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從美學、政治到非裔美國表現文化：
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From Aesthetics, Politics to Afro-American Expression:
A Critique of the Criticisms on Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

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From Baker's careful examination, to understand the spirituality of African Americans' spirit work, the materiality of the machine culture is unavoidable. Neither spirituality nor materiality should be excluded from the discussion of the life-world of African Americans. In *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*, Baker clearly expresses his intention to "avoid a naïve Marxism" (3). His approach is to reverse the fixed process from the "material as a substrate" to the "semiotic" like "a peculiar expressive form" and argues that the former can only be accurately understood by the latter (3). He suggests, "'production' as well as 'modes of production' must be grasped in terms of the sign" (3). The analysis of *Invisible Man* in this thesis will display Baker's main theoretical articulations of Afro-American expression to discuss the aporia of aesthetics and politics. To borrow Baker's words, if the critics exclusively pay attention to the material world in an Afro-American text, they probably will be blinded to see the semiotic world in the text. The material actually could also be the semiotic under the frame of Marxist literary criticism.

In Chapter Two, Virginia Woolf's theory of the novel provides us a brilliant base to examine the relationship of writing a novel and life. As Woolf suggests, "the influences of the power of music" is one of the directions to bring a new literary form as well as a new literary genre ("Narrow" 23). In order to do so, Woolf says that a writer has to abandon "some" of the tools that belong to the old time ("Narrow" 22) according to his or her own instinct. Afro-American expression is the tool of writing for Ellison, and he knows that it is a double-edged weapon for him.² Afro-American

² In Chapter Two, William Lyne's commentary on Ellison's double consciousness is included in my thesis on page 2. He argues that Ellison's double consciousness is "a sword cuts two ways" ("Signifying" 320). Except for those Western authors who are regarded as his literary ancestors, Lyne also mentions Afro-American expression. He says, "[s]pirituals, along with the blues, jazz, and folk narratives...are the primary double-voiced tools that are supposed to undermine and transforms the official hierarchies" (238). In this chapter, my analysis of Afro-American expression as a double-edged

thing to do with it. (54)

After all, the critics reading *Invisible Man* is not Marx himself but the Marxists. Neal then admits that Black Nationalism has deformed Marxist literary theory, and the situation proves what James A. Winders suggests, “[i]t would not be possible to claim that Marxism constitutes a theory of literature as such” (625). As Baker wants to “avoid a naïve Marxism” (*Blues* 3) and reverses the fixed process from the “material as a substrate” to the “semiotic” like “a peculiar expressive form” and argues that the former can only be accurately understood by the latter (*Blues* 3), Winders implies that Marxist literary theorists also “view language as ‘material’ in a textual sense” (625) for culture is inseparable to language. And in this way, the ideology that lurks behind the textuality reveals the social structures and its institutionalization.

Winders continues to suggest a better approach to theorize Marxist literary interpretation, “[s]ince many people subscribe to what in the Marxist tradition would be described as a ‘reified’ concept of culture..., it can come as a surprise to discover how much attention Marxist theories have devoted to literature and art” (625). From this point of view Winders penetrates the interior structure of Marxism from its own discourse. As basic Marxism defines, the material base is the mode of production or “underlying system of economic forces and relations” (“Marx” 625); superstructure contains social institutions such as education, religion, politics, and art. In *Capital*, Karl Marx actually compares language to a kind of commodity (45).

Like language that human beings have to communicate with each other, people need a stamp to decipher “an object of utility as a value” (45) among the social products. Winders believes that a writer equals a worker in a capitalist society from this view point. If commodities speak, texts speak as well. As a result, Winders says,

The Marxist critique of bourgeois ideology encompasses the commodity

abstracted unnaturally from the social relations of production that generated it and the *objet d'art* treated as a timeless cultural commodity surrounded by its aura of aesthetic refinement. (628; emphasis original)

Here we see the connection between Marxism and New Criticism, because New Critics “reify” texts to an “ahistorical realm” (“Marx”628). From Jauss’s advice that “the Marxist and the Formalist literary theories finally arrived at an aporia, the solution to which demanded that historical and aesthetic considerations be brought into a new relationship” (“Literary” 10) to Baker’s reversing the material and the semiotic, the reading politics of the committed-art school and the detached-art school should also be problematized by another possible way of reading.

