instincts and the value of his emotions, leaving him an easy target for exploitation from influential figures like Dr. Bledsoe. This is evident in the novel's resolution, where the narrator remains alienated and psychologically adrift, still wrestling with the internalized racism that exterior motives have imprinted on him (Budd 81). From the blind acceptance of the oppressive norms of the white society to a profound alienation, the narrator's painful realization of the refusal of others to see him shaped his final destination.

### 2.7.3. Isolation

The protagonist, As an african American in a racially stratified America, he was repeatedly pushed to the margins of society and regularly alienated and considered an outsider.”(444) “Racism is the primary reason behind AfricanAmericans’ isolation and alienation”(Taoutaou). The isolation the narrator experienced was because of the profound social invisibility, emotional detachment and psychological rapture.”I am nobody but myself. But first I had to discover that I am an invisible man!”(Ellison 13), he discovered that he has lived his entire life according to others expectations and not his own. According to this, he decided to disconnect himself from the community that caused him this psychological and physical isolation.

The narrator's isolation characterized by external factors like racism, harmful stereotyping, societal rejection and internal choices such as distancing himself from society. His isolation from institutions, the Brotherhood and nearly everyone he met was due to his race as a primary reason. Secondly is the misplaced prejudices on him. This rejection estranged him from the world and disconnects him from his true identity and self. (112).

He reached a breaking point led to his psychological collapse and his isolation. His feelings of paranoia made him reach this point. All the betrayals and unjust treatments, reshaped him into an emotionally closed-off person, reinforcing his isolation. “Otherwise there was nothing but betrayal”(Ellison 392). His paranoia locked him in the shadow of abnoment and self-doubt. His faith in people becomes more of a creeping distrust. His paranoia serves as a form of self-defense to him. It safeguarded him from the harms of community and not in need of people's guidance. At the same time left him alone. The narrator's quest for self-realization turned to introspection, as he grows more detached from his surroundings. By the end of the novel, the narrator's psychological isolation becomes a literal one as he physically retreats to an underground basement. “Now, aware of my invisibility, I live rent-free in a building rented strictly to whites, in a section of the basement that was shut off and forgotten during the nineteenth century, which I discovered when I was trying to escape in the night from Ras the Destroyer”(Ellison 5).

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The narrator used this space as form of hibernation, an intentional pause from the outside world. To him hibernation, is a not a retreat into sleep, but a time for healing and reframing his identity. “I am in a state of hibernation” (Ellison 5).

Surrounded by 1,369 light bulbs in the underground was his final destination for his soulful change. His meditation on his invisibility is painful yet a necessary step for his self-understanding. His alienation was both a prison as he isolated himself from the hypocritical world around him and a refuge to heal from his past experiences.

### **2.7.4 Impact of the Community on the Protagonist’s Journey**

While communities in *Invisible Man* foster a sense of belonging and purpose, they also limit personal liberty and diminish his sense of self. Every group the protagonist interacts with, reflects a version of truth, yet also acts as a disguise and demands playing specific performative roles. Community, in all its shapes, influenced his journey, his vision and his place in the world.

The interactions of the protagonist with his southern black community were marked by the cruel conditions of racism and segregation. His community taught him that assimilation and obedience to white dominated norms were necessary obligations to achieve success. Mentally, this was the beginning of the fracture in his identity. It forced him to hide his unique qualities and present a more socially expected image to the world. As a young man, his community is a foundation of belonging and familiarity. Later, he becomes driven by the need for recognition in the eyes of his black community and the white structures as well. Over time, he discovers that even with his community which shared the same racial identity can expand beneath the veneer of tradition and unity, as seen in self-subjugation cultivated by Dr Bledsoe. (111).

In Harlem, the Brotherhood made him believe that he had found a community that shared his values, which is woven in his early public speech to address the Brotherhood. He stood in front of the audience and shouted “I feel that here, after a long and desperate and uncommonly blind journey, I have come home . . . Home! With your eyes upon me I feel that I've found my true family! My true people! My true

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country!”(Ellison 268). The higher he progresses within the Brotherhood, the clearer they treat him as a figurehead for their causes. They dismissed the real struggles and needs of the black community:“the science of the Brotherhood as an ideology causes the rupture inHarlem between the protagonist and the Black masses because it ignores the elements which shape their daily lives and interests”(Muthanna 6207).

Harlem community brings to light the complex layers of internal class and status within the black community.Despite its collective history of oppression, Harlem validates to be a community polarized by clashing goals and ideological divides. The internal conflicts echo his previous struggles in the South. It articulates the effects of racial injustice that can splinter communities with a shared past. The character of Ras the Exhorter symbolizes the divergent perspective on achieving black liberation. He stands in contrast to the Brotherhood’s strategy of collective ideology and conformity. Ras rebellious resistance appears in his question to the narrator “Why you go over to the enslaver? What kind of education is that?”(Ellison 287).

The narrator develops a psychological state of suppressed rage due to self-deception resulting from the various suppression of different degrading and humiliating events.Each community he faced promised him a brighter future but forced him to quiet his true feelings of displeasure,frustration,and rage. This act of suppression his emotions conceives a psychological burden and takes shape as internalized rage, which erodes his self-concept as he reflects, “Here I've set out to throw my anger into the world's face, but now that I've tried to put it all down the old fascination with playing a role returns, and I'm drawn upward again” (Ellison 449). Community normally offers a sense of belonging to its people. In the case of the narrator it set many limitations. Eventhough his journey was shaped by suffering but also by resistance and agency.

