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An Ivory Tower on the Outskirts of Town: The Othered Intellectual in Joyce and Ellison

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**An Ivory Tower on the Outskirts of Town:
The Othered Intellectual in Joyce and Ellison**

by

William T. Simonson

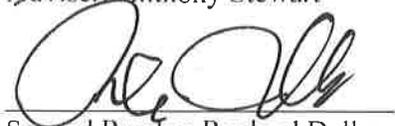
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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine a pairing of protagonists and texts, Stephen Dedalus of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and the unnamed protagonist-narrator of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1953), to explore the ways in which these protagonists are Othered as a result of their unconventional intellectualism, and how that Othering impacts their progress towards self-actualization. Making use of writings by Jacques Lacan, Pierre Bourdieu, Edward Said, Hélène Cixous, Louis Althusser, and Richard Rorty, among others, I engage with theories of language, intellect, intellectualism, and the role of the intellectual, especially when he/she is a marginalized figure. I assert that in opting for self-imposed exile, these two Othered intellectuals step outside of the society of which they are products to occupy liminal spaces, outside of convention, from which they are able to function and be productive as intellectuals. Ultimately, I contend that their portrayals demonstrate that high intellectual pursuits have inherent and intrinsic value, if only for their import and centrality to the intellectuals themselves.

Prologue

In this project, I have elected to include a Prologue and an Epilogue in the style *Invisible Man*, in place of a more traditional Introduction and Conclusion, for the small ways in which it is suggestive of what this project has meant to me. Perhaps to a greater extent than most critics admit openly—perhaps for good reason—this is and has been a deeply personal endeavor that along the way has encompassed a great deal of personal growth. Insofar as I have been successful in my goal—to put forth compelling evidence that the substantial obstacles, challenges, and sacrifices required of the protagonists of these two novels are, if only in the end, worth it—I needed first to persuade myself. To a degree that is nothing short of reckless, and to make use of a poststructuralist cliché, these novels read me as much as I read them, and thus either something in these novels resonated within me or perhaps something in me resonated within these novels. It is, then, a result of the ways I see myself in these texts and I see these texts in me that I undertook this Honors Thesis, and I am fortunate to have had such a driving personal motivation to hold me accountable.

The question of the role, importance, and legitimacy of “higher intellectual pursuits” and the value in them, inherent or extrinsic, is one that I find myself returning to often. The question gives rise to my fascination with characters who pursue or are disposed toward scholarship or art, make use of their intellect, and attempt to foster a personal form of intellectualism¹ that often leads to their becoming outcasts. More significantly, I’m interested in how these characters

¹ By intellectualism, in the sense in which I am using it, I wish to simply signify the practice of being an intellectual. As Antonio Gramsci argues, “All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals” (140), and I wish thus to evoke the ability to function as an intellectual, and not the prolific connotations, negative or otherwise, that occasionally accompany the word.

struggle to position themselves in relation to both an intellectual establishment often unlike them and rampant anti-intellectualism in their greater societies, and in turn how they are able to effect change in a society from which they are marginalized. The two most fascinating examples that I have been profoundly drawn towards in the course of my studies are found in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). The protagonists of both novels, Stephen Dedalus and Ellison's unnamed protagonist-narrator, are driven first and foremost by their intellect and their ability to function as intellectuals, an unwavering commitment as a result of which they suffer.

Characters of this sort, like Stephen and Ellison's protagonist-narrator, embody a type that I am coining an "Othered intellectual." That is to say, their performances of identity do not fit stably into conventional roles and thereby these characters are Othered. Intellectuals as a whole possess sufficient cultural capital to constitute a dominant class; however, they do not hold the financial capital of their more economically driven analogues. Therefore, within the dominant class they constitute only a dominated faction (Bourdieu), and are inherently somewhat marginal. Othered intellectuals are further alienated for the ways in which they are neither acknowledged nor permitted to function as such: not simply marginalized *as* intellectuals but also *by* intellectuals. They are neither comfortably laypeople nor intellectuals, but must carve out a liminal space outside of convention. In these struggles to find and define this space, there is an immense difficulty in understanding self and therefore others that can manifest into solipsism, which would all but guarantee an inability to effect change; however, in the case of these two specific characters, and a significant reason that they are so compelling, they are able to avoid the selfish and solipsistic impulse. Each character ultimately chooses a self-imposed exile, to put himself at a distance from that which ostracizes him, but does so in a manner that allows for the

productive potential of the perspective allowed from this liminal space. In stepping outside of the society that he inhabits, neither character retreats entirely within himself.

Although these two protagonists are far from the only examples of Othered intellectuals in literature, they are among the best examples for the purposes of my project and the two in whom I was most interested. Given how character driven this argument is, the thoughts and voices of each novel's protagonist are fundamental. *Invisible Man* is presented through the first-person narration of a fictional author, retrospectively telling his story in the form of a memoir within the novel. This narration style provides an immense amount of insight into the narrator's motivations, and his tendency to translate emotion into intellect is at the forefront of this narrative. His intellectualism is evidenced not just through the narration but the form itself: the fictional author is able to not only make sense of his life but then articulate it to his imagined reader—an undeniable intellectual success. In *Portrait*, although the narration is much more complicated and unconventional—making use of free indirect discourse, in order to move towards the perspective of Stephen, while remaining in a third-person point of view before shifting to first-person narration in stream of consciousness, in the form of Stephen's journal—Stephen's repeated tendency to displace feeling with thinking, as an end in and of itself, colors and shapes the narrative on a fundamental level.

Furthermore, both Stephen and Ellison's narrator identify as, and strive toward their further becoming, intellectuals as their defining characteristic, despite a relative inability to be recognized by others are such. As a result, each character exists in a liminal space where his unconventional intellectuality further amplifies his racial marginality. In the case of Stephen, regardless of his complicated relationship with nationalism throughout the text and the criticisms he receives for not performing Irishness sufficiently, he is Irish and therefore navigates the world

from a culturally subordinate position to the English colonizer. Ellison's narrator exists in an inherently subordinate position as a Black man in America, and therefore likewise is Othered. The inherent Othering, characteristic of both of these cultures, then compounds the liminality that intellectuals themselves occupy, such that these two characters are fascinating examples of unconventional, Othered intellectuals that will provide invaluable insight into the aforementioned realms of otherness, intellectualism, and identity, at the intersection of which I hope to interject this project.

To this end, then, the first chapter of my thesis pertains to Joyce's novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and follows Stephen Dedalus's journey and development from prelinguistic infancy up unto his declaration of flight and self-imposed exile. Relying heavily on Lacanian theory as it pertains to Stephen's evolving relationship with language, this chapter details his linguistic and intellectual development, the Othering he experiences both as a result of his intellectualism—by non-intellectuals—and his unconventionality—by more traditional intellectual figures—and his ultimate successful act of intellectual creation in the form of his journal.

In the second chapter of this text, I turn my attention to Ellison's protagonist-narrator of *Invisible Man*, and likewise chronicle his intellectual journey from a Southern boxing match all the way down into a Northern coal cellar. In many ways similar to the structure of *Portrait*, I trace and analyze a number of the cycles of influence into which the protagonist-narrator becomes entrapped before subsequently casting them off in a moment of independent thought. Ultimately, largely akin to Stephen Dedalus's self-imposed exile, I see the protagonist-narrator's retreat below society as a dramatic lunge outside of ideology to a position from which he is able to understand his experience and express it in his own intellectual success: his memoir. Of

course, along the way he is also repeatedly pushed further and further from the centers of culture as he is misidentified and Othered.

Ultimately, over the course of this work, my hope is that an optimistic perspective on the exilic positioning of both characters will become evident, not as a naïve silver-lining but rather as a hopeful and unromantic positive potential. The primary desire of both of these characters is to be able to function as, and thus be recognized as, intellectuals; or, in other words, to have others know and see them as they know and see themselves. For both Stephen Dedalus and the unnamed protagonist-narrator, exile is the locus from which he is able to understand and articulate the world as he experiences it, the place from which he is able to ultimately achieve a successful intellectual endeavor and from which he is able to finally function, as an intellectual, and achieve some version of self-actualization. Through this project, I hope to acknowledge the intellectual disposition of each character who wishes to function as an intellectual in society, to validate his identity as such, and thus to reaffirm his humanity.

Chapter 1: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

It is difficult to imagine a more appropriate epigraph to introduce James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: "*Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes*" (P 1), translated by Seamus Deane as "and he applied his mind to obscure arts" (P 277 n. "Epigraph"). In the context of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, from which it is taken, the quotation tells the story of Daedalus's preparations to take flight on wings built from wax and feathers, with his son Icarus, away from the island of Crete where they're being held captive; however, the rhetorical emphasis placed upon the mind and thought in what is an otherwise rather emotional scene in Ovid is significant and particularly relevant to my discussion. Joyce, ever the ironist, begins his novel with reference to Daedalus's mythological preparations for flight from the island of Crete, and ends it with D(a)edalus's¹ declaration of flight from the Emerald Isle. Throughout *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, however, the dual emphasis on thought and art permeates.

In the first of his lecture series on representations of an intellectual, Edward Said quotes Seamus Deane's "Joyce and Stephen: The Provincial Intellectual," which claims that *Portrait* is the first novel in the English language in which a passion for thinking is fully presented. Said continues, "neither the protagonists of Dickens, nor Thackeray, nor Austen, nor Hardy, nor even George Eliot are young men and women whose major concern is the life of the mind in society, whereas for young Dedalus 'thinking is a mode of experiencing the world'" (16). The prerequisite to rational thought, and a recurring subject of Stephen's obsessive musings to understand the world, though, is language.

¹ The play here is between the names Daedalus, the Ovidian artificer, and Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist of Joyce.

As Stephen develops from infancy through adolescence, the language of Joyce's text develops as well. In a very psychoanalytic fashion, the sentence structure, content, narrative, and dialog mature as Stephen himself does. Continuing the tradition of psychoanalysis from Sigmund Freud, and influenced by the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and other structuralists, Jacques Lacan proposed a tripartite model of the human psyche, which Stephen exemplifies well. Unlike Freud, and likely inspired by Saussurean semiotics, as Sasani and Tajarrood note in their Lacanian reading of Joyce, "Lacan maintains that mankind's unconscious is a highly structured and ordered realm which is regulated by language" (1670). The first of these orders or stages is the Imaginary, followed by the Symbolic, and finally the Real. The Imaginary begins at the child's birth, is largely preverbal, and is associated with the mother (1671). The Symbolic order, brought upon by the Law of the Father, marks the beginning of signification—the system of signs, made up of signifier and signified—and is associated with social rule and order (1671). Finally, the Real is the most abstract of said orders; the Real represents a completeness and wholeness that, according to Lacan, is unattainable, despite aspiration (1671). It is worth noting that *Portrait* predates Lacanian theory, and therefore is not a representation or reflection of it; however, the emphasis that Joyce places on linguistic development alongside human development is documented as having fascinated Lacan and opens Joyce's text to Lacanian readings.

Beginning in the prelinguistic infancy—what Lacan might consider the Imaginary—Stephen attempts to use language in order to understand the world and place himself in it. On the first page of the text, Stephen's father tells him the "baby tuckoo" story, narrated in an imagined version of the fractured prelinguistic voice of the Imaginary, and Stephen puts himself in the story: "he was baby tuckoo" (*P* 3). Hélène Cixous identifies this scene as a primitive one, evocative of the Freudian notion and "having to do with discovering a forbidden secret," but also

as the primitive *cène*, the primitive meal (2). She argues that this meal marks the initiation of Stephen as artist, and in it emerges “the questions that will be essential questions of the life of the artist, particularly the question of knowing, of the desire for knowledge, of the means of knowing, and of the symbolic value of knowing” (2). Cixous continues, differentiating between the two types of “knowing” present here: that which is done in universities and has to do with mastering, and that which derives from pleasure—is pleasure itself. Thus, she identifies this moment as the inception of the tension between the pleasurable and the symbolic.

Stephen’s mother, in contrast to his father who tells stories, plays music on the piano to which Stephen dances (*P* 3). Sasani and Tajarrood argue that “Because the infant Stephen has not mastered language, he can relate to the sounds more than language; accordingly, the mother who plays the piano makes him cheerful and seems more amiable to him than the father who reads him storybooks” (1672). Stephen is not permitted to exist in an Imaginary register for long, however, and the Imaginary linguistic narration of the text subsides as the Law of the Father propels Stephen into the Symbolic, and thus into society. Within the first few pages of text, the tension between the pleasurable Imaginary of the mother and the ordered Symbolic of the father is evident, and it is through this tension, Cixous argues, that Stephen comes to create his art. This first section concludes with a little poem, inspired by a threat from Stephen’s aunt, Dante:

His mother said:

—O, Stephen will apologise.

Dante said:

—O, if not, the eagles will come and pull out his eyes.

Pull out his eyes,

Apologise,

Apologise,

Pull out his eyes.