“Though invisible, I am in the great American tradition of tinkers” (7). The invisible man then continues, “[t]hat makes me kin to Ford, Edison and Franklin. Call me, since I have a theory and a concept, a “thinker-tinker”” (7). Henry Ford founds his own car company in Detroit, Michigan and then leads America to the peak of industrialization and urbanization. His friend, Thomas Edison, who urges him to use the gasoline to power the engine of automobile, is the great inventor of electric light bulb. Benjamin Franklin is undeniably a cult hero who creates the way to wealth. All the three role models the invisible man compares himself with are the representatives of modernization, industrialization, and capitalism.

The naïve invisible man believes that he himself belongs to the so-called “great American tradition” and moves to Harlem to earn a living in many kinds of occupations but fails. The only job that is suitable for him and makes him a “useful” person is the orator in the Brotherhood. In the prologue, the hole that the invisible man dwells in is a symbol of industrialization with an implication of Edison. The invisible man describes that he fights with Monopolated Light & Power by stealing

lights from it to power the 1,369 lights in his hole, and his hole is the brightest place among the other places in New York, including Broadway. “And love light.” The invisible man says, “Perhaps you’ll think it strange that an invisible man should need light, desire light, love light. But maybe it is exactly because I *am* invisible. Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form” (6; emphasis original).

The Ellison invisibility annoys the critics like Neal and Addison Gayle, as my critical investigation in Chapter Three has shown. Neal denounces Ellison for he describes an African American as “invisible”; Gayle links light to the signification that the color “white” brings in traditional understanding of color. They all overemphasize the aspect of complexion without paying attention to other aspects that Ellison carefully arranges in the novel. The hole is actually a dead end for the invisible man because he has to hide himself in it because of Ras the Destroyer/Ras the Exhorter.



The symbol of industrialization continues in chapter one. The invisible man gets a chance to deliver an oration at his high school graduation. He takes it seriously and wonders if the white men, “the town’s big shots” (17), will like his speech or not. Strangely, he is taken to a ridiculous “battle royal” that teases the black students with Franklin’s discovery, electricity. This battle royal gathers the black students together, and they all have a pair of boxing gloves. They are soaking wet and forced to pick up the coins on the electrified rug and to hit each other. The audience is the bourgeois class like “bankers, lawyers, judges, doctors, fire chiefs, teachers, merchants” (18).

Another symbol of industrialization of Ford’s car appears in chapter two. After the invisible man suffered from the weird “battle royal,” he delivers his oration and get a scholarship to the state college for Negroes in a suitcase without any reason that makes sense but merely “in the name of the Board of Education” (32). One day he is

asked to pick up one of “the millionaires descended from the North on Founders’ Day” (37), Mr. Emerson, who inspects and encourages the college affairs each spring. Driving him with a car is a terrible and frustrating experience to him, because he is expelled from college by Dr. Bledsoe for taking Mr. Emerson to see Jim Trueblood, who has an incestuous relationship with his own daughter.

No matter the hole that the invisible man lives to fight with Monopolated Light & Power, the electrified rug in battle royal, or the car which he drives Mr. Emerson, the symbol of industrialization are negative. After he is expelled, the invisible man decides to leave for New York. “...how do you get to Harlem?” (157), the invisible man asks. A Red Cap tells him to “keep heading north,” (157) and sojourns in Men’s House. Though he is far away from his hometown, he still has his dream of being a successful orator. He imagines himself making a speech here,

Of course you couldn’t speak that way in the North, the white folks wouldn’t like it, and the Negroes would say that you were “putting on.” But here in the North I would slough off my southern ways of speech. Indeed, I would have one way of speaking in the North and another in the south.

(164)

Intriguingly, speaking as a form of Afro-American expression changes geographically from place to place. This fluidity matches Baker’s definition of the matrix as blues that “is” the sense of placelessness. The invisible man’s oration does not literally “represent” his transience, like the envelope saying “Keep This Nigger-Boy Running” (33) in his dream. Instead, it follows him anywhere and anytime, waiting his “little man” to show up and recognize the Afro-American expression.

