



Perception, Visibility, and Invisibility in Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man¹



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Abstract

This study analyses three essential motifs which are perception, visibility and invisibility and how their relationships determine and legislate the interracial relationships between whites and blacks in Ralph Ellison's novel, *INVISIBLE MAN*. Through insightful analysis, this paper aims to show how from a visible status in existence, the perception that white people have about black people transforms this visibility into an invisible status both in human existence and society and namely in the white American society. And also it aims to clear out how this metamorphosis of black people from visibility to invisibility at first based on white people's perception, is principally based and due to their color of skin, and to another "Blackness" of Black people or African-Americans color of skin. Creating a real problem of existence and identity for black people through the question: "do I exist?", the refusal of such perception and invisibility constructed by racism, stereotypes, prejudices and the concept of white people superiority will oblige black people to struggle for their visibility, their true existence, their identity and recognition by white people as an equal human being. And to achieve this goal or to well conduct this struggle, Ellison advises a metaphorical weapon which is "light".

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¹ Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the second vintage international edition of March 1995 or on that of Vintage Book Edition. (The Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust or on that of Vintage Book Edition), March 1995. Copyright-1947-1948-1952 by Ralph Ellison. The title of the novel will be written in this typography in this paper.

1 Introduction

Developing the notion of black people invisibility as a major and central theme^b in his “experimental novel”^c *INVISIBLE MAN*, Ralph Ellison evokes the question of African Americans' existence, status, identity and value in the white American society. And at large, he evokes the question of any black human existence, status, identity, and value in a world controlled and dominated by white people.

More specifically, the problems of black people's invisible existence and identity experienced by Ralph Ellison in the racist American society are so real and topical that he cannot prevent himself to state that his major character (the protagonist-narrator) is invisible in the society in which he lives. And to better characterize this realistic aspect, he even assigns him (the major character) the name “Invisible Man”^d.

Indeed, the motif of invisibility being central to the meaning of the novel; it plays a key role in questioning the existence of the protagonist-narrator (a black man) as a human being as well as the other human beings (white people) of his living environment or the society. Such a perpetual questioning on the existence^e in turn highlights three important interrelated themes in the same novel which are the themes of perception, visibility, and invisibility.

Because as a careful reading of a scene^f from the novel may let us observe; those three entities play together by examining their interactions. And it is important to know their relationships and especially to know how those three entities work together to construct “an invisible existence to black human being” in general. That is why the first fundamental question in this paper is, therefore, to know how perception can construct^g someone's visibility or invisibility in society?

Set up in the context of the American society, we realize that this notion of invisibility linked to “Invisible Man” the major character, not only foreshadows the racial relationships between white people and black people in terms of superiority and inferiority, but it describes, denounces and reveals the margin place and the status that black people have in the white American society as it is the case for the protagonist in the novel.

... the Negro problem of identity and existence in the postwar American Negro novel with special reference to the saga of survival and invisibility of a nameless young black man in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* ... this man living, in a blind, nihilistic, and a racist American world denies his existence and reducing him almost to a non-entity making him ever more restless, possessed and exhausted.^h

Encapsulating the notion of invisibility, the first sentence “I am an invisible man” is a riddle for both the meaning of the whole novel and its interpretation. Moreover, it is the first expression that puts forth the notions of perception, visibility, and invisibility simply when we consider the simple question: how someone who exists, in reality, can be at the same time invisible in the society or an invisible man? In other words, how can this person move from visibility in existence to invisibility in society? We observe that these important questions let us comprehend the role played by the notion of perceptionⁱ, and how perception can move someone from visibility (in existence, in the real world) to invisibility in the society ([Sesko & Biernat, 2010](#)).

Analogously, we may argue that the first sentence of the novel (“I am an invisible man”) as a fundamental sentence set at the beginning of the prologue introduces us to a major contradiction through the meaning of the

^b This theme is central simply because the words “invisible”, “invisibility”, and the expressions “I am an invisible man”, “I am invisible”, “my invisibility”, “invisible man”, “that invisibility”, “an invisible man” appear several times at the beginning of the novel (the prologue) and control the sense and orientation of the narration of the prologue and of the whole novel.

^c Jennifer DeVere Brody, “The Blackness of Blackness . . . Reading the Typography of *Invisible Man*” in *Theatre Journal* 57 by The Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 679–698, © 2005.

^d “Invisible Man” is the name of the protagonist-narrator and the major character in the novel *INVISIBLE MAN*. And the name of the protagonist-narrator or major character will be written this way or by this typography in this paper.

^e “ Or again, you often doubt if you really exist” p. 4.

^f The scene of his encounter with a white man one night: “One night I accidentally bumped into a man, and perhaps because of the near darkness he saw me and called me an insulting name . . . a man almost killed by a phantom”.

^g create something in mind: to create something such as a theory as a result of systematic thought

^h Khamis Khalaf Mohammad, “Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*: A Quest of Identity”, Abstract, January 2018 on [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331745357 Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man A Quest of Identity](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331745357_Ralph_Ellison's_Invisible_Man_A_Quest_of_Identity) visited on April 16, 2020.

ⁱ Perception being an intuition of the mind on <https://newlearningonline.com/new-learning/chapter-7/descartes-i-think-therefore-i-am>

expression itself^f. Because in this sentence “I am an invisible man”, the visibility through the expression “I am” and at the same time the invisibility through the expression “an invisible man” obliges us to ask the second fundamental question in this paper which is indeed the central problematic: How white people perception constructs invisibility for black people in the society while they do exist in the real world?

Based on the hermeneutic approach, the larger project of this essay is, therefore, to know specifically, how white people's perception about black people constructs black people's invisibility or “an invisible man” as it is the case for the major character? Or again, how white people's perception of black people can shift black people from visibility in existence to invisibility in the society in which they live or from a visible existence to an invisible existence in the society?

