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Ralph Ellison's invisible Women

Nicole Batchelor
Lehigh University

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Batchelor, Nicole

**Ralph Ellison's
Invisible Women**

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Ralph Ellison's Invisible Women

by

Nicole Batchelor

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Thesis Co-Advisor

Chairperson of Department

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Abstract

Ralph Ellison's The Invisible Man delineates the experience of the Invisible Man's growing consciousness of vanishing state through a series of dehumanizing and cruel trials at the hands of an overtly racist white patriarchy. Ellison's displays how the protagonist's moments of consciousness occur through his recognition of women, black and white, similar impotent positions. Although the Invisible Man can make sense of his own feminized oppression at the hands of white men, the women are erased. The women function as a device or background upon which the narrator and other black men can unfurl their psychic and emotional scars. Ultimately, Ellison replicates the very invisibility that he desire to critique in his novel since he evades the full exploration of the political sections of race and gender. Ellison produces flat, generic representations of women that ultimately function to erase the complicated and obviously differently socialized experiences of black and white women.

Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man is a novel that delineates the experiences of a young black man grappling with the social inequality and overt racism of American culture. The novel's protagonist experiences an awakening that imitates the structure of a traditional slave narrative. The Invisible Man moves from a state of innocence to experience in which he gains consciousness of his vanishing state through a series of dehumanizing and cruel trials at the hands of the white patriarchal system. Ellison's protagonist swallows numerous humiliations and indignities in the hope that his humility and unquestioning acceptance of the white man's social mores or laws will result in the some reward of at least recognition of social equality. On the devastating path to racial consciousness, the Invisible Man can no longer repress his new-found doubts that good, hard work and a self-effacing humility will bring about the eradication of the racial boundaries that prevent his social success. Refusing to remain blind to the white laws, Ellison's protagonist shuns the vanishing-man role the white patriarchy has constructed for him. The narrator desires to construct his own identity and/or give his subjectivity visibility outside the deliberately annihilative social roles of a sadistic, white male-dominated culture. Yet Ellison juxtaposes the narrator's moments of consciousness concerning the illusory but oppressive constructs of race within white society, with the violence inflicted against women, both black and white. Recognizing their similar impotence the Invisible Man makes sense of how racism feminizes him. Despite the Invisible Man's recognition of the women as victims of circumstance and convention, the author deprives the women of subjectivity and interiority that even the most marginal of male characters is given. Although sympathetic, the representation of the female characters is sacrificed to further the self-revelation of the Invisible Man and the

reader(s). It is female characters like the white stripper and Mattie Lou Trueblood that allow him the investigation into his own invisibility. Yet, there is a marked absence and/or an invisibility to the women figures in the text which evades the exploration of female subjectivity. Although Ellison constructs a text that conveys sympathy for the female characters, the women are reduced to abstractions.

The Battle Royal scene is indicative of the way in which the Invisible Man gains self through an encounter with a woman. In this scene, the exotic dancer is used by the white men as a tool of shame and emasculation in the white man's trial, the battle royal. The female dancer is described by the narrator as a "circus kewpie doll with a face heavily powdered and rouged, as though to form an abstract mask" (Ellison 19). The woman is a mere shell or mask; she is anything but human. To borrow Lacan's discourse, she is the phantasy or dolled-up play thing of men's desires. She is a representation of what is human; she is the image and product of the powerful white men attending the ceremony. Ultimately, she is a sexual object to be gazed at and adored for her body or for certain parts of her body. The narrator is conflicted about her presence. He can gaze at the woman with "impersonal eyes" as he would like, but he cannot act on his initial desires or impulses. He wants simultaneously to "destroy her, love her, murder her, hide from her and stroke her where her thighs formed a capital V" (Ellison 19).