Apologise,

Pull out his eyes,

Pull out his eyes,

Apologise. (P 4; sic)

Cixous's reading of the text assumes that this poem is the creation of infant Stephen, going on to argue that he "has picked up the world 'apologize' and subverted it into a little poem, which is his way of playing with the law. . . This is how he becomes an artist" (6-7). It is interesting, and perhaps only worth noting in passing, the ways in which his Aunt, Dante, is somewhat masculinized in the evocation of Dante Alighieri and the force and conviction with which she advocates her beliefs. Additionally, she can be said to also enact the No of the Father in a Lacanian sense through the threat of punishment to Stephen if he does not apologize. Perhaps the No of the Father arises in an ecclesiastical sense, given her absolute loyalty and devotion to the Church and its law, as well. Thus, she plays a role in Stephen's education such that, according to Cixous, "he accepts the law in order to transgress it. And he transgresses by being attentive to what is *inside* the words. He enjoys it, so what he will take care of is the sound of the law, not the message of the law" (6-7). This is the kind of knowing that Cixous identifies as the pleasurable, but for the traditional sort, the symbolic sort as Cixous categorizes it, Stephen must obtain schooling.

Following one of numerous unexplained temporal gaps in the narration, Stephen is now enrolled in school at Clongowes Wood College, amid a playground swarming with boys, and his

perspective emphasizes speech, questioning and answering, naming, and thus, more than anything, a preoccupation with language. The moment that Sasani and Tajarrood argue signifies Stephen's separation from his mother and his journey into self-awareness (1673) is when, upon dropping him at school, his mother gives him a kiss goodbye and his father gives him two five-shilling pieces for pocket money² and "told him if he wanted anything to write home to him and, whatever he did, never to peach a fellow" (*P* 5-6).³ Sasani and Tajarrood further argue that Stephen's father "represents social laws and prepares the child to be a normal member of society" (1673). Stephen's entrance into the Symbolic is marked by his newly found fascination with language, which is inherently tied to his thought processes—as language always mediates thought—and thereby to his understanding and experience of the world.

The form of these first few pages, as they quickly jump from topic to topic in short and simple sentences, demonstrates Joyce's effort to represent the experience of a curious child's mind racing, freely associating as he explores and makes sense of his surroundings. In these pages, and throughout the book as a whole, the physical action—in this case a scrum of boys playing rugby on the playground—is secondary to Stephen's thoughts and memories, which nicely demonstrates Deane's point about thinking as a mode of experiencing. When Simon Moonan is called "McGlade's suck" (*P* 7), which Deane says signifies "favourite, sycophant" (*P* 280 n. 17; sic), Stephen thinks of the "queerness"⁴ of the word, and the sound of the word. The

² At twenty shillings to one pound ("£"), two five-shilling pieces equates to somewhere around £50 or \$65 USD as of November 2017, according to www.thisismoney.co.uk "Prices and Inflation Calculator."

³ According to Seamus Deane, in his endnotes to *Portrait*, "peach" in this context means to inform (279 n. 9). In other words, Mr. Dedalus is telling Stephen not to tattle on his schoolmates.

⁴ "Queerness," in the sense that Stephen and Joyce employ the term, means simply peculiarity or strangeness. Its signification contextually does not include the modern notions of sexuality or gender. The first recorded use of "queer" to signify or imply non-heteronormativity did not occur until 1922, eight years after the serial publication of *Portrait* in *The Egoist* began ("queer").

sound of the word, in turn, reminds him of water emptying from a sink, another meaning of the word “suck,” which then reminds him of how the whiteness of a lavatory in which the sink drains makes him feel cold and then hot, evoking a memory of the words “hot” and “cold,” written on the sink faucet handles; this circumstance, too, he dubs “queer.”⁵ These intricate chains of remembering and thinking are intimately tied to Stephen’s attempts to make sense of language, distinguishing between but also associating the written form and auditory sound of words, which disrupts notions of a stable relationship between signifier and signified. His “mode of experiencing the world,” as Deane argues (qtd. in Said 16), but to a greater extent his way of understanding this mode of experiencing, is thinking; his experience of thinking, at this point in his development, is fixated on understanding language. If he can understand the language of the world by thinking about it enough, so this rationale seems to go, he can understand the content of the world.

The earliest and most overt example of how Stephen uses language to place himself in the world arises during geography class, when he reads what he had previously written on a note page:

Stephen Dedalus

Class of Elements

Clongowes Wood College

Sallins

County Kildare

Ireland

Europe

⁵ *Vide supra*

*The World**The Universe (P 12)*

Beginning with himself, the most localized positioning, he writes exactly where he was, growing more and more general until he reaches the largest place he can imagine. In a sense, to himself anyway, he has successfully found his place in the universe. Afterwards, reading and considering the general back down to the local—the name—he questions the limits of the universe and, encountering a thought too big to comprehend, he turns to God. The thought of God, of course expressed and mediated through language, draws his attention again to the nature of naming, and he declares something that resembles, albeit in a child’s terms, a semiotic analysis of an omnipotent being: “God was God’s name just as his name was Stephen. *Dieu* was the French for God and that was God’s name too . . . though there were different names for God in all the different languages in the world . . . still God remained always the same God and God’s real name was God” (P 13). These two instances in close succession, Deane argues, reveal a Stephen, not more than eight years old, who struggles with Saussurean disconnects between sound pattern and concept, signifier and signified (“Introduction” xxv).

This passage depicts quite clearly the mind of an incredibly intellectual child. The child is one who fixates on meaning and knowing, and who is troubled by the holes in his knowledge that confuse him and stop his sequences of association and thinking. It upsets him “that he did not know well what politics meant and that he did not know where the universe ended” (P 14). He is invested in knowing things, and he compulsively thinks and overthinks to the point that unknowns become insecurities. As a result, he struggles. The entire first chapter of *Portrait* is peppered with insecure moments in which Stephen does not have answers, so he oftentimes forces an answer or makes up his own schema to try to understand a concept. For example, he

struggles to make sense of the phrase “*Tower of Ivory, House of Gold*,” postulating that it has to do with Eileen’s hands, “long and white and thin and cold and soft. That was ivory: a cold white thing. That was the meaning of *Tower of Ivory*” (P 35). Eileen is a girl with whom Stephen is infatuated throughout the novel, although that is not relevant to this specific point. Later, he is able to complete the other half of this theory, meanwhile asserting his central belief about thinking, when he associates Eileen’s hands with her “fair hair stream[ing] out behind her like gold in the sun. *Tower of Ivory. House of Gold*. By thinking of things you could understand them” (P 43). Rather than accepting that he does not know, in order to save himself the anxiety he makes up something that makes sense to him. In some cases, however, he is asked a question to which he does not know the answer, and these questions haunt him. A confrontation with something that falls outside his schema of understanding occurs in each chapter; in every occurrence, Stephen has to reconsider his identity and he often achieves a profound epiphany.

Stephen, largely because of these intellectualizing behaviors, although for other reasons as well, is not typical of the boys around him. As is common in response to an Other who is not understood, he gets teased and finds himself marginalized. In their attempts to get under his skin, Stephen’s schoolfellows ask him rhetorical questions—or at the very least questions to which there is apparently no right answer—knowing that he will obsess over them. When asked if he kisses his mother before he goes to bed, he answers first in the affirmative, for which he is ridiculed, and then in the negative, for which he is also ridiculed: neither answer is supposedly correct (P 11). The obvious Lacanian reading here is that the Law of the Father, socially constructed and imposed by the boys around him, castrates his desire for his mother and teaches Stephen to suppress it. Also, however, he believes so confidently in his ability to think through a question, that these queries—ones that he cannot reasonably understand or “think through”—

recur as sources of anxiety throughout the novel. This inquiry about whether it is right to show affection to one's mother plagues the protagonist, and it persists throughout not only *Portrait* but *Ulysses* as well. It puts his innate desire to feel his mother's love at odds with the learned, masculine order of the world. At this point, however, the question stands simply as a cruel joke by his peers, and it is only one of several such questions in the first chapter that both reflect Stephen's marginalized status and further his feelings of marginalization.

The other prominent mean, jocular exchange between Stephen and his peers at Clongowes that reveals his marginality and that has the effect of increasing his cognizance of this position stems from similar issues of naming, family status, seemingly unanswerable questions, and class difference. The first question asked of Stephen in this instance comes from the aptly named Nasty Roche, who demands to know Stephen's name. Roche then follows up with a second question,

—What kind of name is that?

And when Stephen had not been able to answer Nasty Roche had asked:

—What is your father?

Stephen had answered:

—A gentleman.

Then Nasty Roche had asked:

—Is he a magistrate?

[no response] (*P* 5)

There are, in this passage, two unanswered questions; however, the lack of answer to the last question functions as an implied negation, because Roche, Stephen, and the reader know that Mr. Dedalus is not, in fact, a magistrate. The previous unanswered question—what kind of name is

“Stephen Dedalus”—is one that Stephen cannot answer, and it becomes a source of anxiety for him throughout the text. This name is fascinating because of the multiple levels on which it works as signifier. For one, it is the combination of and alludes to two characters: Saint Stephen, “the first martyr” (*P* 173), and therefore an undeniably Christian figure, and Daedalus, the aforementioned artist and inventor in Ovid’s mythology, a secular figure. Stephen is depicted as the combination of these two influences, and the tension is evident in his turn towards and then ultimate rejection of the Church. Additionally, the name is significant because Dedalus is his father’s last name, and another Lacanian reality that harkens to the Law of the Father is the Name of the Father. Thus, this exchange works as a reminder of the social order, which is patriarchal in nature, that pushes Stephen into the Symbolic. However, as he inherits this name of his father, he also inherits his father’s class status.

Clongowes Wood College, the private Jesuit school where Stephen begins his formal education, is understood as a good school for the sons of Ireland’s gentry, and thus it is indicative of Stephen’s family’s upper-middle-class status. His father may not be a magistrate, so he is not the most upper-class of his peers, but Nasty Roche and Saurin’s fathers are (*P* 9), thus Stephen is at least in proximity to society’s upper echelon. However, after an unspecified summer vacation, Stephen does not return to Clongowes. For a period of time he attends no school before eventually reenrolling at Belvedere College. He seems vaguely aware “that his father was in trouble and that this was the reason why he himself had not been sent back [to Clongowes]” (*P* 66-7). Later, he and his family make a “sudden flight from the comfort and revery (sic) of Blackrock,” a suburb south of Dublin (*P* 291 n. 5), and they move into a “bare cheerless house” in the city (*P* 68). His father squanders the family’s money, and thus they plunge into a rather rapid class decline. Stephen’s bitterness grows alongside his awareness and

anger that he becomes “the prey of restless foolish impulses, angry also with the change of fortune which was reshaping the world about him into a vision of squalor and insincerity” (*P* 69). After some years,⁶ Stephen accompanies his father on a return trip to Cork, in the south of Ireland, because “his father’s property was going to be sold by auction” (*P* 92), suggesting further financial crisis and subsequent class decline.

What begins as a minor class difference from his peers that leads to his slight outcasting in time crescendos and becomes a defining factor of Stephen’s childhood that represents his isolation from the peers around him. As a result of a chance encounter with Father Conmee—the former rector of Clongowes, now prefect of studies at Belvedere—Mr. Dedalus is able to reenroll Stephen in school. Belvedere is also a Jesuit school, supposedly superior in quality and prestige to the tuition-free Christian Brothers’ schools, although presumably lesser in quality—and status—than Clongowes. Mr. Dedalus makes some sort of arrangement with Father Conmee, with the implication that Stephen will attend on scholarship. Stephen is quite literally excluded from the peer groups of his earlier years due to his father’s inability to afford schooling for him alongside them. However, in this new lowered class status, at the school he is attending by the generosity of the Jesuit order, Stephen resents his new peers and is snobbish in his perceived superiority. Pierre Bourdieu argues: “To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes taste to function as markers of ‘class’” (1). Thus, prior to his class descent, Stephen obtains and possesses, becomes disposed towards, middle-or-upper-middle class taste; however, after Mr. Dedalus’s financial troubles, he no longer possesses the financial capital

⁶ Precise indications of time passing are difficult to determine in the text as a whole, given the frequent temporal leaps within and between chapters.

necessary to constitute this class; he is no longer surrounded by peers of similar taste, and the disconnect between his imagined or nostalgic class status and his current status, which is akin to or perhaps financially lesser than that of his peers, causes a superiority complex.

As a result of Stephen's snobbery, his schoolfellows, in turn, resent him. As his class status decreases, his marginalization increases. Stephen becomes increasingly isolated, withdrawn, and preoccupied with his thoughts. He does not allow himself to feel the emotion of anger and instead "chronicle[s] with patience what he saw, detaching himself from it and tasting its mortifying flavour in secret" (*P* 70; sic). Thinking, here, provides solace from his experiences of living, but it further separates him from those to whom he could otherwise relate and with whom he could meaningfully interact.

Despite the relief and comfort that detached intellectualization provides to Stephen, inflated notions of his own superiority cause resentment from those who could otherwise be his friends at Belvedere College. Sarcastic monikers tossed at him ranging from "noble Dedalus" to "model youth" (*P* 79-80) function as indicators of how others interpret his views of self. In other words, they call him "noble Dedalus" and "model youth" because he carries himself as if he were noble or thought himself a model youth. These peers are themselves not unintellectual people, for they are studying and learning alongside Stephen and fill moments of their free time with discussions of books and writers. Stephen appears shocked that other people may have the capacity to think about such matters, for he listens to their conversation "in some wonderment for Boland was the dunce and Nash the idler of the class" (*P* 84). In one conversation, they goad Stephen by bringing him out of his silent, arrogant isolation to ask who he thinks is the greatest poet, before scornfully laughing and dismissing his taste for its appeal to the uneducated. This exchange is the first example of Stephen's marginalization by and exclusion from other

intellectuals. In the face of quarrelsome comradeship with his intellectual rivals, Stephen is only happy “alone or in the company of phantasmal comrades” (*P* 89). Retreating to the companionship of his mind, he again defines his experience of living through thought and language.