The theoretical background that will be used in analyzing black people invisibility will be theories such as African American criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, and stylistics and as approach; it will be a hermeneutics analysis meaning the critical interpretation of the way white people perception about black people shifts black people from visibility in existence to invisibility in society or from a visible existence in reality to an invisible existence in human life and society (Tallal, 1980; DeLoache *et al.*, 1979; Carmon & Nachshon, 1973).

It is important to precise in terms of theoretical background that stylistics is important here because Ralph Ellison veiled his message about the notion of black people invisibility principally through metaphors^k, irony^l, symbols^m, images, and rhetoric such as contradiction.

African American criticism is useful in this study because it is the African American who is invisible in the American society, this invisibility is mainly performed and experienced in whites and blacks relationships, in race relation problems, and the pursuit of the American dream. And finally, the African-Americans are the main concern by the notion of invisibility and its drawbacks through the protagonist-narrator in the white American society.

Psychoanalytic criticism is very important for two main reasons. First, this theory is important because of the notion of perception, which is considered as an intuition of the mind, the mental picture that white people have about black people; meaning the way white people conceive in their mind, intuition and *inner* eyes black people in the society. Second, this theory is important because black people react to this status of invisibility. Indeed, how black people and namely African Americans are affected by the fact to exist and at the same time to be invisible in the society in which they live because due to this invisibility cast on them they sometimes doubt their real existence.

The concepts of human existence and perception being central in this study, it is necessary to clarify that to better cope with those interrelated questions and the central problematic, this study will revolve around three key issues that will constitute the blueprint of our analysis:

Firstly, it will be important to understand why the main character identifies himself as “Invisible Man” and how does it come that he identifies himself as “Invisible Man”? This first issue will tackle the aspect or notion of perception, meaning the way white people look at him and refuse to see him.

Secondly, it will be very important to look for the reasons why the main character is invisible or why the main character seems to be invisible? Through this second issue, we will scrutinize the causes of his invisibility in society and therefore analyze the aspects of the color of skin, *Blackness of Blackness*, and humanless status.

Thirdly and finally, it will be important to analyze why Ralph Ellison advises the metaphor of light to solve this invisibility or the problem of black people invisibility? Why light is the solution to solve the invisibility of black people and the like such as identity and recognition in society? In clear terms, why “light” is important and necessary in black people struggle for visibility, true existence, identity and recognition as equal human beings by white people? Through this last issue, we will consider the riddle saying that “Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form” while admitting that light chases “blackness” or darkness.

^j Of course his existence through the expression “I am” becomes automatically invisible through the expression “an invisible man”

^k The main metaphor of his invisibility resides in the sentence “I am an invisible man”.

^l The story of his encounter with a man one night: “One night I accidentally bumped into a man, and perhaps because of the near darkness he saw me and called me an insulting name ... a man almost killed by a phantom”.

^m Many symbols pertain the prologue (invisibility, visibility, light, darkness, blackness, power etc.)

2 From Visibility in Existence to Invisibility in Human Existence Society

Described as being an intuition of the mindⁿ, generally speaking, the perception (mental picture, impression) that someone has about you can create your visibility or your invisibility: meaning either he considers you; either he does not consider you.

And namely, in Ellison's text the perception that white people have about African Americans (or Black people) constructs^o their invisibility^p (black people invisibility) as human beings among white people on the one hand. And on the other hand, the perception that white people have about African Americans (or Black people) constructs^q also their invisibility as individuals and members of the society in which they live and which is controlled and dominated by white people.

Characterized by the image "inner eyes" and which we may consider as a metaphor, the notion of perception is an important factor that determines and accompanies the relationship between white people on the one hand and the relationship between white people and black people on the other hand. This notion of perception^r that we may define as "their inner eyes"^s in the context of the novel is a central key to comprehend efficiently the invisibility put on black people through the mind of the white people. Because this central key sets both the context and the decor of this (fiction-reality) novel about "Invisible Man" and the kind of behavior white people have toward black people in general. And the protagonist-narrator is very clear about the fact that his invisibility is due to the perception that white people have about him when he clearly says:

That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their *inner eyes*, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality.^t

The perception that white people have about black people permits them not to consider black people in the society or to "refuse to see" black people in the society occasioning a kind of invisibility of black people or a kind of invisibility of the black man: "I am invisible, understand, simply because [white] people refuse to see me."^u

In clear terms, while he exists or "do exist in the real world", while he is visible in existence through their "physical eyes" because he is "a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids"^v, the perception of white people or the "inner eyes" of white people renders him invisible in human existence and society. And this attitude creates a new reality in which it is as if he has an invisible existence to other people's minds namely to white people's minds: "You wonder whether you aren't simply a phantom in other people's minds. Say, a figure in a nightmare which the sleeper tries with all his strength to destroy."^w

And practically speaking, such invisibility puts on the black man in the society and his relationships with white people causes a real problem to the black man existence as to question himself and doubt about his real existence or his true existence among other human beings namely white people: "Or again, you often doubt if you exist."^x

ⁿ <https://newlearningonline.com/new-learning/chapter-7/descartes-i-think-therefore-i-am>

^o Create their invisibility or contribute to their invisibility as human being.

^p In reference to the expression "my invisibility" used by the protagonist narrator "Invisible Man"

^q Create their invisibility or contribute to their invisibility as human being.

^r The notion of perception refers to the semantic of the sentence: "a matter of the construction of their *inner eyes*" in *INVISIBLE MAN*, (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p.3.

^s Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p.3.

^t Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p.3.

^u Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p.3.

^v "I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids -- and I might even be said to possess a mind."

^w Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN*, (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p.4.

^x Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p.4.

That is why, in the sentence or expression “I am an invisible man”, we should understand simply that the “I am” means that he exists, he is visible in existence so he has a visible existence. Then the perception or “*inner eyes*” of white people renders him “an invisible man” therefore he has an invisible existence both in human existence and in the society. That is why he has despite his visible existence an invisible existence between human beings and among individuals of the society he belongs to.