Yet Ellison displays how the invisible man cannot act on any of these desires. Surrounded by white men, who threaten him both to look and not to look at the naked woman, he is rendered impotent, powerless (Ellison 20). The woman is used to make the black men feel ashamed of their desires and their bodies. The black man is forbidden to gaze at and even desire the white woman, for in doing so he would open himself up to

violence and perhaps death for the defilement of her whiteness. Yet even as an object, the woman's whiteness and sexuality exerts power over the black men. The black men present cannot act on their desires; their desires are contained. The narrator observes that she delights in this power: "And the blond continued dancing, smiling faintly at the big shots who watched her with fascination, and faintly smiling at our fear" (Ellison 20). The narrator believes that she enjoys how her sexuality (and her whiteness) works to render the men helpless, powerless. She smiles at their fear, relishing a certain sexual command or authority over them and the white big shots.

However, the narrator shifts his view of the exotic dancer's pleasurable power trip. He realizes that she too suffers rather than receives pleasure from this social engagement. She is used to castrate the black men, but in like manner she too is utilized and viewed as an object of entertainment. The dancer and the black men share in the process of dehumanization by the prominent white men of the town. The white dancer and the black men are treated as objects without feelings, emotions, desires and subjectivity. The narrator learns through the tossing scene that he was mistaken or presumptuous in believing that she was smiling at their fear:

They caught her just as she reached a door, raised her from the floor, and tossed her as college boys are tossed at a hazing, and above her red, fixed-smiling lips I saw terror and disgust in her eyes, almost like my own terror and that which I saw in some of the other boys (Ellison 20).

This hazing is a form of retribution to remind her that her sexual power over the black men and themselves is sanctioned by them. Ellison's use of the word hazing seems as if it is intended to intimate a ritual of fear that is enacted to extract a form of respect and sense of obligation and even complicity to a higher order or hierarchy. The white men are just as threatened by her sexual power since "they stare in fascination of her." To deflect their fear of her sexuality, the woman is tossed and flung about as if she were a thing or an object to be manipulated for their enjoyment. Consequently, the narrator sympathizes with the woman. He realizes that she is merely performing for the men. She does not express genuine pleasure, but fabricated delight with "fixed smiles." The free admission of this insight or realization about the dancer really struck me. The narrator does not portray the woman as just evil or an enemy. He represents her as quite a complex character who is, in some ways, better off than the narrator because of her whiteness, yet just as vulnerable because of her gender. The narrator does not present a biased account, but rather he observes and learns from such experiences about his own position within the white patriarchy.

Furthermore, like the woman performing her obscene dance for the men, the black men are reduced to a feminized position. Their bodies are subject to the gaze and subsequent inspection of the white men within the homo-erotic space of the boxing ring. The black men must perform an obscene ritual of their own for the titillation of the white men. With the exception of the narrator, the black men are pre-paid, like the white woman, in the amount of five dollars to indulge white men's whims. The white men choose to strike fear in the black men over the blatant exhibition of their own natural sexual responses. The white men desire to produce a sexual hysteria in the black men

which works to reaffirm the white men's virility, potency and fullness. The ogling, caressing and physical domination of a white woman is a sexual initiation that the black men are instructed that they cannot physically take part in. Rather, they are the feminized bodies to be beaten, intensely gazed at and scrutinized, inscribed as inferior and sexually punished in the sense that their sexual pleasure and desires are arrested. The white men need the impotent audience of black men to heighten and mark their own possession of the phallus. The white man's sexual identity is dependent upon this manipulation of a white female and black males. They succeed in gaining the complicity of both the female dancer and the black men by setting them against each other. The white men tease the woman into enjoying a degree of sexual power over the black men, which only works to intensify the conflicted feelings of the black men. The narrator hates her and wants to cause her physical harm at the same time he wants to possess her physically. The narrator and the other black men cannot act on their sexual aggression; thus they must direct it towards each other and fight it out to acquire a position or station provided by the white men.