Shelly Brivic argues in *Joyce Through Lacan and Žižek: Explorations*, “In post-structuralist terms, [Stephen] recognizes . . . that the world can only be seen through language; but the Lacanian point of view emphasizes that his purpose is to reach through to the real world extending outward ‘about him’” (4). In Lacanian terms, as understood in Roberto Harari’s interpretation of Lacan’s *Le sinthome*, Stephen regularly exhibits examples of Lacan’s Borromean knot, composed of the aforementioned three linguistic registers: Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real:

. . . the imaginary is the self-reflecting, ‘captivating’ image of feeling and the body, while the Symbolic ‘refers to the place of speech and language.’ The Imaginary is often seen as the earliest immediate link to mother that father interrupts by introducing the Symbolic. The Real . . . is located outside any law or language, and can only be expressed through contradiction. Hard to define, the Real is what is posited before language; but because we cannot perceive without language, the Real can only appear to us when language goes wrong, so it cannot be said to actually exist. Outside any order, the Real is the opposite of reality in the sense that reality makes (illusory) sense, while the Real is incomprehensible and provokes anxiety. (Brivic 12)

What I describe as Stephen’s frequent intellectualization of his feelings can be read as his Symbolic order superseding and supplanting his connection to the Imaginary. The fact that the father causes this interruption is fascinating if readers remember both the novel’s opening

passage, where Mr. Dedalus tells Stephen the baby tuckoo story and where Stephen first places himself into the order of language, as well as the anxiety that he feels about the name he has inherited from his father. Finally, although Lacan sees the Real as unattainable, in moments where “language goes wrong,” so to speak, Stephen is often struck by an epiphany that does not make sense to him and that provokes lasting anxiety; Stephen approaches the Real.

When faced with the emotional crisis of disappointment in and disillusionment with his father as a result of Mr. Dedalus’s alcoholism and financial squandering, the same economic downfall that is responsible for his departure from Clongowes and eventual enrollment at Belvedere, Stephen attempts to make use of his familiar coping mechanisms in order to resituate and understand himself. Upon the Dedaluses’ visit to Cork to sell his father’s land, Stephen tries the trick from his time at Clongowes again. He geographically, and, by some perverse extension, existentially, names who and where he is. This time, however, he is not able to intellectualize in order to understand. “He could scarcely recognise as his own thoughts” (sic), and repeats to himself in a sad and mantric fashion: “—I am Stephen Dedalus. I am walking beside my father whose name is Simon Dedalus. We are in Cork, in Ireland. Cork is a city. Our room is in the Victoria Hotel. Victoria and Stephen and Simon. Simon and Stephen and Victoria. Names” (*P* 98). According to Deane, rather than enabling Stephen to find refuge and understanding in language, however, “this chanting of names blurs rather than sharpens his sense of self. He suddenly loses contact with his felt memory of the child he had been” (“Introduction” xx). In this thinking, and through this chiasmic repetition of words, Stephen yet again attempts to reconcile the personal and emotional crises he undergoes by way of intellectualization; however, the more often he does so, the less effective the coping mechanism. Language, here, fails him, and as a result he encounters a profound realization of his burgeoning manhood.

Upon Stephen's realizing that "His childhood was dead or lost" (P 102), as a result of his failed aforementioned activity in naming, he turns next to recalling lines of Shelley:

Art thou pale for weariness

Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth,

Wandering companionless . . .? (P 102)

He notes the "sad human ineffectualness," which chills him, and he "forg[ets] his own human and ineffectual grieving" (P 102). In the poetry, rather than in real humans around him, Stephen finds a reflection of his experience and, thereby, finds comfort. His own "sad ineffectualness" is mirrored by that described in Shelley's poem, and as a result, this recollection ameliorates his suffering. On some level, this reflection of his emotion and experience functions simply to reassure him that he is not entirely alone and that he is not crazy. It is problematic, although absolutely characteristic of Stephen, however, that this rare connection and validation of experience is made through the language of a poet nearly a century deceased rather than with any human physically present around him.

Stephen's dependence upon this language is also problematic for reasons relating to his nationality. Although Shelley is English, and therefore the English language in which he writes is his native tongue, Stephen—and Joyce, for that matter—is Irish, and English is the language of his colonial oppressor. Granted, Stephen does not speak nor read Gaelic, the traditional language of his countrymen; however, this is further proof of the linguistic oppression by the English in their cultural hegemony. Somewhere around the age of twelve, during the period between his time at Clongowes and his enrollment at Belvedere, Stephen accompanies his father and his granduncle on walks from the cosmopolitanism surrounding Dublin out into the little villages and countryside:

Trudging along the road or standing in some grimy wayside publichouse his elders spoke constantly of the subjects nearer their hearts, of Irish politics, of Munster and of legends of their own family, to all of which Stephen lent an avid ear. Words which he did not understand he said over and over to himself till he learned them by heart: and through them he had glimpses of the real world about him. (*P* 64)

Given the subject matter that Stephen is not understanding, “*Irish* politics,” “Munster”—the southern province of *Ireland*, and the homeland of his father—and his own family’s lore (emphasis added), it is particularly troubling that he can only construct and understand Irishness through the language of the English. In this conversation, since he does not possess the understanding or knowledge of Irishness, he is excluded and marginalized, reduced to the role of passive listener. On Irishness and language, Deane argues “[*Portrait*] returns to the question of origin and source. The Irish speak a borrowed language, having given up their own” (“Introduction” xviii). Perhaps, though, given the history of cultural oppression the Irish have faced at the hands of colonizing English forces, “imposed” language is a more accurate terminology than “borrowed.” Regardless, Stephen eventually becomes aware of and problematizes this reliance upon an imposed language during a conversation with the dean of studies⁷ at Belvedere, and it is through the language that he does not understand that he comes to this quasi-epiphany.

Amid a larger conversation about aesthetics, Stephen comes to the realization that the dean is English when he uses the term “funnel” to describe what Stephen knows to be called a “tundish,” and the dean does not know the word. Ironically, as Deane notes, “tundish” is an

⁷ Although conventionally “dean of studies” would be capitalized, and thus read “Dean of Studies,” I have adopted this lowercase version from the text itself: neither “dean” nor “dean of studies” appears capitalized in any of its utterances in Joyce.

English word, not an Irish one (*P* 312 n. 67), a fact that Stephen discovers upon further examination. But in the moment, he has a disheartening realization:

—The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master* on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its word. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language. (*P* 205)

This rather profound realization greatly problematizes the manner by which, up until now, Stephen has tended to make sense of the world. Even once he is able to write and create, once he finds his intellectual voice, the near-Real of this moment besets him.

At the end of *Portrait*, in the section of narration told through Stephen's diary, there is an entry reflecting back upon this exchange with the dean of studies:

13 *April*: That tundish has been on my mind for a long time. I looked it up and find it English and good old blunt English too. Damn the dean of studies and his funnel! What did he come here for to teach us his own language or to learn it from us? Damn him one way or the other! (*P* 274)

Brivic argues that "*Le sinthome* says that we enter the Real 'through little bits of writing' (*'par des petits bouts d'écriture'*). Here writing as a concrete object is the basis of a sense of changing reality" (25). Stephen's realization comes about through a failure of language; it provokes an anxiety that lasts "for a long time." It comes about twice in this text: on the level of Joyce's narration first, and again in the meta-level of Stephen's diary. This near-Real moment reflects a change in Stephen's view of Irishness and colonialism, and it prompts one of his few outright condemnations of the English oppression of the Irish. Further, this close encounter with the Real,

according to Brivic, threatens Stephen and prompts him to “[strive] to move beyond its discrete meanings into peripheral extensions, alternative meanings, symbolic or foreign equivalents, etymological substrata, and so forth. His colonial noninheritance, as a version of paternal imposition, drives him toward freedom and exploration in language” (57).

Returning to Stephen the schoolboy and his earliest musings on the multiplicities of language, it is clear that this move towards linguistic freedom predates his epiphanic awareness of his captivity. A semiotic close reading of this passage reveals much. At Clongowes, Stephen puts his hands into the pockets of his “*belted* grey suit. That was a *belt* round his pocket. And *belt* was also to give a fellow a *belt*” (P 5, emphasis added). Stephen then remembers a conversation among his peers in which the word “belt” was used in this latter sense, meaning to strike someone. In thinking to himself that his suit is belted, he thinks not only of a belt that wraps around his waist but of other uses of the word belt. “Also” does a lot of the work in this passage for the ways in which it reflects not a negation but rather a proliferation of meaning. “Also” both suggests the inability to stably tie signifier to signified and suggests Stephen’s desire to push the limits of conventional language usage; ultimately, a word means something, but it also means other things and does not mean yet other things. Brivic notes Stephen’s tendency to begin with a close sense of proximity and then move outward in these associations of meaning (57), a pattern that is both literally and figuratively true in this example. From the conventional significance of “belt” to the obscure, and from the object around his waist to a remembered conversation he overheard, here Stephen begins locally and proliferates meaning.

Ultimately, this movement to understand the world through problematizing and proliferating language and meaning, which begins within Stephen in his intellect and beliefs, is related to the set of characteristics that Richard Rorty advocates as imperative of the intellectual,

or the figure of the “liberal ironist” as Rorty refers to him/her. He/she, the way Rorty describes him/her, is “the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires” (*Contingency*, xv). Rorty hopes for the liberal ironist, or the ironist intellectual, to bring about what he terms a liberal utopia:

Such a turn would be emblematic of our having given up the attempt to hold all the sides of our life in a single vision, to describe them with a single vocabulary. It would amount to a recognition of what . . . [he] call[s] the “contingency of language” –the fact that there is no way to step outside the various vocabularies we have employed and find a metavocabulary which somehow takes account of *all possible* vocabularies, all possible ways of judging and feeling. . . it would regard the realization of utopias, and the envisaging of still further utopias, as an endless process—an endless, proliferating realization of Freedom, rather than a convergence toward an already existing Truth.

(*Contingency* xvi; emphasis original)

I believe that Stephen Dedalus embodies and, to a certain degree, finds success through this kind of ironic contingency of language for which Rorty advocates. Additionally, in this ever-aspirational goal of liberal utopia there are tangential parallels to Lacan’s notions of the Real, particularly in the emphasis both theorists place on a proliferation of language and meaning in order to achieve or encounter the desired outcomes. It is by means of this use of irony in order to emphasize the contingency of language, ideology, and identity that Stephen finds successes as an intellectual.

Thus, it is through Stephen’s movements between feeling and thinking, between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, between dominant and dominated, between Irishness and a rejection of such, between theory and praxis, and between other seemingly stable dichotomies

that he has brief encounters with the Real. It is through his marginalization from and inability to adhere to stable categories, communities, and identities that he is finally able to achieve profundity. It is because of his liminality, it is because he is an Othered intellectual, that he is able to somewhat effectively practice as an intellectual. Inspired by Joyce, and equating it with Joyce's talent (Brivic 11), Lacan coins the term *sinthome* as a "mode of exploration" (qtd. in Brivic 13). Brivic expands on his definition and explanations, seeing "the *sinthome* as a symptom cultivated as an artistic activity" (1), and "as deranging language and subjectivity in order to create new possibilities" (15). Brivic continues:

It allows one to change volition by apprehending one's identity as a construction. . . . A founding move of the *sinthome* is to see one's life as a fiction, a synthetic home. One's life is always a fiction (especially when it is written), and to see it as fictional is the way to become free, to unfold an alternate route, to change roles. As soon as one sees one's role, one is outside it, ex-sistent" (15).

It is, in essence, what Lacan sees as that which allows one to shift his/her three linguistic registers, and it has the same effect as Rorty's irony in revealing the contingency inherent. It is through this that Stephen discovers the role he plays in writing his own identity, and only then is he able to make his ultimate declaration not to serve any master and echo Lucifer's declaration of "*non servivium*" before ultimately fleeing his homeland for the continent. Through the repeated reinvention of himself that marks every chapter of the text, through the encounters with that which he cannot make sense of, and through his experiences that fall outside convention, Stephen comes to the crescendo for which the book is known. At the end, he reinvents himself yet again and takes his stand, this time able to articulate it to Cranly, the closest thing to a friend he has:

I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence (sic) the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and cunning. (*P* 268-9)

Whether or not the reader believes that Stephen will be successful is beside the point, for the sincerity, at least in his mind, is undeniable; but, so too have been his previous attempts to express his identity been sincere. The diary entries, presented to us in the final pages of the text, mark his success as artist and are the fruit of his creation, though this cyclical process of definition, encounter with that which shatters that definition, and redefinition is likely never to end for Stephen. The hope, however, lies in the increasing success of each iteration of the cycle; as he becomes more comfortable in the process, with the marginalization and Othering that he encounters, he is increasingly comfortable in this lonely, intellectual liminality.