In conclusion, we can say that on the one hand, we should understand simply that the “I am” in the expression “I am an invisible man” means that the black man exists which also means “to be” which in turn means finally; his visibility too.

And we should, on the other hand, understand simply that the expression “I am invisible”, means that the black man despite his visible existence is not considered as part of human beings and not considered as individual and member of the society which in turn means finally; his invisibility too.

I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination -- indeed, everything and anything except me.”^y

Indeed, being part of a society means to be taken into account, to be valued as a human being with the same rights, facilities, opportunities, respect, love, and humanity but here it is not the case for “Invisible Man” the protagonist-narrator who is valued and considered as a “thing”, “a thing and not a man; a child, or even less--a black amorphous thing”^z and who dwells in an “I-It relationships”:

A helpful way to understand the Invisible Man as a character is to use the ideas of the noted twentieth-century Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber. Buber distinguishes between I-Thou relationships and I-It relationships. When we love someone, there is an I-Thou relationship, one between two individuals who truly care for one another as persons. In an I-It relationship, we use others as things. We like people for what we can get out of them. If you apply this idea to Ellison’s central character, you may conclude that he is invisible because people always see him as an “It,” never as a “Thou.”^{aa}

Of course, white people’s perception (*inner eyes*) moves him from a visible existence to an invisible existence among human beings and in the society because with their physical eyes, he does exist and he is visible. So with their physical eyes, he is part of the existence but the problem of black people's existence and invisibility resides through the *inner eyes* of white people because it is there that the black man is invisible. It is there that the black man is invisible as an equal human being and also invisible as an individual and a member of the same society. And the narrator is clear about this fact:

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

Such a permanent perception, such as permanent invisibility and the doubt that accompanies one’s^{cc} true existence among other people (white people) is clearly noticed at the beginning of the prologue through the contradiction between the fact “to be” and at the same time to be “an invisible man” through the sentence: “I am an invisible man.”

^y Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p.3.

^z Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p.95.

^{aa} Anthony S. Abbott, *RALPH ELLISON’S THE INVISIBLE MAN*, (C) Copyright 1985 by Barron’s Educational Series, Inc., p. 21.

^{bb} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p.3.

^{cc} We mean by “one’s” : Black people true existence

He realizes man's invisibility; in this case, the narrator's lies in society and imposed rules. Therefore, the vet addresses the narrator as a 'walking zombie', 'a black amorphous thing', 'a walking personification of the Negative', 'the mechanical man', who 'has eyes and ears', but 'fails to understand the simple facts of life' (94). He is rejected and 'unseen' by the society both as an Afro-American and an individual^{dd}

In white people's minds, "Invisible Man" is not a human being but "a walking zombie, a black amorphous thing, a walking personification of the Negative, the mechanical man". He is only an object, visible in existence but invisible in human existence and in human society as a human being endowed by human beings' values. Simply because in white people's minds, it is not sure he "possesses a mind": "Understand. *Understand?* It's worse than that. He registers with his senses but short-circuits his brain. Nothing has meaning. He takes it in but he doesn't digest it."^{ee} Indeed, it is a puzzle he possesses a mind that is why he says: "-- and I might even be said to possess a mind" because it is something to be verified, that is why white people refuse to see him, they don't recognize him as a human being part of human existence and part of human society.

Ellison's character depiction includes many postwar existentialist elements, which are an emphasis on a character's vulnerability, inauthenticity, loss of identity, and search for identity and struggle for visibility in mass society. 'Two major aspects could be considered while analyzing it in greater detail, namely the narrator's struggle for visibility and acknowledgment both as a human being and as an Afro-American' ([Mazlaveckiene, 2010](#)).^{ff} BECAUSE

A reading of Ellison's novel suggests that the theme of invisibility has different dimensions: (a) Invisibility suggests the unwillingness of others to see the individual as a person. The narrator is invisible because people see in him only what they want to see, not what he is. Invisibility, in this sense, has a strong sense of racial prejudice. White people often do not see black people as individual human beings.^{gg}

The controversial existence, controversial status, controversial identity and controversial value of the black man "Invisible Man" characterized mainly by a visible existence in real life and at the same time an invisible existence in human life and white American society can be represented by the scheme as follows:

physical eyes of White people	is	visible	in	existence	as	object
	is	body	in	physical existence	as	
			↓			
			versus			
			↓			
inner eyes of White people	is	invisible	in	human existence human society	as	Not a human being or

^{dd} Yildiray Cevik, "The Motifs of Blindness and Invisibility within the Influence of Postwar Existentialism as Reflected in *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison" Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: LIT2012-0278. (2012), p. 9.

^{ee} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p.94.

^{ff} Yildiray Cevik, "The Motifs of Blindness and Invisibility within the Influence of Postwar Existentialism as Reflected in *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison" Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: LIT2012-0278. (2012), p. 7.

^{gg} Anthony S. Abbott, *RALPH ELLISON'S THE INVISIBLE MAN*, (C) Copyright 1985, by Barron's Educational Series, Inc., p. 45.

or White people's minds						Not an individual and member of the society
	is	phantom	in	Abstract life Abstract existence Abstract society	as	
			↓ result			
			↓			
Physical eyes	↔	↔	↔	<i>Inner eyes</i>		
↓		↓		↓		
From visibility (in existence)	↔	↔ ↓	↔	To invisibility (society and human existence)		
		Result into a problem ↓				
		↓				
I do really exist in the real world or I don't really exist in the real world						

This problem of controversial existence that the black man is facing because of the invisibility sheds on him through the perception that white people have about him; is reinforced by the “anomalous position” white people give to him in the “American society” because of this same invisibility.