Ellison's Battle Royal scene not only displays the feminization of the black men's bodies and the dehumanization of both exotic dancer and the black men, but it reveals itself as a scene quite dense in its complexity/intricacy. The white men seem to be utilizing the black men in order to indulge in a rape fantasy of their own:

I noticed a merchant who followed her hungrily, his lips loose and drooling. He was a large man who wore diamond studs in a shirt front which swelled with the ample paunch underneath, and each time the

blond swayed her undulating hips he ran his hand through the thin hair of his bald head and, with his arms upheld, his posture clumsy like that of an intoxicated panda, wound his belly in a slow and obscene grind. This creature was completely hypnotized. The music quickened. As the dancer flung herself about with a detached expression on her face the men began reaching out to touch her. I could see their beefy fingers sink into the soft flesh. Some of the others tried to stop them and she began to move around the floor in graceful circles, as they gave chase, slipping and sliding over the polished floor (Ellison 20).

The narrator reveals the Caucasian man's bestial sexual wishes which hypnotize or control his compass. The men's reactions to the white woman's dance are depicted as threatening; the white men sink their "beefy fingers" in her "soft flesh" and chase her around the room in an ecstatic frenzy to dominate her. The white men displace their own anxieties over their violent and animalistic desires for women upon the black man. The taunting threats hurled at the black men to look and not to look at the vulnerable and exposed body of the blond dancer trapped within a room with countless men impresses upon the reader an anxiety that the white men feel about their own sexual appetites. These white big shots project their own conflicted pleasure of looking at the female body upon the unwilling black participants. Obviously, the white men need to make their aggressive libidinal desires external in order to assuage their brutal sexual wishes. They cannot deal with their violent sexual urges so the white men try to construct the primitive,

oversexed black man that is a threat to white womanhood—a physical foe whom they can master and erase unlike their intangible passions.

Much like the white men from the Battle Royal scene, Mr. Norton displays the need to manipulate bodies, to be a part of the "first-hand organizing of human life" (Ellison 42). This is a fetish that he uses in order to sublimate his incestuous desires for his own daughter. As a white man or Father of the law and civilization, Norton must repress his desire for sexual relations for his own flesh and blood since he created and supports the very kinship structures that deems incest as an unnatural closeness. Like the white men from the battle Royal, Mr. Norton indulges vicariously his incestuous desires through Jim Trueblood. Restricted by the order of the incest taboo, the text does suggest that Mr. Norton may not have fulfilled his sexual appetites with his daughter. In his interview with Trueblood, Mr. Norton asks how he is not troubled by an inner turmoil or a no need to cast out the offending eye. Mr. Norton seems to be bound by the moral implications or the burden of conscience. Unlike Jim Trueblood, Mr. Norton cannot transfer to this space of dangerous freedom; he cannot live outside the structures of law and civilization since in doing so he would rob himself of the power and authority that he possesses thanks to his sex and race. In order to keep the power, he has in the world, then he must support the taboos, mores and social codes on which that power is built.

Jim Trueblood seems to desire the kind of power in the real world that Mr. Norton possesses. In Trueblood's dense dream sequence, his overwhelming economic lusts inform his views of race and gender. Jim goes in search of "fat meat" at the white philanthropist's (Mr. Broadnax) overtly symbolic house on the hill which remains just out of his reach. He goes hunting after the valuables and materials of the real world

rather than waiting for the demoralizing charity of the white man which ultimately reinforces within Jim Trueblood feelings of inadequacy over his role as father and provider for his family. The white Master/Father who dispenses charity works to emasculate black men, which Jim desperately wants to avoid at all costs. The “fat meat” is not merely tied up with material power, but also is directly linked to women. Thus, Trueblood’s economic appetites are tied up with his sexual appetites. The sexual consumption of women and the consumption of food are linked tightly for Trueblood:

Then you hear it close up, like when you in the second-story window and look down on a wagonful of watermelons, and you see one of them young juicy melons split wide open a’layin’ all spread out and cool and sweet on top of all the striped green ones like it’s waitin’ just for you, so you can see how red and ripe and juicy it is and all the shiny seeds it’s got and all. (Ellison 56)