At this moment, he meets Peter Wheatstraw who calls himself “blue.” “Folks is always making plans and changing ’em” (175). Wheatstraw tells the invisible man so.

Almost being like a prophecy, the invisible man is not hired by Mr. Emerson's son because he ultimately realizes that Dr. Bledsoe asks so in his recommendation letter. He asks the employers who read the letter to keep the invisible man running. So, the invisible man comes to Liberty Paints and tries to make a living. The engineer Brockway takes him to know the company's product "Optic White." "If It's Optic White, It's the Right White" (217) is the company's slogan.

The company has a union, and it automatically counts the invisible man as one of the members. The invisible man thinks, "[t]hey had made their decision without giving me a chance to speak for myself" (223). For this he has a quarrel with Brockway, and suddenly the accident happens at this moment. The shrill hissing emits noisily from the boiler, and the valve wheels are out of control, losing the standard of the gauges. A horrifying explosion makes the invisible man,

[seem] to sprawl in an interval of clarity beneath a pile of broken machinery, my head pressed back against a huge wheel, my body splattered with a stinking goo. Somewhere an engine ground in furious futility, granting loudly until a pain shot around the curve of my head and bounced me off into blackness for a distance, only to strike another pain that lobbed me back. And in that clear instant of consciousness I open my eyes to a blinding flash. (230)

The interpretation of this episode could be regarded as a similar one to Neal's reading "It Always Breaks Out." The invisible man's blanking out in Liberty Paint is a politically protest to the machinery that attributed to the white civilization. At the same time, the destroying of Liberty Paint is also a public gesture which symbolizes the foundering of the machine culture of white power in an artistic sense. Marx also has a solid research on the machine culture in *Capital*. According to him, the most

important change since John Watt is the gradual disappearance of human muscle. A man's labour power is substituted by implement-machine with natural forces such as wind and water, or animals, and human becomes "invisible" in the capitalistic application of machinery (230-36).

Waking up in the hospital, the invisible man feels uncomfortable without any immediate memory but "as though I had just begun to live" (233). The only sound in his brain is the black folk song that his grandmother hums. Leaving the hospital, invisible man goes back to Men's House and sees a riot. In the mess the invisible man tries to organize people by delivering a speech. Brother Jack listens to it and praises invisible man as a "talented" and "natural" orator. The invisible man tell Brother Jack that he is "simply angry," but in Brother Jack's opinion his "anger was skillfully controlled" and "had eloquence" (290). Again, orating as a way to show Afro-American expression is the characteristic of the invisible man. The little man, his readers/audiences, is all waiting for him to speak. Brother Jack tells the invisible man, "[t]hey exist, and when the cry of protest is sounded, there are those who will hear it and act" (292).

Orating is a conglomeration of political act and an art of speaking. It is politically and aesthetically a strategy to African Americans. The early slave narratives, such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, serve as an excellent example. He becomes a political icon in African American social movement and a prominent author in Afro-American literary history. The invisible man starts to consider the job offering by Brother Jack, "[i]t was, after all, a job that promised to exercise my talent for public speaking, and if the pay was anything at all it would be more than I had now" (298). The invisible man's job hunting keeps him running from Mr. Emerson's son's office to Liberty Paint, and then he considers

working for a political party now.

“This is your new identity” (309), Brother Jack gives invisible man an envelope and tells him to use this new identity from now on. He is one of the members in the Brotherhood. He has to act as other black people do, speak what other black people would speak, and do what he is expected to do. One of the members asks him to sing. “...*all* colored people sing” (312; emphasis original). He says to everybody, and sings himself with an awkward tone. Brother Jack opposes him by saying that assuming all colored people can sing is “an outrageous example of unconscious racial chauvinism” (312). Here, we could perceive Ellison’s deliberate and academic view about Afro-American expression that has been illustrated in the previous section. Once “all colored people sing” sustains as a “Truth,” it loses its historical meaning. They sing not because they are “colored,” but because they are human beings who suffered from the material world of Western civilization.