Ultimately Stephen Dedalus is a lonely individual who is marginalized because he is different. He has middle class taste, superiority, and education, and yet lower-class capital. He occupies a dominated position as a result of his financial standing and yet is educated such that he still constitutes part of the dominant class as well (Bourdieu). He is emotionally crippled by his relationships with his parents, and he does not know how to relate to other individuals. He has a desire to improve Ireland, but he does not approve of most forms of Irish nationalism. He finds comfort in the rituals of the church, but does not subscribe to their orthodoxy. He attempts to force the world into the discourse of Symbolic language because what he finds in the Imaginary frightens him, though of course each register is dependent upon the others, or else the Borromean Knot would dissolve. He wants to be an artist, but has difficulty creating art. He

wants desperately to be loved but pushes away those who could do so. He is conflicted and troubled, and in these paradoxes, dichotomies, contradictions, opposing forces, he is stuck. More than anything, he is stuck between, and he is Othered. However, in the shortcomings of his forceful efforts, in the middle of these opposing forces, in the gaps between signifier and signified, in the *différance*, in the uncertainties, through *sinthome*, puns, and irony he finds perspective, near-Real, purpose, insight, and profundity. He finds himself, or better understands the contingency of himself, in the surprising and unexpected (temporary) resolution of these seemingly unresolvable diametric forces. Joyce himself speaks of “false antinomies with which, in such a world, he was faced” (Deane “Introduction” x), false only because the resolution exists between them.

In the end, Stephen makes progress forward and beyond that which he cannot otherwise because he occupies and lives within these middle spaces, and he realizes his ability and power in doing so. He himself is almost wholly liminal, and so he is somewhat able to play in this position. He is stuck between forces pulling him in opposite directions, but he finds and forges a path in the middle ground between them. And why does all this matter? Because it reminds us to reject anti-intellectual absolutism and consider the opposite perspective of ours. It encourages us to question our final vocabularies, as Rorty says, or ideology, as the Marxists say. F. Scott Fitzgerald writes, “The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.” Hofstadter makes the distinction between intelligence and intellect by arguing:

Intelligence works within the framework of limited but clearly stated goals, and may be quick to shear away questions of thought that do not seem to help in reaching them . . . intellect, on the other hand, is the critical, creative, and contemplative side of the mind.

Whereas intelligence seeks to grasp, manipulate, re-order, adjust, intellect examines, ponders, wonders, theorizes, criticizes, imagines.” (26)

To extrapolate, then, perhaps the test of a first-rate intellect is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability not only to function but to produce, and reproduce, and to imagine and reimagine. Stephen Dedalus, I argue, possesses a first-rate intellect: his ability to function is not limited to stated or unstated goals and does not shear away questions of thought that do not help in reaching them—he often forcefully tries to create answers that will aid his goals. But his inability to do so, his failures to do so, as Brivic argues, are the moments in which he learns the most and in which his intellect overpowers his intelligence.

Even though he has no evident model, there is no one showing him how to be an intellectual, he almost instinctually and subconsciously makes use of his intellect, and he has little choice but to be such. The resulting difficulty, though, is understanding this intellect, his abilities, and his ability to function as an intellectual. Intellectualism is hardly an appropriate descriptor, because the world does not recognize his performance of such. However, on some level it is hardly his choice; on the subconscious level in which he cannot control fully his actions, he is an intellectual whether he is allowed to function as such or not. He gains intrinsic satisfaction from thought, and, despite his lack of recognition, he is an intellectual. He creates “art,” or he at least creates written word, in his own words, and he finds his voice, of which the shift in narration is demonstrative. His first-person narration at the end of the novel, his journal, is the most effective act of creating art of the novel. Thus, the title is not purely ironic, Stephen is

ultimately an intellectual and an artist—it just takes a number of epiphanic revelations⁸ and 269 pages (according to the critical edition to which I have been making my references) for him to effectively become so. This is not a photo or picture of an artist—it is rather a portrait. A picture is a reproduction that captures a moment in time. A portrait, on the other hand, is a subjective rendering that is produced over many sittings and reflects many moments over time. What readers are left with, at the end of the novel, is the experience of having watched this portrait being painted, layer by layer, by Joyce, as the identity of its subject is realized and created, profundity by profundity, by Stephen.

If the process of self-actualization—to use Maslow’s term—were a straightforward one, to say nothing about the implications for human behavior, the *Bildungsroman*—and its derivative subcategory, *Künstlerroman*—genre of literature would not exist. Insofar as art and literature are both pedagogical and compelling, the process of becoming—highlighted in the etymology of the genre term⁹—is of equal importance to the accomplished result. It is thus that the trials and tribulations of the individual, or the artist, are pivotal to understand who he/she comes to be. Joyce masterfully crafts this process of becoming, without excessive romanticization, of one individual, Stephen Dedalus, over the course of his novel; likewise, Ralph Ellison, informed by and somewhat in conversation with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, presents a distinct endeavor toward self-actualization by one individual, the unnamed protagonist-narrator of in his

⁸ Hugh Kenner argues in “The *Portrait* in Perspective” that “the action of each of the five chapters is really the same chapter” (qtd. in Brivic 45-6). Shelley Brivic mostly agrees with this point, and elaborates on this cyclical plot that repeats in each chapter and concludes with a quasi-epiphany that the subsequent chapter destroys (45-47).

⁹ According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, “Bildungsroman (n.): 1910, from German *Bildungsroman*, from *Bildung* “education, formation, growth” (from *Bild* “picture, image, figure;” Old High German *bilade*) + *roman* “novel.” A novel set in the formative years, or the time of spiritual education, of the main character.”

novel, *Invisible Man*, nearly half a century later. Similarly, although likewise distinctly, these two novels by Joyce and Ellison provide invaluable insight into two of the multitudinous paths endeavored by Othered intellectuals in order to achieve his/her stable identity, and be recognized as such, in face of great adversity. Read in conjunction, through the lens that I have taken, this coupling of texts—to say just one thing of them—can serve as a reminder that the individualized afflictions along this journey—which are countless in number and profound in intensity—can be, and in fact are, worth it.

Chapter Two: *Invisible Man*

Robert Washington has asserted of Ralph Ellison's 1947 novel, *Invisible Man*, that it "suggests that the primary struggle confronting black Americans is not political but existential, that is, the battle to realize their individuality, and to prevail over the stereotypes and abstracted categories that violate their humanity. This is the central normative message *Invisible Man* aims to affirm" (qtd. in Banner Haley 163). Washington's claim here is problematic, at best, for the impulses to which it gives in. This novel is not the story of Black¹ Americans, nor do I read it as identifying the primary struggle facing Black Americans as a whole. This temptation to generalize is perhaps encouraged by Ellison's protagonist-narrator's suggestion that, "on the lower frequencies, I speak for you" (*IM* 581); but, this impulse is both essentializing and reductionist, and speaking on behalf of another can veer dangerously close to disallowing an Other to speak, thereby erasing a multitude of voices and experiences. Of course, there is often some universalizing impulse in an artist to capture, and in turn resonate within his audience,

¹ In the Author's Note to his book, *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness: What it Means to be Black Now* (2011), Touré provides the following note: "I have chosen to capitalize the word 'Black' and lowercase 'white' throughout this book. I believe 'Black' constitutes a group, an ethnicity equivalent to African-American, Negro, or, in terms of a sense of ethnic cohesion, Irish, Polish, or Chinese. I don't believe that whiteness merits the same treatment. Most American whites think of themselves as Italian-American or Jewish or otherwise relating to other past connections that Blacks cannot make because of the familial and national disruptions of slavery. So to me, because Black speaks to an unknown familial/national past it deserves capitalization." Parts of his argument may veer towards essentialism, and, in light of the 2016 Presidential Election, I am less confident than he that American whites do not identify principally and problematically as such. Nell Irvin Painter, in an Opinion piece for the NYT from November 2016, argues: "Thanks to the success of 'Make America Great Again' as a call for a return to the times when white people ruled, and thanks to the widespread analysis of voters' preferences in racial terms, white identity became marked as a racial identity. From being individuals expressing individual preferences in life and politics, the Trump era stamps white Americans with race: white race." Holding both of these perspectives to be true to a degree, I appreciate the distinction that Touré is making, and have decided to likewise apply these capitalization rules to my project.

something greater than him/herself and his/her story; however, in his later years, this became a sticking point for Ellison in his work. As Charles Banner-Haley notes, drawing attention to an interview with Ellison in 1982, the author became preoccupied, implicitly to some point of paralysis, by letting individuals “speak for themselves in whatever way they can” (Ellison, “A Completion of Personality,” 815; qtd in Banner-Haley 165) in his work in progress, the Odyssean project left yet uncompleted at the time of his death 12 years after this interview.

I contend that while Washington’s analysis is apt, his scale is much too generalized. In Ellison’s novel, the battle to realize individuality, the existential and primary struggle to prevail over those forces that violate one’s humanity, is not those of Black Americans but rather of this unnamed protagonist-narrator. Readers must resist the urge to accept Ellison’s suggestion—invitation, perhaps—that this character is indicative of ‘the African American experience,’ whatever that problematic phrase alleges to mean. Ellison tempts this dangerous line of thinking both implicitly, by his protagonist-narrator’s lack of stable identifying signifier, his unnamedness, and explicitly by the character’s Epilogal suggestion that he may speak on behalf of his addressee; however, his anonymity ought not be conflated with a lack of individuality. That is to say, this narrator is not truly unnamed,² but it is rather an intellectual act of subversion to withhold from the reader his name. Not only is the reader denied this conventional comfort, the author and protagonist-narrator repeatedly draw his/her attention to what he/she is denied. Perhaps a comparison could be drawn to Melville’s *Moby Dick*, as this novel too begins with a direct address, an introduction, of and from the narrator to the reader; however, that is about

² In the novel as a whole, there are a number of instances in which mention is made of the protagonist-narrator’s name, or the fact of him having a name, before the name itself is withheld. For example, see the exchange between “the man” and “the boy” on p. 198, the unanswered question of “What is your name?” on p. 245, or the protagonist-narrator’s obsessive reflections on the meaning of the Brotherhood assigning him a new name on pp. 316 and 336.

where the parallels cease. Ellison's narrator does not open an invitation to his reader, "Call me Ishmael," but rather declares "I am an invisible man," and for the following five hundred odd pages does not invite his readers to call him anything. Thus, it is crucial to read this novel as *Bildungsroman* or *Künstlerroman*, the story of one's becoming in the case of the former and becoming an artist in the latter, and pertaining to one instance of one unique fictional individual.

Focusing, then, on the particularity of this narrator and this novel is not to say that this novel exists in a vacuum, void of transtextuality. The text is, rather, in conversation with any number of other texts as the author is in conversation with any number of other artists, characters, and figures. Most prominently, as the title of this project betrays, is the conversation between *Invisible Man* and *Portrait*. At points in this novel, for example, passages of imagery read as though they could be lifted directly from a page of Joyce. In the first chapter of *Invisible Man*, prior to fighting in the Battle Royal, the narrator observes and is drawn to a sirenic white woman, "a magnificent blonde—stark naked" (*IM* 19). Having internalized various social codes that demarcate white women as taboo sexualized objects, the narrator is overwhelmed by attraction and guilt simultaneously, not unlike Stephen Dedalus's initial experience of being pulled by opposing forces of Catholic piety and sexual lust when he observes the "bird girl" on Dollymount strand (*P* 185). For Dedalus, the resolution of this internal conflict, and by extension this girl wading in the waters herself, allows an epiphanic realization and declaration that he wishes to live life and cast off the identity pushed onto him by his parochial upbringing. For Ellison's narrator, however, seemingly in conversation with Joyce's text and at once not replicating it, he is not allowed the same epiphany:

She seemed like a fair bird-girl girdled in veils calling to me from the angry surface of some gray and threatening sea. I was transported. Then I became aware of the clarinet

music playing and the big shots yelling at us. Some threatened us if we looked and others if we did not. (*IM* 19-20)

Thus, in a multitude of ways, because of the circumstances of his experience, Ellison's character is disallowed the moment of flight that Stephen Dedalus is granted, despite how tantalizingly the narrative tempts a reader familiar with Joyce's novel to expect it. This, in a sense, can be read as one of several moves by Ellison to put himself in company of the likes of Joyce, Melville, or H.G. Wells, by putting himself in conversation with them; however, he does not aim to replicate the tropes or stylistic flourishes of his forbearers, but rather to transform and localize them to the specific and individual level of experience of this character. Ultimately, his protagonist-narrator is not Stephen Dedalus, nor Ishmael, nor Griffin/*The Invisible Man*, because not one of those protagonist-narrators³ is a Black man living in America, much less this particular Black man living in this particular America. Comparisons and evaluations of relative suffering are not necessarily productive; however, despite poverty and colonized status, Stephen Dedalus simply does not face the same levels of oppression, nor is he oppressed in the same manner, as Ellison's protagonist-narrator. Ellison's protagonist-narrator is existing in a culture and an environment that has intentionally created conditions under which he is least-likely to succeed, particularly to bar success in the intellectual pursuits to which he is disposed.