In this passage, Trueblood recollects in detail a wagon of watermelons that he has seen on one of his dates with a former girlfriend. This representation of the fruit is explicitly sexual. The description of the watermelon evokes the image of a woman with her legs “split wide open” and vagina “a’layin’ all” exposed, “spread out waitin’” and tempting someone to consume her. Even Trueblood’s description of this old girlfriend’s compelling sexuality orbits around the watermelon imagery:

Kinda like when you watch a gal in a red dress and a wide straw

hat goin' past you down a lane with the trees on both sides, and she's plump and juicy and kinda switchin' her tail 'cause she knows you watchin' and you know she know, and you just stands there and watches 'til you can't see nothin' but the top of her red hat and then that goes and you know she done dropped behind a hill—I seen me a gal like that once. All I could hear then would be that Mobile gal—name of Margaret—she be breathin' beside me, and maybe 'bout that time she'd say, 'Daddy, you still 'wake? (Ellison 56)

Not only does this passage display Trueblood's conflation of women with food, but it directly expresses his desire for power and potency as "Daddy." Jim's remembrances of his times with Margaret underline his desperate need for economic power which he feels is key to a sense of authority and even a hindrance-free social mobility. Hidden within his lush sensory descriptions, Jim reveals that the indulgence of sensory pleasures was akin to "feelin' like [he] was rich folks" (Ellison 56). The indulgence in bodily and sensory pleasures is linked to economic stability and consequently a sexual prowess that Jim once experienced in a two-story house on the river with Margaret (Ellison 55). The picture Jim paints of life on the river expresses contentment. He and Margaret would lay in bed listening to the music from the boats that was as good as peach brand wine (Ellison 56). When Jim can afford a certain material "success", he acquires is sanctioned not only physical potency but a symbolic potency. However, for Jim to know and feel this power he requires the dependency of and sexual dominance over an Other weaker

than himself, Margaret. In proving or reaching a position of financial "success," Jim is a whole man; he is a "Daddy," in possession of the phallus.

> Trueblood's desire for wholeness and authority is connected to his dream of violating southern taboos. Tired of being denied a symbolic legitimacy and its sexual privileges within the white world, Jim attempts to seize the fat meat, his exclusive property rights over material items and women. Trueblood desires to be the Daddy or Father who has access and deals out the fat meat from his house with its lighted candles and shiny furniture and pictures on the wall (Ellison 57). Coincidentally, the house smells like a woman; the text conflates women and property to underscore Trueblood's desire for the Symbolic power of the Father/Master. The material items create a sexual arousal within Jim; property elicits a sexual response, creating feelings of virility and/or manhood. Yet, since Trueblood is granted a meager degree of economic success through his subordinate relationship to white men, he is continually castrated by their paternalistic involvement, denied him the fullness or wholeness that the acquisition of property would effect. Although Jim is denied material possessions to reflect his maleness, his physical and sexual domination of the women who *belong* to him does signify some degree of his phallic power. Jim's active mastery of Katie and Mattie Lou makes him, literally and figuratively, a Daddy. Both his wife and his daughter are pregnant visibly displaying his potency as Father and Master.

In his critical examination of Ralph Ellison's novel, Houston A. Baker claims that Jim Trueblood, the farmer who rapes and impregnates his daughter, is the only person capable of ensuring an authentic Afro-American lineage" (Baker 78). Baker asserts that Ellison's representation of Jim is essentially a matter of competing phalluses. Trueblood