The invisible man is trapped in whether he is “colored” or “human.” He is getting confused with whether his skill of oration is committed to the black community or to humanity. His first public speech at a rally is launched at Harlem. This job makes the invisible man feel that he is “becoming someone else” (335). During the speech, the invisible man tells the rally, “I feel, I feel suddenly that I have become *more human*. Do you understand? More human. Not that I have become a man, for I was born a man. But that I am more human” (346; emphasis original). As we can tell by this statement, the job of being an orator makes the invisible man feel more human than those are related to industrialization.

But the problem also rises at the same time. The invisible man’s improvising style to speak is regarded as “wild, hysterical, politically irresponsible and dangerous...it was *incorrect*” (349; emphasis original). The Brotherhood makes a

conclusion that the invisible man must be trained. “There’s hope that our wild but effective speaker may be tamed” (351). In this way, oration as a form of Afro-American expression becomes a discipline to help the activists become “champions of a scientific approach to society” (350). The art of speaking is distorted into a “science” to achieve a goal, and the materiality in language concretes as an ideology. By his skill of orating, the invisible man doubts,

What had I meant by saying that I had become “more human”? Was it a phrase that I had picked up from some preceding speaker, or a slip of the tongue? For a moment I thought of my grandfather and quickly dismissed him. What had an old slave to do with humanity? (354)

James Joyce, W. B. Yeats, and Sean O’Casey suddenly occurs to him. “Our task is that of making ourselves individuals” (354). The invisible man thinks so. He changes his mind and does not say “more.” Instead, he uses the word “less.” “[L]ess a Negro,” “less a being apart,” and “less an exile from down home, the South” (354). Then he asks, “[t]o become less—in order to become more?” (354).

The question, “the possibility of being more than a member of a race” (355) keeps haunting the invisible man like a nightmare. The invisible man tries hard to “master the ideology” of making speeches for the Brotherhood. Brother Jack reminds him, “[m]aster it, . . . but don’t overdo it. Don’t let it master you” (359). Soon, the nightmare then incarnates a person calls Ras the Exhorter. He is a speech maker whose identity is a black nationalist. The invisible man sees him with a glance while he just arrives at Harlem. One day, when the Brotherhood holds a street meeting publicly, Ras shows up. “We organize—organization is good—but we organize black. BLACK!” (373). He yells. The invisible man has a different opinion from Ras, because he believes that the white could be allies to the black. “You black and

beautiful—don't let 'em tell you different" (373).

Ras shows a double alienation of the invisible man. Firstly, the invisible man is alienated from the machine culture that is related to the white civilization. His labour power is limited and invalid in the "great American tradition" of a thinker-tinker. Secondly, his ability of orating as labour power is also alienated to the Brotherhood for political reason. Hence, his talented skill of oration could neither be simply committed to the resistance to the machine culture nor to a "science" which theorizes the art of making speeches. He needs to redeem his life-world, and Frederick Douglass ignites this motive.

During his conversation with Brother Tarp, the invisible man explains that his grandfather used to tell him about him but he himself knows not much. Brother Tarp then tells him, "[y]ou just take a look at [Douglass] once in a while. You have everything you need..." (378). Looking at the portrait of Douglass, the invisible man suddenly realizes, "[m]y new name was getting around. It's very strange, I thought, but things are so unreal for them normally that they believe that to call a thing by name is to make it so. And yet I am what they think I am..." (379). Inspiring by this idea, the invisible man begins to explain Douglass's situation, "[w]hat had his true name been? Whatever it was, it was as *Douglass* that he became himself, define himself" (381; emphasis original). At this moment, he decides to discover his own life-world. "Well, I had made a speech, and it has made me a leader, only not the kind I had expected" (381). As a result, he keeps running.