In the thirty years since its original publication, *INVISIBLE MAN* has become firmly established as an American classic, not only as a triumph of storytelling and characterization but also as a profound and uncompromising interpretation of Negro’s anomalous position in American society^{hh}

The perception that white people have about him [what he is “in other people's minds”] creates a problem of invisibility for the protagonist-narrator (a black man). And this problem of invisibility creates as a cause and effect relationships a problem of existence for him for “you often doubt if you exist”) and as a concrete result; this problem of invisibility creates consequently a problem of an “anomalous position” in the society in which he lives.

The motif of invisibility treats a black man’s situation in the United States. For a long time, an Afro-American’s individuality was ignored by society, and the narrator in *Invisible Man* faces the same problem. For centuries blacks were oppressed by the whites and treated as inferior creatures, a cheap workforce, and ‘a flock of invisible people’ (Juozapaitytė, 2001). Afro-Americans were considered as people of lower social and intellectual status: they were not allowed the same possibilities as the white people, like receiving education, participating in public events, even deciding upon their future. They were simply deprived of their individuality (Juozapaitytė, 2001).ⁱⁱ

Invisibility, the problem of existence and “anomalous position” in the society oblige black people to fight or to struggle all their existence or during their lifetime. Indeed, black people fight for their visibility in the “inner eyes” of white people or their visibility “in [white] people's minds” so that to make themselves visible by them. But also all their existence or during their lifetime, black people fight to persuade themselves that they do exist (or have a true existence like the others in the world). And consequently, all their existence or during their lifetime, black people fight for their recognition (consideration and respect as human beings and as part of the world and society). We observe therefore that they are at least confronted with three kinds of fighting in their life: a fight for visibility in

^{hh} Forewords of the edition of the novel *INVISIBLE MAN* published by Random House, (New York: Random House, Copyright 1952).

ⁱⁱ Yildiray Cevik, “The Motifs of Blindness and Invisibility within the Influence of Postwar Existentialism as Reflected in *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison” Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: LIT2012-0278. (2012), p. 8.

human existence and society as equal human beings (so a fight from visibility to visibility^{jj}); a fight for a real existence among human beings in the society; and a fight for recognition and good position as human beings in the society as well as white people:

VISIBILITY + EXISTENCE + RECOGNITION

“You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you're a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you. And, alas, it's seldom successful.”^{kk}

Considering this testimony on the part of “Invisible Man” the main character, the question that arises from the observation we made about his effort to be visible is, therefore, the following: why is it seldom successful? Or again, why are black people still invisible in human existence and society and namely in the white American society despite all their effort to be visible?

In the following part, we will see how black people (or the black man) invisibility thanks to the perception that white people have about them (or him) is inherent and linked to the color of their skin (*Blackness*) or the color of their race and how this invisibility and color of skin work together to deprive an identity to black people in the society or to influence the identity that black people should have in the society.

3 Black People Invisibility, Color of Skin, and Identity are Intrinsically Linked and Work Together

Drawing a relation to the analysis above, we recognize the main character as a human being but he reclaims himself *invisible*^{ll} “understand, simply because people refuse to see me” and namely “understand, simply because *white people* refuse to see *him*”. So when analyzing the first cause or reason why he claims himself invisible, we can say that his invisibility is related to the refusal of other people (white people) to see him. White people refuse to see him not with their physical eyes [because with these physical eyes they do see him for they are not blind] but with “their *inner* eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality”^{mmm}.

It means clearly that he does exist but he is not part of *reality* for the white people so that with the physical eyes, he is not invisible (he is part of existence) but with the *inner* eyes, he is invisible (he is not part of *reality* meaning human existence and human society). This clarity lets us imagine that there is a *reality* dedicated to the *inner* eyes which are quite different from the reality of the physical eyes or rather the *reality* (true reality) is dedicated to the *inner* eyes and is a *reality* quite different from the apparent reality of the physical eyes.

This kind of two realities (*reality* dedicated to the *inner* eyes and reality of the physical eyes) shed light on the numerous dualities in the prologue such as (physical eyes / *inner* eyes); (they see only my surroundings / except me); (people refuse to see me / people see me (he saw me)ⁿⁿ); (I am a man / I am an invisible man); (I am a man of substance / I am invisible).

And because it is the *inner* eyes which is related to *reality* and it is also that *inner* eyes which render him *invisible*, we are obliged to ask ourselves those following questions: why do white people refuse to see him with their *inner* eyes so that he becomes invisible in the *reality* or again, why do white people refuse to see him in the reality as if he is not part of this reality?

To respond to those questions means simply to find the real and true cause or reason why white people exactly perceive him as invisible in the *reality* and with their *inner* eyes and at a larger sphere, why exactly white people perceive all black people as invisible men. And to those questions, the protagonist-narrator answers that for him; his invisibility (or black people invisibility) is due to “*the 'Blackness of Blackness.'*”:

“*Brothers and sisters, my text this morning is the 'Blackness of Blackness.'*”

^{jj} from visibility in existence to visibility in human existence and human society.

^{kk} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p.4.

^{ll} “I am invisible” in *INVISIBLE MAN*, p.3.

^{mmm} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p.3.

ⁿⁿ “One night I accidentally bumped into a man, and perhaps because of the near darkness he saw me and called me an insulting name” in *INVISIBLE MAN*, p. 4.

And a congregation of voices answered: "That blackness is most black, brother, most black . . ."
"In the beginning . . ."
"At the very start," they cried.
". . . there was blackness . . ."
"Preach it . . ."^{oo}

In clear terms, the real or true cause and the reason why white people perceive the protagonist-narrator (black people) as invisible is the notion of "*Blackness of Blackness.*" We observe clearly that Ralph Ellison develops a new theory related to the invisibility of black people through the relationship between the same repeated word which is the word "*Blackness*" [a metaphor and symbol of black people invisibility].

The major character or "Invisible Man" is black and this "*Blackness*"^{pp} [the fact to be black: his color of skin] has another "*Blackness*"^{qq} or is surrounding by another "*Blackness*"^{rr} [which is a kind of darkness] that prevents him to be seen or that allows him to be invisible to white people.