is attempting to maintain his black phallus outside the white male sexual economy, but that Baker ignores the disturbing sexual politics behind the rape of Matty Lou. Jim Trueblood's act of incest is an indictment of white masculinity. If as Houston Baker asserts, Trueblood's sexual assault against his daughter is "symbolic of a type of royal paternity, an aristocratic procreativity turned inward to ensure the royalty (the truth, the legitimacy, and authenticity) of an enduring, black line of descent," then the sharecropper's rape of his daughter mimics the slave owner's or the Master's notion of fatherhood. The white slave owner was master and father in one who gained his authority through the institution of family. American slave-owning society organized its complex system around the paterfamilias, which extended beyond the nuclear family and conditioned all life, black and white, as personal property subservient to fulfilling the demands of the master/Father. White slave owners broke up families to assume their paternalistic rights/rites with African females who were largely targets of rape to ensure the purity of white womanhood. Whatever the paternity of the offspring, the "child" was figuratively and (in a sense) literally the "personal property" of the white Master/Father. As Hortense Spillers points out in her article "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" that "often the offspring of the female would not belong to the Mother nor is s/he related to the "owner," though the latter possesses it, and in the African-American instance, often fathered it, and, as often, without that very benefit of patrimony" (Spiller 469). White slave owners did not merely steal and objectify bodies but in the process of dehumanization, normative gender categories were erased to extinguish the threat of competing phalluses or masculinities, thereby maintaining the Euro-descendant's identity of superiority built upon the African's alterity. Black slaves were not considered male or

female, but were considered as livestock and/or property. To acknowledge, black male slaves as men would disrupt white men's sense of their maleness; the black male slave was looked at as feminized and powerlessness to authenticate white male's superiority and identity as Male/Father. As Hortense Spillers suggests the "legal enslavement removed the African-American male not so much from sight as from mimetic view as a partner in the prevailing social fiction of the Father's name, the Father's law" (Spiller 479). Jim Trueblood participates in the social fiction of the Father; he is in direct competition with white men to inflict violence on black women. Looking at the sexual assault of black women as a means of achieving the black phallus, as Houston Baker does, willfully ignores how male sexual identity is built upon the violent objectification, physical mutilation and arrested sexuality of black women. The "royal paternity or an aristocratic procreativity" affirmed by Baker is actually a destructive masculinity predicated not merely on violence against women but their erasure as well.

Trueblood does not rape his daughter because of the overwhelming state of his poverty, which is an argument that I wish to avoid since: (1) it reduces acts of incest to an economic matter and (2) furthermore, it ducks the gender politics working that shapes Jim's desire for economic success in ways that result in Mattie Lou's rape. Jim plainly admits that he actively took pleasure in the rape of his daughter even suggesting that she wanted the sexual encounter (Ellison 60). Trueblood replicates the violent white masculinity that not merely subordinates women but works to erase their subjectivity. The juxtaposition of Trueblood with the white Northerner, Mr. Norton, functions to criticize the ubiquitous notions of white Fatherhood or white masculinity. Mr. Norton is heavily dependent upon the organization of Negroes, which is connected in intimate ways

with his destiny (Ellison 41). Norton's concerns with Negro life, revolves around his own purpose and identity rather than with the young, black students of the college. He even goes so far as to assume the vision of the great Founder of the college (i.e. Booker T. Washington) was his own (Ellison 39). Ultimately, Mr. Norton nurtures his own identity and interests rather than in nurturing the black students. The philanthropist's frequent use of the "your people," "my people" rhetoric reveals Mr. Norton's dependency upon the Other to establish and legitimize his own identity (Ellison 41). Mr. Norton's organization of human life divulges a prurient longing. The philanthropist needs to attend to the White man's burden of (mis) educating his black sons in order to assuage his guilt over his incestuous desires for his daughter. Norton's philanthropic obsession with the black students functions as a form of sublimation. The erection and maintenance of black college is a "living memorial to [his dead] daughter" who was "so rare, more beautiful, purer, more perfect and delicate than the wildest dream of a poet" that "[he] found it difficult to believe her [his] own" (Ellison 42). Norton's paternalistic concern for his black sons is just a vehicle to purge his own perverted sexual desires to "drink and drink and drink again from [his daughter's] beauty which was the wellspring and purest water-of-life" (Ellison 42). The philanthropist's sensual and lush descriptions of his offspring combined with his inability to utter the words "my own daughter" visibly outline the man's erotic attachment to his child.