In Chapter Two, my argument focus on Ellison, who is defined as a life-world modernist, in a sense of Woolf's theory of the novel and Hans Robert Jauss's reception theory. Life itself could not be theorized, and the representation of life by

fictional writing should not be deformed by any kind of ideology. Jauss comes up with the idea of the reader, and Ellison also pays attention to his readers. He intends to give the experience of life itself to his readers but not “what-life-is-all-about.” The invisible man now realizes what he wants to do by his ability of oration is to experience life. He refuses to accept “what-life-is-all-about” from Dr. Bledsoe, Mr. Emerson’s son, Brockway, the Brotherhood, even his grandfather. Just before he is expelled from the Brotherhood, he thinks,

[The Brotherhood] had given the world a new shape, and me a vital role. We recognize no loose end, everything could be controlled by our science. Life was all pattern and discipline; and the beauty of discipline is when it works. And it was working very well. (382)

As Wheatstraw says about plan changing, the invisible man got to run and run and run.

Brother Wrestrum ferociously accuses him “to dramatize our differences” (392).

Brother Wrestrum tells invisible man that “dramatizing difference” is “the worse kind of thing for Brotherhood—because we want to make folks think of the things we have in common” (392). The invisible man’s skill of oration, like Ellison’s skill of writing, is asked to be taken as a homogeneous representation for a race. For the invisible man it is the “ideology of speech making”; for Ellison is protest writing that of Stowe and Wright. Finally, the Brotherhood transfers the invisible man to the Women Question, a women’s rights party outside the Harlem. Hearing this decision, the invisible man says, “[n]o, despite my anger and disgust, my ambitions were too great to surrender so easily. And why should I restrict myself, segregate myself? I was a *spokesman*—why shouldn’t I speak about women, or any other subject?” (407; emphasis original).

From this moment, Baker’s concept of “the matrix of blues” and “spirit work”

shows its transcendent values. When the invisible man moves from the South to the North, he knows how to adapt his orating skill. Leaving Harlem for the Women Question, the invisible man carries his orating skill to suit a new environment. He does not speak for the Brotherhood anymore, not even for merely the black race. The art of speech making as a form of Afro-American expression does not belong to the black among the black people. It is a spirit work that makes people find their own life-world, far more than a discipline. This reveals the fluidity of Afro-American expression and its transcendence beyond the binary opposition of art and protest.

After Brother Clifton is shot to death by the cop, the invisible man wonders about some issues about history philosophically. At Brother Clifton's funeral, the invisible man delivers a sobering speech. People's anger keep burning because of Brother Clifton's death, and another orator Ras the Exhorter now becomes Ras the Destroyer. The invisible man starts to recognize his invisibility but confront the issue of responsibility. "Why should I worry over bureaucrats, blind men? *I am invisible*" (528; emphasis original). Experiencing a dream-like as well as a messy running, the invisible man says, "I would take up residence underground. The end was in the beginning" (571).

In the epilogue, the invisible man sums up the whole process of becoming invisible, "[w]hen one is invisible he finds such problems as good and evil, honesty and dishonesty, of such shifting shapes that he confuses one with the other, depending upon who happens to be looking through him in time" (572). His journey is not only a geographical but also a philosophical one that help him to find his life-world by orating. Though he chooses to hibernation, he knows that he still has his social obligations to do. No matter what he is going to do, he wants to live his own life. As he suggests, the invisible man lives a life others might think to be awkward, but a

genuine life of his own nonetheless.

Unlike Wright, Neal, and Gayle, Ellison is a writer who de-materializes the material world by criticizing the materiality around the life-world of African-Americans. At the same time, he has also successfully de-materialized the institutionalization of Afro-American expression in the black vernacular tradition. He is the one who truly understands the interweaving of the material and the semiotic by showing the process of materializing in *Invisible Man*. By doing so, Ellison transcends the aporia of aesthetics and politics that have been a symptom in the history of Afro-American literature. His *Invisible Man* is neither for art's sake nor for protest's sake, but for life's sake. (De-)Materializing Afro-American expression makes it leap beyond a confined battlefield and takes the readers to experience the life-world of African Americans with the invisible man. As the invisible man says, “[l]ife is to be lived, not controlled; and humanity is won by continuing to play in face of certain defeat” (577).