More specifically in this new theory^{ss}: "*the 'Blackness of Blackness'*"; we have the following relationship: "*the 'Blackness'*" (the first one) is related to a kind of shadow or a kind of darkness and "*of Blackness*" (the second one) is related to the color of the skin of any black man and this color is the color black. Therefore we have two levels of "*Blackness'*":

First "*Blackness'*" = the darkness which hides his value as a human being (or as a black human being). "*That blackness is most black, brother, most black . . .*" because it prevents him to be visible, to be considered as human being and individual in the society; and it obliges him to be invisible.

Second "*Blackness'*" = the color of the skin (which is black because he is a black man). This second "*Blackness'*" is natural and through it, he is visible as an object, a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids.

- 1) "*Blackness'*" because he is invisible [no value, no identity, no rights, not a human being]
- 2) "*Blackness'*" because he is black [color of skin]

By examining this new theory, we realize that being black leads to a "*Blackness'*" and being invisible [people refuse to see me] is the result of a second or another "*Blackness'*" that is why we conclude in terms of the relationship that:

- 1) Physical eyes lead to a *blackness* equal to a person who is black, the color of skin, the black race or the "darker brother".
- 2) *Inner* eyes lead to another *blackness* equal to invisibility, not human being, and no value, no identity, no respect, no right, no consideration, etc.

When coming back to the different dualities or ambivalence^{tt} we mentioned above [(physical eyes / *inner* eyes); (they see only my surroundings / except me); (people refuse to see me / people see me (he saw me)^{uu}); (I am a man / I am an invisible man); (I am a man of substance / I am invisible)], we may draw those new parallels:

FIRST:

- 1) Physical eyes = 2nd "*Blackness'*" so white people see black people [color of skin].
- 2) they see only my surroundings = 2nd "*Blackness'*" [color of skin] = "a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids".
- 3) people see me (he saw me) = 2nd "*Blackness'*" [human existing] = "he saw me and called me an insulting name."

^{oo} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p. 9.

^{pp} The underlined one "*Brothers and sisters, my text this morning is the 'Blackness of Blackness.'*"

^{qq} The underlined one "*Brothers and sisters, my text this morning is the 'Blackness of Blackness.'*"

^{rr} The underlined one "*Brothers and sisters, my text this morning is the 'Blackness of Blackness.'*"

^{ss} In the very first theory, he states that he is invisible because White people refuse to see him but in this new theory, he states metaphorically that he is invisible because of "*the 'Blackness of Blackness.'*", a kind of metaphor in which the word "*the 'Blackness'*" becomes the symbol and also the synonym of his invisibility.

^{tt} "*I too have become acquainted with ambivalence," I said That's why I'm here*". in *INVISIBLE MAN*, p.10.

^{uu} "One night I accidentally bumped into a man, and perhaps because of the near darkness he saw me and called me an insulting name" in *INVISIBLEMAN*, p. 4.

SECOND:

- 1) *inner eyes* = 1st "*Blackness*" = white people see black people that they cannot consider as a human being and part of reality for they are invisible.
- 2) *except for me* = 1st "*Blackness*" = white people do not take into account his *me* which is most of the time used to affirm oneself as responsible so he is denied thinking, mind, recognition, consideration, rights, respect, and value by white people.
- 3) *refuse to see me* = 1st "*Blackness*" = he is considered as inferior, as not a human being, he is considered as a *third-degree* person.

The **Invisible Man** is the rhetorically flamboyant unnamed narrator of Ellison's novel. He is invisible not because he is a "spook"—literally unseen—but because he is a black man living in the racist atmosphere of America in the 1920s and 1930s, unrecognized because of his skin color^{vv}... The motif of invisibility treats a black man's situation in the United States. For a long time, an Afro-American's individuality was ignored by society, and the narrator in *Invisible Man* faces the same problem. For centuries blacks were oppressed by the whites and treated as inferior creatures, a cheap workforce, and 'a flock of invisible people' (Juozapaitytė, 2001). Afro-Americans were considered as people of lower social and intellectual status: they were not allowed the same possibilities as the white people, like receiving education, participating in public events, even deciding upon their future. They were simply deprived of their individuality (Juozapaitytė, 2001).^{ww}

He is not seen^{xx} because of the other "*Blackness*"^{yy} [darkness] of his "*Blackness*"^{zz} [color of skin] makes him invisible and hides all his personality, identity, value, etc. It is a kind of shadow or darkness or exactly "*Blackness*"^{aaa} which hides his individuality as a human being in the white men's vision and the perception that is why white people refuse to recognize him, to take him as an equal human being, as a human of quality, rights, thinking, mind, and importance. White people consider him in *reality* as an inferior and namely "a third-degree"^{bbb} person and this duality of superiority and inferiority make him invisible and at last "an invisible man." His equality and quality as a human being have been denied so that he has become logically an object, a tool, a sort of monument and only his "surroundings" are seen not himself "me" as a person of reality like "those"^{ccc} who see him meaning white people.

This analysis about the new theory leads us to another important relationship in which we observe that his invisibility is clearly and intrinsically related to the color of his skin or his complexion and these two entities which are color of skin and invisibility are intrinsically related to his lack of identity and personality as an equal human being for white people. The narrator states clearly that the black man invisibility in the society is linked to the color black of his skin, and the color black or his complexion creates invisibility which in turn creates a lack of identity and personality as an equal human being for white people:

"Black will make you . . ."

"Black . . ."

". . . or black will un-make^{ddd} you."^{eee}

The fact to be a black person (color of skin) or (race) leads automatically to the fact to be twice black or rather leads automatically to the fact to have another "*Blackness*" which means to be invisible. Indeed, the first "*Blackness*" of this theory ("the *Blackness of Blackness*."') is "*most black*" and darker than it becomes really the "*the 'Blackness of*

^{vv} Harold Bloom, "List of Characters", *Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man*, Bloom's Guides: Invisible Man, Copyright © 2008 by Infobase Publishing, p. 19.