Mr. Norton's participation and abidance in the Great [Paternalistic] Traditions provides him with the freedom to indulge vicariously in his incestuous desires through Jim Trueblood's tale of incest:

" I wakes up intendin' to tell the ole lady 'bout some crazy dream. Morning

done come, and it's getting' most light. And, there I am, lookin' straight in Matty Lou's face and she's beatin' me and scratchin' me and tremblin' and shakin' and cryin' all at the same time like she's havin' a fit. I'm too surprised to move. She's cryin', 'Daddy, Daddy, oh Daddy,' just like that. And all at once I remember the ole lady. She's right beside us snorin' and I can't move 'cause I figgers if I move it maybe aint no sin 'cause it happened when I was asleep—although maybe sometime a man can look at a little ole pigtail gal and see him a whore—you'all know that? Anyway, I realizes that if I don't move the ole will see me. I don't want that to happen. That would be worse then sin. I'm whisperin' to Matty Lou, tryin' to keep her quiet and I'm figurin' how to git myself out of the fix I'm in without sinnin'. I almost chokes her." (Ellison 59)

Like the white male voyeurs before him, Norton becomes visibly excited with his "intent stare" and "bright burning eyes" as he relishes in his temporary identification with Trueblood and his incestuous fulfillment. The philanthropist can finally purge the incestuous desires that he has concealed from the white world in the presence of his "Other" half, Trueblood. Despite the three-dimensional and fleshy quality of Trueblood, he seems to represent Norton's "black" desires that are loathsome and disgusting to the philanthropist yet nevertheless an aspect of the white man's repressed longings. The meeting with Jim is orgasmic for Mr. Norton; physically shaking and unable to break the specular connection with Trueblood, Mr. Norton pays Jim one hundred dollars for meeting the obscene requirements that the philanthropist desperately desired to purge.

Mr. Norton pays for his sexual stimulation, but the exchange of money suggests more than erotic titillation. Rather, the philanthropist's payment functions as an absolution from his feelings of guilt over his imagined and/or real incestuous desires. Even the white men living within the town bestow some kind of financial contribution towards Trueblood's situation to pardon their purely voyeuristic pleasure: "I went to the jailhouse and give Sheriff Barbour the note and he ask me to tell him what happen, and I tole him and he called in some more men and they made me tell it again. They wanted to hear about the gal lots of times and they gimme somethin' to eat and drink and some tobacco. Surprised me, 'cause I was scared and spectin' somethin' different" (Ellison 53).

Trueblood's story becomes a form of mass-marketed pedophilia for the white men's consumption which, after many performances of the tale, is refined specifically into a form of merchandise for white men's masturbation. The rape of Matty Lou is an example of both the white men and Jim Trueblood participating in establishing a sexual license for men to eroticize an ownership of women. The sensation of maleness (or rather the sensation of possessing the phallus) derives from owning the bodies of women. The holding of "personal property," the treatment of bodies as objects, is a form of phallic eroticism, which strictly maintains the boundaries between male/active/subject/owner and female/passive/object/owned.

Not only is Norton blinded to the traditions and morals of [white] society that he must represent as he listens with rapt attention to the details of Matty Lou's victimization at the hands of her father, but Trueblood, himself, attempts to absolve himself of his responsibility. Jim fails miserably to acknowledge his violence against his daughter, insisting his position that he was in an altered state of sleep. It was not done consciously

therefore he did not sin against Matty Lou. And even more important, contends that if he does not move then he cannot be blamed for such an abominable act. It is this weird configuration of not moving that is particularly alarming. Jim Trueblood has already sinned with his penetration of his daughter so moving in his conscious state would not make him guilt free. To move for Trueblood means to admit his pleasure in the sexual assault of his daughter. Yet, Jim discloses that he consciously had desires for Matty Lou, which led to his pathetic rationalization of the dream-sin to absolve himself. Within his masturbatory re-telling of Matty Lou's rape, Jim admits to Norton and the narrator about feeling threatened by a young boy paying attention to Matty Lou: "I was thinking 'bout how to git some grub for the next day and 'bout the gal and the young boy what was startin' to hang 'round her. I didn't like him and he kept comin' through my thoughts and I made up my mind to warn him away from the gal." Under the guise of paternalistic concern, Trueblood's words reveal his libidinal lusts for his child.