In January of 1903, the General Education Board was incorporated by an act of the United States Congress, and was granted the responsibilities that contemporaneously fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Education (Rooks 64). Founded by ultra-wealthy, white

³ "Protagonist-narrator" is perhaps contentious in the case of Griffin, as he is more of an antagonist than protagonist, and he only narrates for a brief section; likewise, Dedalus only truly narrates the last section of his novel although his voice mediates throughout; however, I believe the point stands, and each is at least a quasi-protagonist-narrator.

Northern philanthropists, the “Mr. Nortons” of the world, this body fundamentally shaped the education landscape of the United States in the twentieth century, particularly with the creation of a “tax-payer supported, universally available education system [to be] the only viable long-term solution to the problems of both Black education and southern labor” (65). To this end, then, they set about creating a system that would adhere to their founding principles and aims, as outlined in their official Statement of Purpose:

In our dreams, we have limitless resources and the people yield themselves with perfect docility to our molding hands. The present education conventions fade from their minds, and unhampered by tradition, we work our own good will upon a grateful and responsive rural folk. We shall not try to make these people or any of their children into philosophers or men of learning, or men of science. We have not to raise up from among them authors, editors, poets or men of letters. We shall not search for embryo great artists, painters, musicians nor lawyers, doctors, preachers, politicians, statesmen, of whom we have an ample supply. . . . The task we set before ourselves is very simple as well as a very beautiful one, to train these people as we find them to a perfectly ideal life just where they are. (qtd. in Rooks 63-4)

Thus, the goal of these more “progressive” reformers was to educate rural and primarily Southern Blacks such that they would be happy in their current conditions, without thinking too much about them—not to raise men/women of learning, nor of science, letters, nor thought, evidently. This is the educational system, tradition, and milieu into which Ellison writes his protagonist-narrator. It is, then, literally in spite of his schooling, or in spite of the aims upon which the system that schools him is built, that the narrator develops the intellect and affinity for thought that he does. It is not necessarily, however, his intellectual ability that is objectionable.

As Antonio Gramsci succinctly states in a discussion on the organic intellectual, “All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals” (140). It perhaps comes as little surprise that he is marginalized for his attempts to function as an intellectual, then, when even the progressive types, those who invest huge amounts of financial capital in the education of Blacks in the South, want that education to stop short of developing the capacity for independent thought and, perhaps more to the point, to stop short of developing Blacks to function as intellectuals.

In much scholarship surrounding *Invisible Man*, particularly in questions, such as these, of intellect and intellectualism, there is a tendency to unduly blur lines between Ellison and his character. Although perhaps the author may no longer be dead (Barthes), at least on the subject of African American literature it is irresponsible criticism to speak about these two entities as if they were one and the same. Perhaps primarily resulting from the metafictionality of the novel, and the resulting care one must take in speaking about the various levels on which the text operates, the tendency is not entirely separable from an essentializing impulse with which many scholars have, historically speaking, approached African American literature specifically, although the same is true of Black art more generally. Additionally imperative to avoiding an essentializing conflation of narrator and author, however, is a separating of the intellectuality, and ability to function as an intellectual, of the protagonist-narrator from that of Ellison himself.

In statements about his novel, Ellison establishes and draws attention to this separation and distinction between the novel and the narrative, or the text and the meta-text. In an interview from 1969, Ellison says “that although *Invisible Man* is *my* novel, it is really *his* memoir” (“On Initiation Rites and Power,” *Collected Essays*, 537; emphasis in original), a terminological distinction that I find useful and will continue to borrow. These two levels on which this

intellectuality, and likewise this individuality, operate are further evidenced by Banner-Haley when he transitions seamlessly from speaking to the success of the one, the novel, to speaking of a shortcoming of the character, or the memoir:

[*Invisible Man*] was a significant move in removing the veil of invisibility for Afro-American intellectuals. The protagonist narrator, Ellison wrote in his working notes, “is a man born into a tragic national situation who attempts to respond to it as though it were completely logical” (Ellison, “Working Notes for *Invisible Man*,” 344). But that attempt is doomed to failure and Ellison tells us why as we follow the narrator who, intellectually and historically, starts out with a nineteenth-century mindset. . . and ends up in the mid-twentieth century in a basement filled with lights and trying to understand the meaning of it all and, perhaps, come to a resolution. (159)

While the novel undeniably is a successful intellectual project, I contend that so too is the memoir. The form of the novel itself stands as the primary narratological evidence of both the protagonist-narrator’s eventual overcoming of many of the barriers established to hinder his capacity for independent thought, as well as of his relative success in functioning as an intellectual. Given that Ellison’s text both begins and ends with direct addresses to audience, and is narrated from a first-person point of view throughout, that of the protagonist, the novel then stands as evidence of the narrator achieving the successful culmination of an intellectual endeavor to make sense of his story, and in turn articulate that sense to an imagined audience. If this success in intellectualism is not fully realized within his narrative world, at the very least it is realized within the world of his reader. The novel functions, then, at least in part, as an assertion of the narrator’s intellectual success to, as well as an insertion of himself as a part of, the ‘real’—which is to say non-fictive—intellectual milieu of his readership.

Turning, then, to the quote from Ellison's notes on *Invisible Man* that Banner-Haley cites, throughout the novel, the protagonist-narrator attempts to make sense of the world through his intellect and his reasoning. Although Banner-Haley makes this trait out to be a flaw worthy of his criticism, the tendency to intellectualize is not inherently so and, in fact, is perhaps the most prominent defining characteristic of the protagonist-narrator. Individuality is, however, under the perverse dehumanization characteristic of colonialism or domestic racism, a privilege not readily granted to the dominated classes and, when it manifests as nonconformity in the face of hegemonic codes of social conduct, can be troublesome, to say the least.

From the Battle Royal scene onward, it is apparent that the protagonist-narrator is different from those around him, and, given that the narration is in first-person from his perspective, it is evident that he is profoundly aware of this difference, at least in hindsight awarded by the time of his writing the memoir. Upon arriving on the scene, he sets himself apart from his peers, and not only because of his perceived superiority that stems from his exclusive invitation to deliver a speech to "All of the town's big shots" (*IM* 17). Additionally, he declares:

. . . I didn't care too much for the other fellows who were to take part. They were tough guys who seemed to have no grandfather's curse worrying their minds. . . But the other fellows didn't care too much for me either, and there were nine of them. I felt superior to them in my way, and I didn't like the manner in which we were all crowded together into the servants' elevator. Nor did they like my being there. In fact, as the warmly lighted floors flashed past the elevator we had words over the fact that I, by taking part in the fight, had knocked one of their friends out of a night's work. (*IM* 17-8)

Thus, similarly to Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist-narrator is excluded by, and also removes himself from, his peers. The implication in his statement, that these are "tough guys" who "have

no grandfather's curse worrying their minds," is to suggest that they are men of action, of physicality, and not men of thought or worry, like himself. Further, he is not a part of their social circle, and instead has been inserted into it and thus displaced one of their friends. The white men of the town who have invited him to deliver his speech feel that "since [he] was to be there anyway [he] might as well take part in the battle royal to be fought by some of [his] schoolmates as part of the entertainment" (*IM* 17), which speaks to the fungibility⁴ of Black bodies in the eyes of these men; however, to the Black men being coerced into abusing one another for entertainment, the members of their group are not interchangeable, and the interjection by the white men of someone like the protagonist-narrator, someone unlike them who purports himself to be superior, is cause for objection, if they were permitted such an opportunity as to object.

The differences between the protagonist-narrator and the other men 'hired' to fight become starker as the Battle progresses. As the men are blindfolded, the protagonist-narrator is preoccupied by "going over [his] speech" (*IM* 21). As the fight becomes more intense, he still devotes his energies to obsessing over the speech he intends to give, narrating that "The harder we fought the more threatening the men became. And yet I had begun to worry about my speech again. How would it go? Would they recognize my ability? What would they give me?" (*IM* 24). He goes through motions automatically, while it seems that his real energy and attention are attuned entirely to an insecure preoccupation with the reception that his speech will receive, until he is fighting one last opponent to become the victor; even then, he sees his adversary as an obstacle not to his victory in the very real, physical, boxing match but rather an obstacle between himself and the speech he wishes to deliver "more than anything else in the world, because [he]

⁴ I am grateful to C. Riley Snorton, and his book *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* for introducing me to this term's usage in the context of Black bodies.

felt that only these men could judge truly [his] ability, and now this stupid clown was ruining [his] chances” (*IM* 25). In a scene in which this group of Black men are quite obviously all being exploited, rather than coming together in comradeship, the protagonist-narrator continues to separate himself from those to whom, if only by means of shared circumstance, he could relate. This speaks testament to how outcasted and marginalized he is by his peers, and conversely how much he exiles himself from them; the marked difference between him and them, and the root cause of this isolation, I contend, is his intellectualism.

Although finally granted the opportunity to deliver his speech to the local oligarchy, with the blood of the Battle Royal still hot in his mouth, the protagonist-narrator does not demonstrate his capacity for independent thought and thus the speech can hardly be considered a high intellectual moment. As H. William Rice says of the Battle Royal speech:

Not only is the audience at the Battle Royal a group of drunken white men who have just subjected the narrator and his friends to a racist, sexist carnival of lust, blood, and wanton brutality, but also the narrator bases his speech upon Booker T. Washington’s *Atlanta Exposition Address*. Very much in the tradition of the European sermon. . . the narrator has a text, and he presents it, allowing the text to speak through him. What is more, his text is a well-known document in the history of American culture. Washington’s speech is just the type of speech that white audiences like, one that suggests no changes or discontent of any kind. (26)

Thus, as Rice argues, the protagonist-narrator is allowing Washington, by means of his text, to speak through him, and is not presenting his own thoughts on the matter. Rather, he hardly himself seems to comfortably have made sense of his world, logical(ly) or not, resulting in an internal conflict that is evidenced in his subsequent misspeaking of “social equality” in place of

“social responsibility” (*IM* 30-1). Throughout the endeavor, though, as Rice further argues, “The desire to be understood is the center of the narrator’s motivation. . . yet the art of speechmaking repeatedly forces the narrator to become something he is not, ultimately making him visible as a speaker but invisible as a voice” (26). The distinction between speaker and voice highlights both the performativity of his act as well as the passivity of letting others speak through him; the oration is more recitative than discursive. However, despite the speech’s relative failure as an intellectual act, as a performative one it earns him a scholarship to the “state college for Negroes” (*IM* 32) where he moves on in his journey towards achieving intellectualism.

Once he arrives at the college, the protagonist-narrator continues his education and schooling, and evidently performs well in his studies; however, the development of intelligence, here, does not equate to the furthering of intellect, to return to the distinction between the two made by Hofstadter and cited in the previous chapter. Regarding his actual intellectual development at the college, pertaining to the “critical, creative, and contemplative side of the mind” that “examines, ponders, wonders, theorizes, criticizes, imagines” (Hofstadter 26), perhaps the veteran-doctor—referred to in the text anonymously, not unlike the protagonist-narrator himself, as merely “the vet”—turned mental patient whom the protagonist-narrator encounters at the Golden Day makes a somewhat encompassing evaluation of him:

“You see,” he said turning to Mr. Norton, “he has eyes and ears and a good distended African nose, but he fails to understand the simple facts of life. *Understand*. Understand? It’s worse than that. He registers with his sense but short-circuits his brain. Nothing has meaning. He takes it in but he doesn’t digest it. Already he is—well, bless my soul! Behold! a walking zombie! Already he’s learned to repress not only his emotions but his

humanity. He's invisible, a walking personification of the Negative, the most perfect achievement of your dreams, sir! The mechanical man!" (*IM* 94; emphasis in original)

The veteran-doctor realizes and calls attention to the type of schooling that the protagonist-narrator is receiving at the college, the sort akin to that established by the General Education Board in reality. Furthermore, he names the falsity into which the protagonist-narrator has been indoctrinated, one which he is yet in the novel to reflect upon and make sense of, and prophesizes the outcome for the protagonist-narrator in absence of said sense making, speaking of him to Mr. Norton:

He believes in you as he believes in the beat of his heart. He believes in the great false wisdom taught slaves and pragmatists alike, that white is right. I can tell you *his* destiny. He'll do your bidding, and for that his blindness is his chief asset. He's your man, friend. Your man and your destiny. Now the two of you descend the stairs into chaos and get the hell out of here. (*IM* 95; emphasis in original)

Evidently, however, the protagonist-narrator cannot resolve the disconnect between this image of himself and that which he himself holds, and so he fails to understand this warning and is left preoccupied, holding onto that which he knows—or, rather, that which he thinks he knows, the college—in an effort to maintain the semblance, perhaps primarily to himself, of a stable and unified identity.