^{ww} Yildiray Cevik, "The Motifs of Blindness and Invisibility within the Influence of Postwar Existentialism as Reflected in *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison" Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: LIT2012-0278. (2012), p. 8.

^{xx} He is invisible.

^{yy} The underlined one "*Brothers and sisters, my text this morning is the 'Blackness of Blackness.'*"

^{zz} The underlined one "*Brothers and sisters, my text this morning is the 'Blackness of Blackness.'*"

^{aaa} The underlined one "*Brothers and sisters, my text this morning is the 'Blackness of Blackness.'*"

^{bbb} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p. 13.

^{ccc} "the eyes of those with whom I come in contact" in *INVISIBLEMAN*, P.3.

^{ddd} To unmake: undo something: to undo the effects of something/change something completely: to make a fundamental change or changes in something/remove somebody from power: to remove somebody from office or a position of authority, in Microsoft® Encarta® 2009. © 1993-2008 Microsoft Corporation. Tous droits réservés.

^{eee} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p.10.

Blackness " because due to that "*blackness*" which is "*most black, most black . . .*"^{fff} the protagonist-narrator is in reality invisible. So it is seldom successful for black people to be visible because of the "*the 'Blackness of Blackness'*". And white people refuse to take the protagonist-narrator or "Invisible Man" as an equal human being, he is rather as a humanless, a mindless, statusless person and therefore he becomes invisible to them.

The "*Blackness*" of his complexion gives him another "*Blackness*" on his value, quality, and status; denying him many things and allowing restrictions, negativity, evil, hatred, death, mask and at last invisibility. And all these emphasize the contradiction that initially Americans declared human equality but lived the contradiction of slavery, Jim crow laws, segregation, discrimination, etc.

On the metaphorical level, we observe that the frontier or boundary between civilization (whites) and savagery (blacks), superiority (whites) and "third degree" (blacks) synthesizing such opposing forces as freedom/restriction, life/death, self/mask, visible/invisible... reveals firstly, the intrinsic connection between blackness and invisibility. Secondly, it reveals the intrinsic connection between the color of skin and invisibility or between blackness and color of skin and blackness and invisibility. Thirdly, it reveals the intrinsic connection between blackness and mindless, between blackness and humanless, between blackness and statusless.

And finally, the dialectic and paradoxical result permits question such as: "What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue"^{ggg}— and in a better contextual mood concerning invisibility: "What Did I Do to Be so Black and invisible"—

When asked the question, how black people should struggle to be "visible"^{hhh}, Ralph Ellison responds that black people need "light" to be visible or rather black people should be in interaction with "light" to be visible because the "The truth is the light and light is the truth"ⁱⁱⁱ creating, therefore, another theory for black people's existence.

4 The Metaphorical Weapon of Light: Black People Need "Light" to be Visible -- Have Visibility, True Existence, Identity and Recognition by White People

The perception that white people have about black people constructs black people invisibility and such a perception based on racism and stereotypes and sustained by the concept of white people's superiority and the ideology of white supremacy creates a real problem of existence to black people. Due to such a perception and invisibility, black people should struggle for their visibility and their true existence, for their identity and their recognition by white people.

Ellison seems to criticize the downsized scope of the happenings in the novel. His protagonist – an unnamed Afro-American youth, designated as 'the narrator' – is invisible in the eyes of the white American society; he is forced to seek his identity, struggle for visibility, and analyze himself throughout the whole novel only to find out that he has been constantly manipulated by other people, both white and black... *Two major aspects could be considered while analyzing it in greater detail, namely the narrator's struggle for visibility and acknowledgment both as a human being and as an Afro-American*ⁱⁱⁱ

To achieve this goal or to well conduct this struggle, Ralph Ellison advises a metaphorical weapon which is "light" stating clearly that: "Nothing, storm or flood, must get in the way of our need for light and ever more and brighter light. The truth is the light and light is the truth."^{kkk}

As we may observe and as the major character used to state: "*In the beginning . . .*" "*At the very start,*" *they cried. . . there was blackness . . .*"^{lll} meaning the color black is the color of the skin of any black people. But there

^{fff} "*That blackness is most black, brother, most black...*" in *INVISIBLE MAN*, p.9.

^{ggg} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p.8.

^{hhh} That is to say to realize the struggle for their visibility, the struggle for their true existence, the struggle for their identity and the struggle for their recognition by white people.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p.7.

ⁱⁱⁱ Yildiray Cevik, "The Motifs of Blindness and Invisibility within the Influence of Postwar Existentialism as Reflected in *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison" Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: LIT2012-0278. (2012), p. 7

^{kkk} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p.7.

^{lll} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p. 9.

is another "'Blackness' " (the first "'Blackness' " of the theory "*the 'Blackness of Blackness.'* ") which is a kind of shadow, a kind of darkness qualified as "*most black*"^{mmm} and which hides the value and the individuality of any black human being so that "Invisible Man" the protagonist-narrator (being a black person) needs "light" to light himself.

This light will certainly put off the first "'Blackness' " which hides his original "'Blackness' " [the color of his skin]. In clear, "*the 'Blackness'*" [invisibility] of "'Blackness' "[color of skin] obliged the major character to look for "light" to cope with that first "'Blackness' "[invisibility] because it is indeed his real problem while the second "'Blackness' " [color of skin] seems to be naturalⁿⁿⁿ.