### **2.7.5. Resilience and Agency**

The protagonist’s resilience is repeatedly tested by exploitation, but these hardships pave the way toward reclaiming agency and control over his life. Each setback compels him to reconsider his principles and moral convictions.“as he grows in self-awareness, he comes to the realization that the only way to truly resist is to establish

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his individuality and voice”(Sheoran 117). His self assertion changed him from a passive participant in other events to the author of his identity.

Resilience has a strong part in the narrator’s experiences. It is the inner strength to recover from crisis and to face despair without losing oneself in it. Resilience is preserving emotional balance and unified personal coherence. The protagonist endures societal and personal storms while nurturing the possibility for inner growth and evolution, while holding on to hope amid the trials of life. His resilience is not about the absence of invulnerability but in his capacity to seek meaning.

The narrator’s resilience is illustrated in key turning points that chart the course of his evolution. Unfairly expelled by Dr Bledsoe, the narrator refused to let grief and bitterness overwhelm him. “I thought of Bledsoe and Norton and what they had done. By kicking me into the dark they'd made me see the possibility of achieving something greater and more important than I'd ever dreamed”(Ellison 275). He felt his entire faith started to hallow, “Tears filled my eyes” (Ellison 78). Instead, he heads on a journey to Harlem, fueled by the belief of new opportunities despite the betrayals, “Then my old confidence and optimism revived, and I tried to plan my time in the North. I would work hard and serve my employer so well that he would shower Dr. Bledsoe with favorable reports”(Ellison 122). He tried to encourage himself and resist all the circumstances that hold him from advancing in his life.

His resilience is further tested again in the face of brutality he suffered from at the Liberty Paint factory. He remains committed to his search for purpose even when he endures physical injury and dehumanizing treatment. These instances, bring his inner crisis to the forefront “Left alone, I lay fretting over my identity” (Ellison 188). Another instance that defined his resilience is when he discovered the manipulation of the Brotherhood yet he did not surrender completely.

The protagonist’s agency is tested by his capacity to claim his independence. He is caught in a world eager to define him by reductive racial narratives. With awakened consciousness, his agency emerges and his resistance begin to take its shape. He challenges the idea of whether individuality can stand under the pressures of

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Hierarchical power, as it was stated that he “recognizes the need to reclaim invisibility as agency after witnessing the appropriative results of visibility in the psychosocial and economic spheres”(Jarenski qtd.in Kovařík 39). Through the act of embracing his invisibility , he changed what was considered as erasure to self-possession and agency.

When he finally rejects the Brotherhood and the countless imposed identities on him, it is one of the defining moment toward his growth. In the chaos of the riot, he realizes the painful truth of manipulation by everyone and that his invisibility is a consequence of others intentional denial of his personhood. This realization is a moment of clarity, in which he accepts his invisibility and embraces it as a means of autonomy. As he said:

It was as though I'd learned suddenly to look around corners; images of past humiliations flickered through my head and I saw that they were more than separate experiences. They were me; they defined me. I was my experiences and my experiences were me. (Ellison 393).

In the last chapter by embracing the underground, he took control over the course of his life for the first time, signifying a bold declaration of self agency “Here, at least, I could try to think things out in peace, or, if not in peace, in quiet. I would take up residence underground”(Ellison 443). His return to the underground was a conscious turning action to break free from the false identities and roles.

### **2.8. Conclusion**

In *Invisible man*, the horrifying pursuit of identity and self discovery was constructed by layers of racial oppression and the silence of internalization ideas the protagonist has knowingly adapted. He suffered from people rejection and invisibility. But through reflection and isolation he began to slowly liberate himself from the roles he has to perform. His final understanding was that true identity is not something granted from the outside but internally affirmed and claimed

Through the psychological anguish and the relentless weight of oppression , the protagonist feels a fracture of emotional and mental well being of social and racial

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invisibility. Yet even in darkness, resilience shimmers faintly and agency stirs like a hidden flame . In the noise of Harlem and the solitude of underground , he welcomes the full complexity of who he is.

# **General Conclusion**

## General Conclusion

Widely acknowledged as a milestone in African American literature, *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison continues to have a prominent place in African American literature due to its insightful engagement to the details of black identity in the twenty century. By layering symbolic meanings of race, identity and displacement with psychological depths, the novel tackles concerns that are still unsolved and exist in today's modern conversations and literary discourses. This dissertation approached these issues on two fronts: its relationships with the roots of African American literature and its focus on the influence of intersectional dynamics on the protagonist psych.

The aim of this research is to provide the defining elements of African American literature. It positioned *Invisible Man* within a narrative tradition centred on identity formation, self -discovery and resistance. Ellison's work embodies this heritage driven from the truths of slavery and systemic racism while confronting the historical burdens of these traumas. By using an anonymous narrator and voice, Ellison described a painful search of identity, transferred to invisibility and finally to erasure from a fractured society. His invisibility is a symbol of societal blindness, the result of neglecting his individuality. In echoing the voiceless black figures struggles like the invisible man, this theme in African American literary tradition is aimed to reclaim a void created by centuries of subjugation and invisibility.

The novel engaged with identity as multifaceted and complex. It shows the black experience as evolving and personal rather than fixed. The educational, social and political surroundings of the narrator are examples of external forces that want to dominate black identity. In the sense of domination, Ellison critiques not only white structures but also black ideology that fails to stand for a change.

The main drive is the analysis of the narrator's psychological turmoil which deepened by an intersectional lens. The protagonist is more than a black man who is an introspective individual whose sense of self is unstable due to the conflicting pressures. This mental toll manifests as a psychological rupture. It leads him to a finally metaphorical invisibility in the underground and despair from the chaos of society. Beyond its commentary on racial identity, *Invisible Man* is a philosophical

## **General Conclusion**

meditation on the human need for understanding and recognition in a society that denies these needs for black community.

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