Although perhaps not of the utmost importance, it is worth noting that while the veteran-doctor's evaluation of the protagonist-narrator is scathing, it is also not baseless. Keeping in mind the temporal gap from which he is narrating, it would appear that over time the protagonist-narrator has come to realize the truth in the vet's statement as well, as is the case of realizing his

individuality. With the clarity of hindsight, in narrating how he felt at the time, the protagonist-narrator confirms that of which he has been accused:

I wanted to stop the car and talk with Mr. Norton, to beg his pardon for what he had seen; to plead and show him tears, unashamed tears like those of a child before his parent; to denounce all we'd seen and heard; to assure him that far from being like any of the people we had seen, I *hated* them, that I believed in the principles of the Founder with all my heart and soul, and that I believed in his goodness and kindness in extending the hand of his benevolence to helping us poor, ignorant people out of the mire and darkness. I would do his bidding and teach others to rise up as he wished them to, teach them to be thrifty, decent, upright citizens, contributing to the welfare of all, shunning all but the straight and narrow path that he and the Founder had stretched before us. If only he were not angry with me! If only he would give me another chance! (*IM* 99; emphasis in original)

In this passage, perhaps more so than all but a few other sections of narration outside of the Prologue and the Epilogue, there is a mark of the protagonist-narrator as he exists when writing this memoir, revealed by the sarcastic, condemnatory tone with which he describes his past feelings. Once again, the audience, through the eyes of Ellison's protagonist-narrator, sees a character who, as Ellison stated of him, "attempts to respond. . . as though [his situation] were completely logical" (Ellison, "Working Notes for *Invisible Man*," 344); however, as Cornel West has argued, continuing in the thought-tradition of Albert Camus and other existentialist philosophers, experiences in "black America" are more often marked by nihilism than rational order.

When West writes of nihilism, he defines it “*not as a philosophic doctrine that there are no rational grounds for legitimate standards or authority; it is, far more, the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most-important) lovelessness*” (22-3; emphasis in original). Further, West argues that “Nihilism is not new in black America. The first African encounter with the New World was an encounter with a distinctive form of the Absurd” (23). To combat the nihilistic threat in America historically, West continues, powerful buffers, or “cultural structures of meaning and feeling that created and sustained communities,” such as “black religious and civic institutions that sustained familial and communal networks of support” (23-4), were created; however, West argues that these sociological buffers have been historically dismantled, thus leaving Black Americans unable to fend off the nihilistic threat. Likewise, the protagonist-narrator is expelled from the college, as a result of events that in many ways are not in his control, and thus experiences the dissolution of its accompanying social bonds, exposing him to greater vulnerability.

In addition to the loss of the college as a support system, or a buffer, in West’s language, against the destructive potential of meaninglessness, there is the distinct sense that the protagonist-narrator is isolated, perhaps physically but also, and to a greater extent, emotionally. Prior to the conversation with Trueblood or the events at the Golden Day, when he is first chauffeuring Mr. Norton around, the protagonist-narrator is stunned by the personal tale that Norton shares in which he alludes to the love he had for his own daughter, and the protagonist-narrator muses to himself:

what in the world had made [Norton] open his heart to me. That was something I never did; it was dangerous. First, it was dangerous if you felt like that about anything, because then you’d never get it or something or someone would take it away from you; then it

was dangerous because nobody would understand you and they'd only laugh and think you were crazy. (*IM* 43).

Firstly, the quote reflects a history of internalized oppression and trauma, as a result of which the protagonist-narrator is essentially afraid to love something or someone out of fear of losing it. Then, secondly, it also reveals that he doesn't believe in sharing his desires or feelings with other people out of fear of being misunderstood, which suggests that he doesn't often share things with other people in any capacity. In a subsequent moment of desperation, upon confronting the possibility of disciplinary action as a result of Dr. Bledsoe learning of the day's events, the protagonist-narrator laments to himself, "To whom could I turn for help? I could think of no one. No one to whom I could even explain what had happened" (*IM* 105). This kind of emotional isolation establishes a greater vulnerability of the sort that West writes that makes the protagonist-narrator more susceptible to the dangers of nihilism. He has not, however, lost what is perhaps one of his primary tools of resiliency to this nihilistic impulse: his intellectualism.

Under the forces of and for those subjected to colonialism, as well as its supplementary tools of Othering and racism, the relationship between cause and effect is fractured, if not severed entirely, as West alludes to with his mention of the Absurd when discussing nihilism in Black America; the protagonist-narrator, however, at this point in his story, has not yet come to realize that. Instead, he continues striving to make logical sense of his world, despite the lack of logic in almost every scenario in which he finds himself. Rather than submitting to despair in the meaninglessness of life or accepting the absurdity of his existence, the protagonist-narrator maintains his resolve to intellectualize, even when that means lying to himself or convincing himself of a particular mode of understanding. Upon confronting his expulsion, the protagonist-narrator is forced to then convince himself that his punishment is deserved, or else have his

ideological worldview shattered. Insofar as “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser 162), to shatter an ideological worldview is to disrupt the connection between self and world; how he imagines himself to relate with his environment and how his environment relates to, and reflects back onto, him are at stake:

I simply could not endure it. For, despite my anguish and anger, *I knew of no other way of living*, nor other forms of success available to such as me. I was so completely a part of that existence that in the end I had to make my peace. It was either that or admit that my grandfather had made sense. Which was impossible, for though I still believed myself innocent, I saw that the only alternative to permanently facing the world of Trueblood and the Golden Day was to accept the responsibility for what had happened. Somehow, *I convinced myself*, I had violated the code and thus would have to submit to punishment.

Dr. Bledsoe is right, *I told myself*, he’s right. (*IM* 147; emphasis added)

Much like Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist-narrator intellectualizes and rationalizes, convincing himself and telling himself, so as to maintain some sense of meaning in life. It is in this practice that I identify his intellectualism as a coping mechanism so as to protect himself from nihilism. Perhaps a better fate than resignation and suicide, it takes a repeating and frustrating series of negotiations with himself, destructions of existing schema, and creations of subsequent new schema before the protagonist-narrator is able to break this repetitive mold. First, however, he is to encounter an entirely new world of which he knows little and understands less, but of which, and in which, it is imperative that he make or find meaning if he is to ultimately to make sense of himself.

Upon arriving in Harlem, after moving beyond the initial shock and awe at having “never seen so many Black people against a background of brick buildings, neon signs, plate glass, and roaring traffic” and sheer disbelief that “there were white drivers in the traffic who obeyed [a Black policeman directing traffic’s] signals as though it was the most natural thing in the world” (*IM* 159), the protagonist-narrator does find a familiar experience: loneliness and isolation. In obsessing over the letters of introduction that Bledsoe has given him, the protagonist-narrator “caught [himself] wishing for someone to show the letters to, someone who could give [him] a proper reflection of [his] importance” (*IM* 163). It is perhaps sad for the empathetic reader to see this burning desire for human connection unfulfilled, even if his motivations are only such that he can feel his own importance, especially for its sequentiality to his encounter on the bus away of the College with the veteran-doctor from the Golden Day. Perhaps the character that is kindest to the protagonist-narrator in the entire first half of the novel, the vet is a similarly marginal and Othered figure worth addressing further.

Interestingly, although perhaps entirely unsurprisingly, the person who most seems to speak truth in the pre-Harlem portion of the text is this Black veteran-doctor who now finds himself in an asylum. Likewise, he is also the only person who shows potential as an intellectual ally vis-à-vis the protagonist-narrator. He makes a real effort, it seems, to share his wisdom with the protagonist-narrator, first at the Golden Day, as I mentioned earlier, but more significantly in the scene on the bus. Prior to the first instance, he justifies the sharing of lived experience, speaking to the miseducation of the College, by saying to the protagonist-narrator, “Perhaps had I heard some of what I’m about to tell you when I was a student up there on the hill, I wouldn’t be the casualty that I am” (*IM* 91). Thus, it is from a place of concern and care, wanting to save the younger man from becoming a “casualty” like him, that he attempts to (re)educate the

protagonist-narrator. The vet says a lot to Ellison's protagonist-narrator, but the emotional apex of the scene on the bus is the older man's near-pleading monologue:

All right, forget what I've said. But for God's sake, learn to look beneath the surface. . . Come out of the fog, young man. And remember that you don't have to be a complete fool in order to succeed. Play the game, but don't believe in it—that much you owe yourself. Even if it lands you in a strait jacket or a padded cell. Play the game, but play it your own way—part of the time at least. Play the game, but raise the ante, my boy. Learn how it operates, learn how *you* operate. . . and that game has been analyzed, put down in books. But down here [in the South] they've forgotten to take care of the books and that's your opportunity. You're hidden right out in the open—that is, you would be if you only realized it. They wouldn't see you because they don't expect you to know anything, since they believe they've taken care of that. (*IM* 153-4)

He is, essentially, encouraging the protagonist-narrator to play the part of the fool, much as Bledsoe encourages him to do, without being a fool. In order to survive, he must play the game; however, it is important that he understand the game he is playing and, most importantly, how he is playing it and thereby who he is. Further, the veteran-doctor recognizes the advantage of intellect that the protagonist-narrator possesses, and in turn predicts his ultimate understanding of invisibility—or, at the very least, one aspect of what invisibility comes to mean to him. Finally, the passage echoes the deathbed advice of the protagonist-narrator's grandfather that haunts him throughout the novel. In that scene, as his grandfather lay dying, he said to his family, “keep up the good fight. . . Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open” (*IM* 16). Thus, this relationship with the veteran-doctor demonstrates

the potential for a meaningful human, quasi-paternal—though less problematically so than most of the protagonist-narrator’s influencers—intellectual connection; however, he is unable to see that potential, for he is blinded by fear, overcome by misunderstanding and confusion, and, as of this point in the novel, inseparably intertwined with and indoctrinated into the dominant, and repressive, hegemonic ideology. When his grandfather said it, “they thought the old man had gone out of his mind” (*IM* 16); likewise, as J. Bradford Campbell points out, the source of the vet’s sickness is also rooted in his racial experience (453).

Although perhaps to be taken with a grain of salt, the veteran-doctor’s own explanation of his illness is the only insight into how he has ended up in an asylum; however, he is already established through the protagonist-narrator’s eyes to be at least somewhat credible, and so the reader is inclined to give weight to the words telling his own story, as we are to the protagonist-narrator telling his:

. . . these hands so lovingly trained to master a scalpel yearn to caress a trigger. I returned to save life and I was refused. . . Ten men in masks drove me out from the city at midnight and beat me with whips for saving a human life. And I was forced to the utmost degradation because I possessed skilled hands and the belief that my knowledge could bring me dignity—not wealth, only dignity—and other men health! (*IM* 93)

An understanding of the passage requires a certain familiarity with a story, or, perhaps better, the less individualized narrative, in which, under Jim Crow, Black men and women faced “enormous legal, social, and cultural barriers to pursu[ing] professions as doctors in a period in the nation’s history profoundly hostile to their efforts” (Jones). Thus, if the reader is familiar with this history then the racial social forces are evidently central to the vet’s story. Ellison characterizes this relationship between reader and author as a most necessary collaboration, within which “there

must exist a body of shared assumptions concerning reality and necessity” (“Society, Morality, and the Novel” 697); that which is unsaid, here, in the vet’s explanation, is but one example of a shared assumption necessary for making meaning. Campbell, drawing attention to the veteran-doctor’s doctor, argues that it is “not the vet’s dream or ‘belief’ that is criticized or rendered absurd but the concrete forces—the ten men in masks—that prevent him from realizing the dream. . . the locus of the problem is not in the vet’s naïve aspirations but in the racist social practices in the South. This is what makes him sick; the source of his neurosis is rooted in his racial experience” (453).⁵ Further, as Campbell subsequently argues, the vet’s language, and the language of madness throughout the *Golden Day*, is “marked by a commentary on the particular experience of blacks in America” (453).

Campbell, then, largely informed by his interests and background, takes for granted that the veteran doctor is “sick,” and attempts to uncover the suggested causes of and subsequently find hope in the position of his neurosis. I, however, as an individual with neither formal training nor expertise in psychology or mental illness, am less convinced of the validity of his diagnosis, and, for the purposes of my discussion, am more interested in the social forces that would hasten his labeling as mentally ill and compound his Othered status. The protagonist-narrator, in many ways parroting the ideology of the dominant culture at this early point in the novel, and his reactions to the vet can greatly enlighten an understanding of said social forces. When the vet speaks, the protagonist-narrator acknowledges:

⁵ For an extended discussion of mental illness in the text, see Campbell, J. Bradford. “The Schizophrenic Solution: Dialectics of Neurosis and Anti-Psychiatric Animus in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*.”