And I love light. Perhaps you'll think it strange that an invisible man should need light, desire light, love light. But maybe it is exactly because I am invisible. Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form.^{ooo}

Black people due to "*the 'Blackness of Blackness.'*" need to be visible, need to have true existence, need to be recognized by white people and the metaphor here is that for all these, black people need "light"^{ppp}. They will *need* light, *desire* light, *love* light because "light" will give them visibility and this visibility, in turn, will give them true existence and this true existence, in turn, will give them their identity and recognition by white people. It becomes therefore very important for him ("Invisible Man") to love light and to need light to illuminate "*That blackness*"^{qqq} which is "*most black, most black . . .*"^{rrr} and which creates his invisibility: "I love the light... need light...desire light...love the light... because I am invisible. Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form."^{sss}

Without light, I am not only invisible but formless as well, and to be unaware of one's form is to live a death. I myself, after existing some twenty years, did not become alive until I discovered my invisibility ... It allows me to feel my vital aliveness.^{ttt}

The necessity of light or need for light as a metaphorical weapon for black people and the multiple functions attributed to this light permits us to draw those equivalences to show the importance of light in the lives of African-Americans or black people:

First equivalence:

invisible man should *need* light = Light *gives birth to my form*
invisible man should *desire* light = Light *confirms my reality*
invisible man should *love* light = Light *allows me to feel my vital aliveness*

Second equivalence:

Light *gives birth to my form* = visibility
Light *confirms my reality* = true existence
Light *allows me to feel my vital aliveness* = identity

Third equivalence:

invisible man should *need* light = Light *gives birth to my form* = visibility
invisible man should *desire* light = Light *confirms my reality* = true existence
invisible man should *love* light = Light *allows me to feel my vital aliveness* = identity

To compensate for his first "'Blackness' " or invisibility, the ultimate need, desire, love of "light" for "Invisible Man" is so real and necessary to be visible, have true existence, have an identity and gain recognition by white people that

^{mmm} "And a congregation of voices answered: "*That blackness is most black, brother, most black . . .*"

ⁿⁿⁿ "*At the very start, they cried. . . there was blackness . . .*" in *INVISIBLEMAN*, P.9.

^{ooo} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p. 6.

^{ppp} "Nothing, storm or flood, must get in the way of our need for light and ever more and brighter light. The truth is the light and light is the truth" in *INVISIBLE MAN*, p. 7.

^{qqq} "*the 'Blackness of Blackness.'* "

^{rrr} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p. 9.

^{sss} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p. 6.

^{ttt} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p. 7.

he confesses: "My hole is warm and full of light. Yes, *full* of light. I doubt if there is a brighter spot in all New York than this hole of mine, and I do not exclude Broadway" ^{uuu}

Without light, I am not only invisible but formless as well, and to be unaware of one's form is to live a death. I, after existing some twenty years, did not become alive until I discovered my invisibility ... That is why I fight my battle with Monopolated Light & Power. The deeper reason, I mean: It allows me to feel my vital aliveness. I also fight them for taking so much of my money before I learned to protect myself. In my hole in the basement, there are exactly 1,369 lights. ^{vvv}

The symbolism ^{www} and metaphor ^{xxx} in the expression "Monopolated Light & Power" tells us the importance and necessity of "light" in the existence of black people because "light" and "power" work together and it is therefore important for black people to have the monopoly of light to have power too. That is why the home or hole of "Invisible Man" is "full of light" ^{yyy} another metaphor ^{zzz} which is explained and reinforced by this other metaphor "in my hole in the basement there are exactly 1,369 lights" ^{aaaa} so that we can comprehend that "full of light" means also or exactly 1,369 lights.

The ascendant gradation that we see through the *need* ^{bbb}, the *desire* ^{ccc}, and *love* ^{ddd} of light is the same gradation that we have in the metaphor concerning numbers in 1,369 lights. And this metaphor concerning the number 1,369 is most simple to understand when we admit that the black man as a single person can be symbolized by the number 1 ^{eee} which indeed is separated from the numbers 3, 6, and 9 by a punctuation mark ^{fff} which is a comma. So the protagonist-narrator "Invisible Man" who is the one who needs light for his visibility is represented by the number 1 in the number 1,369 and separated from the numbers 3, 6, and 9.

Then thanks to the ascendant gradation we observe in *need*, *desire*, and *love* of light; we can reconsider the ascendant gradation symbolized in and by the numbers 3, 6 and 9. Therefore we may admit that the *need* gradates in a *desire* which in turn gradates in *love* and here too with the numbers 3, 6 and 9; we observe that the number 3 doubles (so gradates) to become 6, and later it triples (so gradates) to become 9. It is, therefore, the same logic:

need → desire → love
3 → 6 → 9

So the *need* corresponds to the number 3, the *desire* corresponds to the number 6, and *love* corresponds to the number 9, and when coming back to the different equivalences, we have the following new ones, with the ascendant gradation that we see through the *need*, the *desire*, and *love* of light and the numbers 3, 6, and 9:

invisible man should *need* light = 1st degree of gradation = 3
invisible man should *desire* light = 2nd degree of gradation = 6
invisible man should *love* light = 3rd degree of gradation = 9

Also the ascendant gradation that we have in the metaphor concerning 1,369 lights is the following:

invisible man should *need* light = Light gives birth to my form = visibility = 1st gradation = 3
invisible man should *desire* light = Light confirms my reality = true existence = 2nd gradation = 6
invisible man should *love* light = Light allows me to feel my vital aliveness = identity = 3rd gradation = 9

^{uuu} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p. 6.

^{vvv} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p. 7.

^{www} The symbol of light and the symbol of power

^{xxx} To have the monopoly of light and power, to have the monopoly of light so that to have power.

^{yyy} "My hole is warm and full of light. Yes, full of light. I doubt if there is a brighter spot in all New York than this hole of mine, and I do not exclude Broadway" in *INVISIBLE MAN* p. 6.

^{zzz} Meaning a kind of complete light which permits to solve his problem definitively: visibility, true existence, identity and recognition : "I'll solve the prolem" at the page 7.

^{aaaa} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p. 7.

^{bbbb} Le besoin peut être unique.

^{cccc} Le désir peut être incessant.

^{dddd} L'amour doit être éternel.