Through self-deception, Jim tries to disavow his very conscious desires for his daughter by rationalizing that a dream-sin led him to such an unspeakable horror where any movement would condemn him the worst kind of sinner. If he moves then he sins; if he does not withdraw from Matty Lou then his wife will discover him, which would be a worse sin—a blood sin. Jim constructs a situation to convince himself that he has no control over the rape of Matty Lou: "I know there ain't nothin' like what I went through, I cain't tell how it was. It's like when a real drinkin' man gits drunk, or like when a real sanctified religious woman gits so worked up she jumps outta her clothes, or when a real gamblin' man keeps on gamblin' when he's losin'. You got holt of it and you cain't let go even though you want to" (Ellison 60). Trueblood tries to make himself believe that

external forces are greater than himself. Mattie Lou is this force that has seduced him; she is a whore in the guise of a little girl with pigtails. In an attempt to disavow the sexual craving for violence against his daughter, Trueblood projects the blame onto the victim for corrupting and exciting his senses and judgment like alcohol, gambling and religion effect upon an individual. After all, Jim has no desire to hold himself accountable for the rape of his daughter since to admit wrong would effect a castration: "There was only one way I can figger that I could git out: that was with a knife. But I didn't have no knife, and if you'all ever see them geld them young boar pigs in the fall, you know I knowed that that was too much to pay to keep from sinnin'" (Ellison 60). It is in the act of fucking his daughter that Jim feels real, like a real man, since to withdraw from Matty Lou would mean being gelded like a boar. The conviction of Trueblood's maleness lies in his genitals, or rather the social ideas and meanings constructed behind the penis. Jim does not desire to lose his genitals, to lose the symbol of his power and legitimacy over women. Trueblood is oblivious to all consequences, including moral and corporal punishment, since as a male it is within his right to fulfill his male sexual identity in order to feel wholeness, vitality and realness. Jim's rape of his daughter was a matter of him realizing his own maleness through the sexual subordination of Matty Lou: "All I know is I ends up singin' the blues. I sings me some blues that night ain't never been sang before, and while I'm singin' them blues I makes up my mind that I ain't nobody but myself and ain't nothin' I can do but let whatever is gonna happen, happen. ...I'm a man and a man don't leave his family" (Ellison 66). Matty Lou's victimization is necessary to re-create a certainty about his gender identity and more importantly to produce what he desperately envies in the white man, the possession of the phallus.

There seems to be little difference between these two Fathers, Mr. Norton and Jim Trueblood, according to the narrator. The narrator's innocence registers in horror the brutal lived fantasies of these incestuous fathers, which ultimately reveals the destructiveness of their phallic energies. The invisible man creates a distance between the "crazy rich man who might be the tiniest bit crazy" and the "shamefully fascinating Trueblood" (Ellison 44, 68). As readers, we not only detect the striking similarities that Ellison emphasizes between the actions/fantasies of the two men, but we can read the humor behind the Golden Day veteran's mad ramblings and the "Negro doctor's" diagnosis of Mr. Norton's "mild case of hysteria." Dr. Burnside's diagnosis of Mr. Norton's physical condition, mild hysteria, makes it obvious to the reader that Mr. Norton merely performs mock disgust over Trueblood's tale of incest to keep up appearance of the morally righteous Father (Ellison 81). Yet the Golden Day veterans do not let Mr. Norton's moral performance go off without a hitch. Not only do the men react indifferently to the white man's medical condition, but the mentally ill men reproach the "founding Father's" violence and cruelty toward black men and women:

As we carried him toward the Golden Day one of the men stopped suddenly and Mr. Norton's head hung down, his white hair dragging in the dust. "Gentlemen, this man is my grandfather!"

"But he's white, his name's Norton."