[He] could understand the vet's words but not what they conveyed. . . The one thing which [he] did know was that the vet was acting toward the white man with a freedom which could only bring on trouble. [He] wanted to tell Mr. Norton that the man was crazy and yet [he] received a fearful satisfaction from hearing him talk as he had to a white man. (*IM* 93)

As so often is the case in situations in which the actions of an individual drastically break from convention, the urge to dismiss the man as “crazy” serves as a distancing mechanism to separate he who ‘diagnoses’ from he is who is ‘diagnosed.’ The more extreme the unconventionality, the more unsettled the audience, and, perhaps most importantly, the more similar the diagnosed to the diagnostician, the more swift and virulent the denunciation. Contemporaneously, we need only think of mass media coverage in this country—undeniably and overwhelmingly a reflection of dominant white culture and ideology—of acts of domestic terrorism when the perpetrator is white. How quickly is it announced that he had a history of mental illness?⁶ Thus, it is the anxiety of association with this “crazy” veteran-doctor, voiced explicitly in the protagonist-narrator’s desire to “assure [Mr. Norton] that far from being like any of the people [they] had seen, [he] *hated* them” (*IM* 99; emphasis in original), that spurs the protagonist-narrator to denounce a would be ally, one who would likely make for a better mentor than the other paternal figures onto which he latches in succession. Furthermore, it is not the content of his speech for which the protagonist-narrator denounces the veteran, for he does not understand or believe the

⁶ Admittedly, this is a relatively extreme example, and an incredibly complex phenomenon, that I am articulating rather simply; however, if, just for a moment, we put aside—not for lack of importance, but only for the purposes and scope of my project—some of the other intricate cultural forces, or better yet powers, at play here, it becomes emphatically evident that in this denunciation there exists a strong impulse to show how a “regular human,” which is to say somebody un-afflicted by mental illness, could not be capable of such acts, which in turn is coded to say that the speaker himself would/could never do such a thing.

content; but rather, it is the openness with which he speaks and the freedom with which he acts toward a white man that make the protagonist-narrator uncomfortable to the point of fear. And yet, on some repressed/oppressed level, that freedom is tantalizing to Ellison's protagonist-narrator.

The concept of "freedom" is one that is central to and yet sits just below the surface of *Invisible Man*, usually not explicitly addressed. The word, "freedom," appears across what I consider to be sixteen moments in the texts, comprising thirty-four total utterances.⁷ Furthermore, when the protagonist-narrator uses the term in reference to the vet's "crazy" behavior, it is but the second moment in the text, and the first to occur outside of the Prologue. Thus, each utterance, or even more significantly each moment, carries some substantial weight in contributing to the significance of the term, and thus of the concept, in the novel; furthermore, the word takes on an even greater importance in certain specific moments in which it is evoked and uttered by the protagonist-narrator himself. In drawing attention to one such example of such moments, I aim to show that this unrealized or unrecognized—consciously, that is—desire for freedom as an abstract concept, the desire that I see as informing the sense of satisfaction that he feels in observing the freedom in the veteran-doctor's behavior, is in fact more specific to the protagonist-narrator, and becomes increasingly central in his endeavor to assert and articulate his identity as an intellectual.

The first moment in which the word "freedom" is mentioned, and therefore the first moment in which the topic is breached, occurs in the Prologue, when the protagonist-narrator is

⁷ I am indebted to Zak Ové, artist and sculptor, as well as Modern Forms, for their creation of an online archive to accompany Ové's installation, *The Invisible Man*, which included a machine searchable text of *Invisible Man*, without which frequency of word occurrence would not have been possible.

telling of a surreal hallucinatory experience after smoking reefer, during which he enters into the music of Louis Armstrong's "What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue." After descending into the depths of the song, and hearing a sermon on the "Blackness of Blackness," he encounters an old woman "singing a spiritual as full of Weltschmerz as flamenco" (*IM* 9). As Rice describes the scene:

This old singer of songs is caught between black and white, loving and hating her master who gave her children, who will not set her free, and loving her children who hate her master. She has poisoned her master. . . The one thing she loves more than her master is freedom. When the narrator asks her what freedom is, she finally defines it as "*I guess now it ain't nothing but knowing how to say what I got up in my head*" (italics in original). That she cannot find the right words to express herself, that she cannot free herself through language is embodied in her final words to the narrator. . . (48)

The freedom that she defines here is essentially what amounts to a freedom of expression, or perhaps, more accurately, a freedom of articulate expression. Rice, differing slightly in his reading, identifies this as "the freedom of definition, the ability to be present and to speak the truth" (49), but I believe that he and I are approaching the same point. This freedom, the one that the singer loves more than anything and the one that captures the protagonist-narrator's attention, is at once both intellectual and individual: it is to know what one is thinking and to articulate it to an audience. Antecedent to this articulation, however, is the requirement that one make sense of that which is in his head.

In "Society, Morality, and the Novel," an essay that Ellison published three years after *Invisible Man*, the author discusses what he sees as the social and moral role, and obligation, of the novel as an art form. In one passage, Ellison asserts what he views as the primary function of

the novel, which, with a mere substitution of “protagonist-narrator,” or *Invisible Man* as Ellison often refers to him, in place of “novel,” is as true of him as it is of the form:

Thus the novel seeks to take the surface “facts” of experience and arrange them in such ways that for a magic moment reality comes into sharp and significant focus. I believe that the primary social function of the novel (the function from which it takes its form and which brought it into being) is that of seizing from the flux and flow of our daily lives those abiding patterns of experience which, through their repetition and consequences in our affairs, help to form our sense of reality, and from which emerge our sense of humanity and our conception of human value. (698)

If the primary function of a novel is to extract from the chaotic flows of life some sense of reality, which in turn informs a sense of humanity and thusly human value, then is that not also the primary function of the novelist? Likewise, insofar as *Invisible Man* is a memoir within a novel, the duties of the novelist are diffused through, or rather written onto, the memoirist, the protagonist-narrator. Rice’s characterization of the aforementioned definition of freedom, that of the old singer, as a freedom of definition is reminiscent of Ellison’s argument here. Making sense of reality, in the case of the protagonist-narrator an intellectual endeavor, begets an emergence of a more stable sense of humanity, which in turn imbues a concept of human value, both of the thinker himself as well as that of those around him. This is, in essence, the same freedom of definition postulated by Rice’s analysis; however, noting the importance of the word “social” in modifying “function,” the emphasis placed on the old woman’s endeavor—as well as the protagonist-narrator’s parallel endeavor—to “say” what is in her head, and the necessity of a reader to complete the author’s collaborative effort that constitutes a novel, I must stress the

importance of articulation in the freedom that is central to the protagonist-narrator's intellectual project of determining selfhood.

Throughout the novel, as I said of freedom previously, these ideas and concepts of that which is required for the protagonist-narrator's success in his ultimate quest to tell the story of his world as he experiences it, remain primarily just below the surface of not only the discourse of the text but also of his consciousness. Ellison said of his character, "He has accepted the definition of himself handed down by the white South and the paternalism of northern philanthropy. He sets out with the purpose of succeeding within the tight framework granted him by jim crow (sic), and he blinds himself to all those factors of reality which reveal the essential inadequacy of such a scheme for the full development of personality" ("Working Notes for *Invisible Man*" 344). Within the limited definition of himself that he has accepted, as well as within the limitations of colonialism, both *de facto* and *de jure*, the protagonist-narrator is unable to achieve the freedom of articulate expression that he desires and requires. Repeatedly, he casts off one 'master' for another, each time inching closer to knowing himself through his own eyes:

M. K. Singleton, among other critics, has detailed the repeated patterns of influence and rebellion that characterize the novel. Starting with Booker T. Washington, evoked in the narrator's speech at the Battle Royal and continuing through Mr. Norton, Homer Barbee, Dr. Bledsoe, Mr. Emerson, Lucius Brockway, and Brother Jack and the Brotherhood, the narrator falls under the influence of one leader after another, only to rebel. (Rice 8)⁸

⁸ For Singleton's full account of this pattern of influence, see Singleton, M. K. "Leadership Mirages as Antagonists in *Invisible Man*." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Invisible Man: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by John M. Reilly, Prentice-Hall, 1970, pp. 11–21.

Although each of these cycles of influence and rebellion is fascinating in and of itself, they are not equally impactful on the protagonist-narrator's identity development, and thus, under the constraints of this project, I am only able to address a few in the detail that they deserve; the model, however, is similar across them, and it is only a few specificities in which they differ.

One of the aforementioned influential figures that is worth briefly addressing is that of Lucius Brockway. After taking a job at Liberty Paints, and following a dismissal from his first role there due to circumstances largely out of his control, the protagonist-narrator is sent to a deep basement, "three levels underground" (*IM* 207), to work as an assistant to Lucius Brockway. Brockway is a small, "wiry," old Black man who takes pride in his role, boasting to the protagonist-narrator that "caint a single doggone drop of paint move out of the factory lessen it comes through Lucius Brockway's hands" (*IM* 215; sic). Brockway is also distrustful of the protagonist-narrator also immediately upon his arrival into his basement dominion, seemingly at least in part because of his perception of the protagonist-narrator's intellectuality and education. The first telling exchange is one in which Brockway demands to know if the protagonist-narrator is an engineer, and then, upon his response in negation, Brockway asks again if he is sure before appearing to relax (*IM* 209). Immediately subsequently, he continues along the same line of interrogation as to where the protagonist-narrator goes to school and what he learns there, again making sure the protagonist-narrator is not studying mechanics (*IM* 209). Brockway then disparages the protagonist-narrator for his perceived physical abilities (*IM* 213-4), suggesting that he is unfit for manual labor, implicitly because he is more inclined to thought, in an interesting inversion of the protagonist-narrator's own judgements of his peers at the Battle Royal. Finally, Brockway brags more than once that he is an expert at his job, "And [he] learned it all without all that education" (*IM* 215).

There are a lot of complex forces at play in the hostility toward the protagonist-narrator that Brockway exhibits, ranging from generational and class difference to an internalized racism that Brockway exhibits; however, one factor that receives less critical attention but undeniably informs his distrust is the protagonist-narrator's intellectual disposition, and the resulting differing viewpoints when it comes to knowledge and self-worth. Brockway believes in tactile learning, and as such considers himself an expert from years of experience working in the paint plant. He is not a man of intellect—which is not to say that he is unintelligent, for presumably he is a talented maker of paint—but rather a man action. The protagonist-narrator, as I have demonstrated throughout this project, is of a disposition to think, understand, speak, and write; thus, it is a hostility toward an intellectual by a man utterly opposite him in disposition, as a result of which Brockway misidentifies and Others him. At the mere mention of a union meeting that the protagonist-narrator stumbled upon, to which he is subsequently barred entrance, Brockway feels that his suspicions about him have been confirmed, and he threatens to kill the protagonist-narrator.

Although the protagonist-narrator is less influenced by Brockway than some of the other men on the list, it is not until the old man threatens him that the spell breaks:

something fell away from me, and I seemed to be telling myself in a rush: *You were trained to accept the foolishness of such old men as this, even when you thought them clowns and fools; you were trained to pretend that you respected them and acknowledged in them the same quality of authority and power in your world as the whites before whom they bowed and scraped and feared and loved and imitated, and you were even trained to accept it when, angered or spiteful, or drunk with power, they came at you with a stick or*

strap or cane and you made no effort to strike back, but only to escape unmarked. (IM 225; emphasis in original)

The passivity in the narration, as if the protagonist-narrator is watching this happen to himself, is interesting for how it speaks to the urges and flows of which he is not conscious, be they repressed or oppressed. The epiphanic moment of clarity in which the protagonist-narrator realizes his “training,” or better yet interpellation and indoctrination, is profound but for the ways it is later diluted. Brockway allows the protagonist-narrator to be caught in an explosion of the machines, sending him into the company hospital to have racist experiments performed on him and to be incarcerated in a lobotomizing machine. Following his recovery, and a number of significant events not directly related to this discussion, the protagonist-narrator frustratingly falls back into the same, or perhaps an even more powerful, relationship of influence with the Brotherhood; that iteration of the pattern, however, is one in which he is influenced and surrounded by other intellectuals.

Similar to the caveat I provided to my commentary of Lucius Brockway, it’s worth acknowledging that the relationship of influence between the protagonist-narrator and the Brotherhood is complex, such that an entire book-length project could be devoted to it. For my purposes, however, I am interested in the ways in which the organization, purportedly made up of quasi-intellectuals⁹ who employ a “scientific terminology” (*IM* 306), both exploit the

⁹ The modifier “quasi” here is included not merely to be pejorative, although that may have been an appealing factor, but rather to emphasize the difference between the ways in which the protagonist-narrator is an intellectual on the one hand and how the Brotherhood is an intellectual organization on the other. Whereas for the protagonist-narrator intellectuality is central to his self-definition of identity, for the Brotherhood it is a politically affective tool for persuasion and manipulation; as such, the entities cannot be said to be intellectuals in the same manner, for their investments in intellectualism are drastically different. To put it in slightly different terms, the Brotherhood perhaps performs intellectualism whereas the protagonist-narrator functions as an intellectual.

protagonist-narrator's intellectuality and then marginalize him for exhibiting intellectualism in a manner other than their own.

The Brotherhood is a quasi-Communist organization¹⁰ that aims to work “for a better world for all people” (*IM* 304), and they hire the protagonist-narrator after observing a speech that he delivers at an eviction in Harlem—again, much like his first speech, an example of him passively compelled to speak without knowing it. They are impressed by his oratory, and recruit him to “be the new Booker T. Washington” (*IM* 305), despite some concern that perhaps “he should be a little blacker” (*IM* 303). Thus, he is hired certainly as a token, but also because he possesses intellect and talent. Tellingly of the exploitation that is to ensue, the members of the Brotherhood immediately misidentify him, or rather inscribe their own identity onto him, in the symbolic act of cutting his ties from friends and family and giving him a new name. It is clear from the start, then, that this is not a collaboration between intellectuals, but rather a group—ironically and/or hypocritically, given their expressed aims—exploiting another individual to make use of his mind and his mouth for their purposes. In a flurry of activity and money, he is moved from his apartment, isolated from the few people he knows, and put to work.