The invisible man destroys the so-called “what-life-is-all-about” from both sides of politics and the aesthetics. For politics, as we see in Chapter Three, Ellison shows his uniqueness in composing the art of fiction due to “the forms of things unknown.” For aesthetics, my discussion in this chapter shows how Ellison thinks and deals with the complicated issue of Afro-American expression as a cultural phenomenon. The invisible man mentions Louis Armstrong in the prologue. He adores Armstrong and his “What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue” (8), and he explains how he feels when listening to Armstrong's music. No matter what discourse they argue, like Tracy's observation of Ellison's blues tradition which is related to existentialism, jazz as a discipline to Ellison from O'Meally's interview with him, or oration as an art skill, Afro-American expression is rather than an artistic performance. Afro-American

expression is neither the representative for American democracy, nor the exotic performance on stage. It is life-world itself for the “little man” who is an “everyday expert.”



Chapter Five

Conclusion: Who's Afraid of Ralph Ellison?

In *Cultures of Letters* (1993), Richard H. Brodhead surveys the scenes of literary production in the nineteenth-century America and illustrates his opinions about the literary production, thus:

Writing always takes place within some completely concrete cultural situation, a situation that surrounds it with some particular landscape of institutional structures, affiliates it with some particular group from among the array of contemporary groupings, and installs it some group based world of understandings, practices, and values. (8)

From Chapter One to Two, Ellison's position is switched from a signifying modernist, who struggles and faces his "two-ness," to a life-world modernist who emphasizes on the "little man" who could recognize Afro-American expression. Once again, Ellison's attitude toward writing, as I reiterated in Chapters Two and Three, is the reason why he is so different from the protest writers, such as Wright. In Chapter Two, we actually see the different ideas toward writing a novel between Wright's "Blueprint for Negro Writing," Ellison's "The Art of Fiction," "Society, Morality, and the Novel," and "The Little Man at Chehaw Station." Abandoning the extreme and ideological writing methods of protest writing, Ellison hopes to "talk" to the readers and his audience with Afro-American expression. From this view point, *Invisible Man* is more than a pure literary work of art without any extra socio-cultural function.

In Chapter Three, I further examine the importance of Afro-American expression, that is, the forms of things unknown, to Ellison. Generally speaking, this chapter could be regarded as an epitome of the literary and cultural atmosphere among the (black) intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s. Again, we realize that

Ellison's uniqueness is due to his attitudes toward writing in "The World and the Jug," "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," and "An Extravagance of Laughter." At the same time, this chapter is also a short study of the reception of *Invisible Man* from the mid-fifties to mid-seventies. By investigating the limited reception of the novel, we also understand that it is Ellison's recognition of Afro-American expression which makes him different from even the literary critics on the issue of Afro-American literature. To continue illustrating this point, Chapter Four focuses on the various forms of Afro-American expression that Ellison appropriates and adopts in *Invisible Man*.

In Chapter Four, what is more important is "(de-)materializing" Afro-American expression. As I have indicated in Chapter One, black music under the theoretical frame of American studies is not simply an art form anymore, but has become "the fascination with exotic art forms in modernism..." (Yu 106). In *Invisible Man*, the invisible man's orating skill is materialized as an object of art by this sort of exoticism in a similar manner. Though Ellison adopts the forms of Jazz, Blues, and even story telling, he does not want to use them as a tool for writing an African American novel, as if they are so necessarily indispensable to black literature. In addition, the invisible man's orating skill is also materialized by the ideology of Brotherhood. Through my analysis in Chapter Four, the issues of art and protest could be mirrored as the aporia of aesthetics and politics in the Black Aesthetic, especially in the dichotomy of the committed-art school and the detached-art school.

As what I have done in Chapter One, my thesis also ends with a literary debate. Through a meticulous discussion of a wide array of topics ranging from Ellison's theory of the novel and the possibility for him to be a "life-world modernist," the negative criticisms on Ellison and *Invisible Man* by Irving Howe, Larry Neal, and

Addison Gayle, to Ellison's use of Afro-American expression in the novel, my thesis could, to some degree, formulated as this probably be a question: Who's afraid of Ralph Ellison? The answer could be found in Paul de Man's argument in "The Resistance to Theory."