"I should know my own grandfather! He's Thomas Jefferson and I'm his grandson—on the 'field-nigger' side," the tall man said.

Sylvester, I do believe that you're right. I certainly do," he said,

Staring at Mr. Norton. "Look at those features. Exactly like yours—

from the identical mold. Are you sure he didn't spit you upon the earth, fully clothed?" (Ellison 78)

The very image of Norton and his "mast of whiteness" are meant to recall those physical and sexual assaults of the white forefathers like Thomas Jefferson upon black women, female slaves. But I think that Ellison desires to link all three Fathers as similar in their actions. Ellison's juxtaposition of these three fathers—Mr. Norton, Jim Trueblood and Thomas Jefferson—implies that the founding of the United States was built upon the sexual violation of black women by white and black men to produce themselves as Fathers. While bringing to the forefront the years of abuse and rape endured by black women, this passage pays particular attention to the effects of such violence (i.e. rape) upon the black man rather than textually linking such recollections to black female characters. The dialogue between the two veterans is obviously painful indicating that they suffer psychically knowing that they cannot claim possibly their paternity or even fulfill their traditional "manly" duties. Despite possibly identical physical characteristics, Sylvester cannot claim any kinship ties; he cannot claim publicly and legally the white man as his grandfather or father since he is visibly black. Ultimately, Sylvester's responses suggest a desire to stave off a kinlessness and its castrative effects. Obviously, the dialogue implies that Sylvester is not concerned with his maternal line or roots. Rather, he does not wish to lose a sense of familial meaning or kinship, and his position in it as a male and a possible Father. Ellison's text deals with black (and even white) women only insofar as the conditions of womanhood affect the experience of the black man. Once again, Ellison's text alludes to and sympathizes with black and white women,

but ultimately the women become a background upon which the men unfurl their psychic and emotional scars.

Ultimately, Ellison's representations of black and white women fall into abstraction. Despite his narrator's exploration and critique of invisibility, Ellison depicts what it means to be a black man in America, and not a black woman, thereby evading the full exploration of the political intersections of race and gender. The narrator's search for identity and meaning in his life as a black man is enabled by the very women, black and white, with whom he comes into contact. In this sense, Ellison's text replicates the very invisibility on the terrain of gender that he sought to deconstruct in the racial domain. Black women are doubly invisible due not only to their blackness but also to their gender. Ellison's *Invisible Man* does not delve into the experiences and conditions of black (or white) women, but produces flat, generic representations of women that ultimately function to erase the complicated and obviously differently socialized experiences of black and white women.

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Curriculum Vita

Nicole Batchelor

1906 Livingston St.
Bethlehem, PA 18017
610-691-5667

Birth Place: Newport News, VA
DOB: November 3, 1977
Parents: William and Cathleen Batchelor

Education

LEHIGH UNIVERSITY
Masters of Arts, English, Expected—May 2003

ALBRIGHT COLLEGE
Bachelor of Arts, English and History, June 2000

Experience

GRINGRICH LIBRARY
Circulation Desk Mgr., Fall '97- Spring 2000
Responsibilities included: delegating circulation and shelving duties; small clerical duties, circulation transactions, distribution of library cards, reference & research work.

LEHIGH UNIVERSITY COMPOSITION INSTRUCTOR
English 1: Composition and Literature Fall 2000
English 2: Gender and Performance Spring 2001
Self as Cultural Artifact Fall 2001
Our Hideous Progeny: The Origin and Power of Deviance Spring 2002
The Individual and the Institution Fall 2002
Narrative as Cultural Artifact Spring 2003

Honors and Activities

Sigma Tau Delta: English Honor Society
VP of Fellowship Alpha Phi Omega: Community Service Organization
Short Fiction Editor of Agon: English Literary Magazine
Assistant Director of Agon Coffeehouse

Writing Intensive Projects

The Disruptive Excess of Cordelia Masters Thesis
Ralph Ellison's Invisible Women Masters Thesis

**END OF
TITLE**