The first speech that the protagonist-narrator delivers on behalf of the Brotherhood is the day after accepting their offer for employment. Given little time, and even less preparation, the protagonist-narrator somehow succeeds in connecting with his audience, leaving them “cheering, knocking over chairs, stomping the floor” (*IM* 347). The members of the Brotherhood, however, argue that the speech was “wild, hysterical, politically irresponsible, and dangerous. . . And

¹⁰ Although critics debate the extent to which the Brotherhood is or is not a Communist organization and whether they are meant to “represent” the American Communist Party, this evaluation is of no concern to me. The point that I wish to make is simply that they are a radical political organization, certainly left-of-center.

worse than that, it was *incorrect!* (*IM* 349; emphasis original). Thus, they send the protagonist-narrator to be “trained” under the guidance of another member of the organization so as to learn the exact form of intellectualism that they would have him perform. Twice more, the protagonist-narrator is reprimanded for not being the type or kind of intellectual that the Brotherhood demands, and twice more they uproot him from the work he is doing and send him elsewhere with instructions to do their bidding in the way they demand it be done. Finally, the Brotherhood begins to marginalize him from the organization, giving him fewer instructions, resources, and support until he is acting autonomously, at which point he puts on the public funeral for Tod Clifton.

The funeral marks the breaking point between the protagonist-narrator and the Brotherhood, effectively ending their influence over him. Rice argues of the funeral that “for the first time in the novel, he has no text of any sort, whether it be a model speech, such as the *Atlanta Exposition Address*, or a set of expectations such as those that he learns to cater to as a representative of the Brotherhood” (40). Thus, although it is not the most effective of his speeches at inciting an emotional response from the audience, it is a personal triumph in that it represents an important step in asserting his individuality, largely free from the bidding of others. This is the final iteration of the problematic cycles of influence in the text, and “we hear fully developed in this speech. . . the voice, the being, that will speak to us in the prologue and epilogue, in the novel itself, a voice of sarcasm and irony, a writer’s words, not a speaker’s voice” (44). As painful and detrimental as these cycles are for the protagonist-narrator while he is experiencing them, at the resolution of them he is left, at the very least, as himself: the writer of this memoir.

The repeated pattern of influence, followed by rejection of influence, and turn toward a new influence is quite alike the cyclical form of *Portrait*. Ellison admits the parallel in an interview from the Spring of 1955, describing the novel as “a series of reversals. It is the portrait of the artist as a rabble-rouser, thus the various mediums of expression” (“The Art of Fiction: An Interview” 179). Robert N. List sees that which is so problematic within these twin cycles of influence—that of the protagonist-narrator as well as that of Stephen Dedalus— as inherited “From Dostoevsky and other 19th century Russian writers,” continuing:

Ellison discovered that in a Hegelian world the roles dictated by the Hegelian “master” can, if accepted by the “servant,” create an inauthenticity of self, a series of “false-sense systems” in the subsequent words of R. D. Laing, that could eventually obscure the core of the self, the drives for self-realization, and lead to a pathological diffusion of identity.

(64)

This, then, is the core problem of the protagonist-narrator, and is, perhaps, inherent to the society that he inhabits; at the very least, he seems to see it as such. The freedom that he desperately wants, to be allowed to function as an intellectual and a thinker, to make sense of the world and articulate it to an audience, cannot exist for him under the conditions of the society that he inhabits, and thus he chooses to leave it behind. His is neither a D(a)edalean nor Icarian flight, but rather a descent down into the dark depths of a coal-cellar. Once again, this is not the departure of Stephen Dedalus, but that of the protagonist-narrator; in both cases, however, the protagonists opt for self-imposed exile in order to be free.

Many readers of Ellison’s novel tend to criticize the protagonist-narrator, and by extension Ellison himself, for what they see as his passivity in retreating underground; however, as I have previously stated, I do not see this as a passive retreat into reclusion but rather a

dramatic step outside of society, and therefore its dangerous influences and ideology—insofar as it is possible to step outside of ideology, that is. Furthermore, while I would not recommend self-imposed exile to just anybody, and nor do I think Ellison would either, in the case of the Othered intellectual, such as the protagonist-narrator or Stephen Dedalus, they face little other option. Thus, I prefer to take the optimistic approach, not to hunt for a silver lining but rather to see, and to make productive use of, the advantages that marginality can provide.

It is worth acknowledging that I believe that the descent of the protagonist-narrator below ground, entering into his period of hibernation and stepping outside of society, is primarily driven by and therefore primarily for the benefit of his search for identity, such that he is able to function productively; however, that search for identity, and the related desire for the freedom to make sense of and articulate his perceptions of humanity, is inseparably linked to his intellectual impulses and thereby secondarily is for the betterment of his ability to function as an intellectual. Edward Said, in his lecture series, *Representations of the Intellectual*, devotes an entire lecture to the figure of the intellectual in exile, and takes a similarly optimistic stand to that I present here. Using Theodor Adorno as classically exemplary of the intellectual in exile, Said argues that Adorno overlooks the positive potentiality of the position:

What Adorno doesn't speak about are indeed the pleasures of exile, those different arrangements of living and eccentric angles of vision that it can sometimes afford, which enliven the intellectual's vocation, without perhaps alleviating every last anxiety or feeling of bitter solitude. So while it is true to say that exile is the condition that characterizes the intellectual as someone who stands as a marginal figure outside the comforts of privilege, power, being-at-homeness (so to speak), it is also very important to stress that that condition carries with it certain rewards and, yes, even privileges. So

while you are neither winning prizes nor being welcomed into all those self-congratulating honor societies that routinely exclude embarrassing troublemakers who do not toe the party line, you *are* at the same time deriving some positive things from exile and marginality (59).

The nuance of Said's argument is important, I believe, for he deludes neither himself nor his reader, avoiding Pollyannaism, but rather acknowledges the great loss of prerogative while maintaining the productive potential. The protagonist-narrator of Ellison's novel certainly experiences the marginality and marginalization, deficits in privilege and power, as well as an almost literal homelessness—though his 1369 lightbulbs and Louis Armstrong records serve as a reminder of the home he has left behind.

In addition to the obvious disadvantages, of which there are many, the protagonist-narrator also, however, does employ to a certain extent both of the two primary advantages that Said articulates: first, “the pleasure of being surprised, of never taking anything for granted, of learning to make do in circumstances of shaky instability that would confound or terrify most people” (59); and second, the ability “to see things not simply as they are, but as they have come to be in that way. Look at situations as contingent, not as inevitable” (60). To the first point, at no point in his journey, from the Battle Royal through the Harlem riot, does the narrator navigate anything but instances of “shaky instability,” and, from the distance of his exile, is able to make sense of his experiences, avoid befuddlement, and paint a dynamic and profound image of his story in the minds of his readers. To the second point, I believe that seeing the contingency of a given situation, with the suggestion of an aspect of temporality, is reflected in the protagonist-narrator's encouragement to “Step outside the narrow borders of what men call reality and you step into chaos. . . or imagination” (*IM* 576), and take reality itself as contingent.

Ultimately, it is somewhat remarkable to see the change in the protagonist-narrator over the course of the novel—for which Ellison is to be commended—that makes the initial leap between Prologue and Chapter One so jarring.¹¹ It is particularly noteworthy, or remarkable, that he is able to achieve such identity development without a reputable model to guide him. Those that he allows to influence him end up clouding his perception of self, and those from whom he perhaps could benefit from greater influence, such as the veteran-doctor, are at the time too unconventional for him to embrace; however, for those in his position—or in a similar position, for his position is markedly unique, as I argued at the beginning of this chapter—this existential trail breaking may, in fact, be both inevitable and ultimately pleasurable. As Said argues,

Exile means that you are always going to be marginal, and that what you do as an intellectual has to be made up because you cannot follow a prescribed path. *If* you can experience that fate not as a deprivation and as something to be bewailed, but as a sort of freedom, a process of discovery in which you do things according to your own pattern, as various interests seize your attention, and as the particular goal you set for yourself dictates; that is a unique pleasure. (62; emphasis added)

The “if,” upon which the latter of Said’s statement depends, is perhaps rather substantial, and the difficulty of achieving that mindset ought not be overlooked; however, the disposition of the protagonist-narrator, as I have argued throughout this chapter, is one driven towards a freedom of the sort Ellison gives phrase to: one that seizes “from the flux and flow of our daily lives those abiding patterns of experience which, through their repetition and consequences in our affairs,

¹¹ Obviously, the maturer protagonist-narrator is present throughout every chapter, as he is narrating and thus mediating the story; however, I mean to say that, between the Battle Royal and the riot in Harlem, the protagonist-narrator as a character of his own memoir grows and develops intellectually and individually to a tremendous degree.

help to form our sense of reality, and from which emerge our sense of humanity and our conception of human value” (“Society, Morality and the Novel,” 698). This yearning for freedom, in the general and specific senses of the word, will hopefully allow him to see his position as comprising not merely the sacrifices but all the advantages too, and will motivate his imminent transition from *vida contemplativa* into *vida activa* (Arendt) that he declares on the last page of the Epilogue: “I’m shaking off the old skin and I’ll leave it here in the hole. I’m coming out, no less invisible without it”—no less Othered— “but coming out nevertheless” (*IM* 581).

If, in the end, a reader chooses not to believe that the protagonist-narrator will ascend from his hole to action—as is their right, as Ellison’s/the protagonist-narrator’s collaborator in meaning making—that is still not to say that the endeavor of the narrator has been a failure. For, ultimately, he did what he had to in order to find the freedom that he craved. He has been marginalized by the intellectual establishment, both academic and civil, as well as the laypeople in society for the ways in which he unconventionally performs; however, he is an intellectual, he is able to function as an exilic intellectual, and he is recognized by his readers as an intellectual. Even if he spends the rest of his days surviving as best as he can, and remaining underground in his hole to further make sense of himself and the world above, he will never be ephemeral, erased, or completely without home: “For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live” (Said 58).

Epilogue

Stephen Dedalus, of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the as a Young Man*, and the unnamed protagonist-narrator, of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, each come to occupy a physical and intellectual positionality that is marginal to the culture in which they have been born and raised. In the case of Stephen Dedalus, his exile is marked by his declaration to serve no master and his departure from Ireland for continental Europe. Ellison's protagonist-narrator, on the other hand, exiles himself from and descends below society to the depths of a coal cellar. In both cases, however, as the direct narratological addresses from protagonist-author to reader are indicative, he is able to achieve success through an intellectualization and articulation of lived experience and, ultimately, to function and be recognized as an intellectual—if not sufficiently by his narratological peers then at least within and among his readership. Prior to that point, however, each is repeatedly Othered, misidentified, marginalized, and excluded at least thrice over: Othered *as* intellectuals by laypeople; Othered *by* intellectuals for his unconventionality in intellectualism; and, finally, Othered *as* intellectuals, *by* intellectuals and laypeople alike, for his racialized difference.

At risk of taking a naively romanticized view of exile, I contend that it is perhaps a result of the aforementioned, interanimating Othering that each protagonist is able to step outside of history and society. In order to do so, he must cast off the prejudices and essentialisms of the dominant hegemonic ideology and escape the double consciousness, the “sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois 16-7) that W. E. B. Du Bois argues is the experience of African Americans, but an observation compellingly generalized to include subaltern peoples as a whole. The only way each character can do that, to cease viewing himself

through the eyes of the dominant faction, is to remove himself from its more direct influences and to observe not from within but without. From this locus, both Stephen and the protagonist-narrator are able to view the society that he formerly inhabited from a safe(r) distance, or at the least a distance less susceptible to the problematic influences of a bigoted and oppressive ideology. I'm not sure that this exilic position, of the sort advocated for by Edward Said, is one that an individual can be born into or rather must come to or else have imposed upon him/herself. In the case of each of these two character examples, however, he is pushed and jostled, Othered and ostracized, to the very edges of society such that the move to self-imposed exile, the metaphorical road he takes out of town to the great ivory tower that he comes to inhabit, is perhaps somewhat lesser in distance and ferocity: the leap from the inner-side of a margin to the outside of the entity is not so great as that from the center, perhaps. Or, to state it slightly differently, perhaps exile from a home in which one is not able to function in his/her primary self-defined role—that of an intellectual, in this case—in favor of a positionality in which he/she is able to function as such is not such a monumental sacrifice when the subject has always already been systemically and systematically disallowed a feeling of at-home-ness in that homeland.

In any case, the intellectual success of both Stephen Dedalus and Ellison's protagonist-narrator is undeniably evidenced in both the form and content of the respective novels, and therefore so too is their success in achieving self-actualization, self-assertion, and self-determined social function. At the end of the novels, the freedom that each man desires, to function as an intellectual in whatever manner he so feels fit, is radically and dramatically asserted and reinforced. The worth of higher intellectual pursuits, thus, is confirmed through these two texts. Perhaps the intellectualism of Stephen Dedalus and the protagonist-narrator

means something to every reader, although also perhaps not; certainly, the intellectual endeavors of the two have meaning for me, as a critic, reader, and person; but finally, and most significantly, intellectual pursuits, despite the substantial sacrifices they may require, are worthwhile, significant, meaningful, fulfilling, and central to these individuals themselves, and I think that's enough to justify the aspiration towards them by any individual, myself included.

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