When discussing the relation of literary scholarship, the theory, and the teaching of literature, de Man explains that the methods of reading and interpretation for understanding literature formulate a discipline that engages "rational means" (4). To "theorize" an object of study means to "be rational." From the textual analysis, we see how the art of speaking of the invisible man is distorted into a "science." If Afro-American expression as a black vernacular tradition is merely an art form, it already is theorized in the realm of aesthetics. It is just like an exhibition in a museum of ethnology, so people are likely to say "*all* colored people sing" (*Invisible* 312; emphasis original). But the fact is that not every single black man is Louis Armstrong, Mos Def, or Jennifer Hudson.

Likewise, the invisible man's orating skill could never be "tamed." Brother Wrestrum wants to avoid dramatizing the differences among the black people, but the invisible man's orating skill makes him different from other black members. Political cause also "theorizes" Afro-American expression by assuming a logical pattern of being a black man. Protest writing, in this perspective, theorizes Afro-American literature by Marxist thinking and Black Nationalism. Ellison is very brilliant, as he does not theorize his writing according to either aesthetics or politics. He, like Jauss, intends to accept the aporia of the aesthetic and historical consideration in Afro-American literary history.

Crudely speaking, literature as creative writing is "literary"; theory is "non-literary" due to the system of logic and grammar it owes. Literary theory,

however, is a mixture of both “literary” and “theoretical”. De Man notices that “[l]iterary theory can be said to come into being when the approach to literary texts is no longer based on non-linguistic, that is to say historical and aesthetic” (7). Like my argument in Chapter Two has shown, a complete aesthetic judgment, such as “*Invisible Man* is a pure literary work,” is apt to be ambiguous, even Eurocentric and Americentric to a writer like Ellison. De Man reminds us that “[a]esthetics is part of a universal system of philosophy rather than a specific theory” (8), so de Man asserts that literature involves the voiding of aesthetic categories (10).

As Jauss pays attention to the historical and aesthetic considerations in literary history in “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” de Man conducts his own discussion of literary theory from the frame of aesthetic and historical contexts. In de Man’s opinion, “the development of literary theory is itself overdetermined by complications inherent in its very project and unsettling with regard to its status as a scientific discipline” (12), and such an understanding is adopted in my arguments. In Chapter Two, I indicate that Woolf’s theory of the novel means to follow the instinct. To paraphrase her words in de Man’s way, we realize that literature falls in fact into the realm of rhetoric. When mentioning the classical *trivium*, de Man writes “[t]he uncertain relationship between grammar and rhetoric (as opposed to that between grammar and logic) is apparent...” (14). In *Invisible Man*, the invisible man’s oration is a rhetorical behavior without theorizing the form of Afro-American expression in the wake of aesthetics or politics. This simply makes him become “more human” (346). He experiences his life-world with black verbal art, just as Ellison has refused to theorize Afro-American literature for the sake of either art or politics.

For one thing, Ellison does not want his *Invisible Man* to become a protest writing in the context of Marxism and Black Nationalism; for another thing, he

worries about his using Afro-American expression as a literary style would be considered as an “object of art.” He simply wants to write a life-world of African Americans, neither a world full of protest, hatred, conflicts, nor an exotic world of African American verbal art. Delmore Schwartz admits in *Partisan Review*, “the language of literary criticism seems shallow and patronizing when one has to speak of a book like [*Invisible Man*]...” (qtd. in O’Meally 3). Intriguingly, Schwartz made this claim in 1952, exactly the year the novel was published. I wonder whether he would be astonished if he should witness the debates on the novel from the 1960s to the 1970s.


Back to my argument in Chapter Two, Ellison’s uniqueness is attributed to his emphasis on the role of the reader, in his words, the “little man” at Chehaw Station. What little man expects to have is not art or protest, but Afro-American expression as “the experiencing of experience” from Baker’s point of view. *Invisible Man* is neither a pure literary work nor a piece of protest writing. Instead, it is an experiencing of experience, a work of Ellison’s instinct. Those who are afraid of Ellison actually resist the fact that literature itself is rhetoric but not logic and grammar. The invisible man’s closing sentence, “[w]ho knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you” (581), now opens up a new possibility in the horizon of literature, literary history, and literary theory.

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