^{eeee} The black man symbolizes = 1 in the number 1,369.

^{fff} sign used to divide writing: a symbol that is used to organize and clarify the meaning of writing, e.g. a comma, full stop, or question mark

And knowing that "full of light" or "1,369 lights" permits him to be complete that is to say, to be at the same time visible, have true existence, have an identity and be recognized by white people^{egge}; we may admit this other equivalence of gradation:

1st degree of gradation = 3 = visibility
 2nd degree of gradation = 6 = true existence
 3rd degree of gradation = 9 = identity

We observe through these equivalences that the number used here is not merely a light bulbs but metaphorically meaning gradation when we take the numerical order (3-6-9). It is a sort of ascent, a growing mutation toward positiveness thanks to the doubling and triplication of the number 3. And thanks to such a gradation, we can argue that the fact to move from 3 to 6 then to 9 encompasses visibility, true existence, and identity for "Invisible Man" thanks to "full of light" or the monopoly of light and power. The monopoly of light permits him to be no more "an invisible man" but a visible man with all the values:

to be visible - to have true existence - and - to have an identity
 3 -then- 6 -then- 9

It is, therefore, the same logic when we include "Invisible Man" who is represented by the number 1:

1-----which moves to-----3-----then to-----6-----then to-----9
 Invisible man—who moves to—visibility—then to--- true existence---then to---identity

Considered as "an invisible man" by white people in human existence and human society, the major character "Invisible Man" lights himself with 1,369 lights to compensate his lack so that he doubles and he trebles himself with light to be visible. Moreover, he does it to keep his self-identity and his self-personality to avoid to be a "mechanical man" as said by the vet^{hhhh} in *the Golden day* or to avoid fulfilling the need of white men as Bledsoeⁱⁱⁱⁱ who says "white is right" or as Lucius Brockway^{jjjj} who says "if it is optic white it is right white":

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!"^{kkkk}

"Invisible Man" will *need* light, *desire* light, *love* light to avoid be such a thing (a walking zombie, the mechanical man) and his development to avoid it will go through a metamorphosis from blackness to light, ignorance to enlightenment; invisibility to visibility, inexistence to true existence but also from a "mechanical man" to self-identity meaning self "me". Indeed, the need, the desire, and love of light are the three steps of the metamorphosis to give birth to his form but also to confirm his reality, his consideration, and his recognition because "without light, I am not only invisible but formless as well; and to be unaware of one's form is to live a death. I, after existing some twenty years, did not become alive until I discovered my invisibility".^{llll}

The discovering of his invisibility provokes the need for his visibility and the need for his visibility passes by the need for the light that is why he has to fight his battle with "Monopolated Light & Power" a metaphor meaning oneself enlightenment and struggle to have power and recognition. The relation between light and power is important and symbolical to his "vital aliveness" and to make himself clear he says "The truth is the light and light is the truth". Throughout light, "Invisible Man" "solves the problem" and achieves a sort of ascent to become a visible man in human existence and human society. Thus light and visibility are inter-related, light and truth are inter-related and because light and power are also inter-related therefore visibility and power and truth are also inter-related.

^{egge} "I love light... need light...desire light...love light... because I am invisible. Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form.... It allows me to feel my vital aliveness" in *INVISIBLE MAN* pp. 6-7.

^{hhhh} A character of the novel

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ A character of the novel

^{jjjj} A character of the novel

^{kkkk} It is what the vet is saying about the "mechanical man" in the Golden day in *INVISIBLE MAN* pp. 94-95.

^{llll} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), p. 7.

This movement from darkness to light, from invisibility to visibility, from ignorance to enlightenment in which is set our character “Invisible Man” is quite important because it makes him alive and it makes him feel his “vital aliveness” but also it calls to the notion of identity when we take into account dualities such as black-white, self-mask, visible-invisible. That is why “Invisible Man” says:

Hence again I have stayed in my hole because up above there's an increasing passion to make men conform to a pattern . . . Whence all this passion toward conformity anyway?—diversity is the word. Let man keep his many parts and you'll have no tyrant states. Why, if they follow this conformity business they'll end up by forcing me, an invisible man, to become white, which is not a color but the lack of one. Must I strive toward colorlessness?^{mmmm}

5 Conclusion

At the end of this analysis, we can say that the notion of black people invisibility that Ralph Ellison develops as a central theme in his novel, and which puts in question African Americans or black people existence, status, identity and value in the white American society; has obliged us to study three important and essential interrelated motifs in this novel which are the motifs of perception, visibility, and invisibility.

Indeed, is also central to the meaning of the novel, we have explored the relationships between the motifs of perception, visibility, and invisibility and namely how their relationships determine and legislate the interracial relationships between whites people and black people in the novel because:

Ralph Ellison, in *Invisible Man*, relies heavily on the symbolism of vision: light, color, perception, sight, insight. These, his master symbols, are organically related to the dualism of black and white, the all-absorbing and bafflingly complex problem of identity. How does the Negro see himself and how do others see him? Do they notice him at all? Do they see him as he is or do they behold a stereotype, a ghostly caricature, a traditionally accepted myth? What we get in this novel, creatively elaborated, is the drama of symbolic action, the language of the eyes, the incredibly complex and subtle symbolism of vision. All this is structurally bound up with the underlying theme of transformation. All this is imaginatively and, for the most part, successfully worked out in terms of fiction.^{mmmm}

Doing so, we have tried to answer the question of how from a visible status in existence, the perception that white people have about black people transforms this visibility into an invisible status both in human existence and society and namely in the white American society. And more specifically, we have tried to answer the question of how white people's perception of black people constructs invisibility for black people in society while they do exist in the real world?

Answering those questions has permitted to notice that in the Prologue to Ralph Ellison's *INVISIBLE MAN*, the narrator explicates the novel's central metaphor by telling us that he is invisible because “[white] people refuse to see [him].” And this simple but important central metaphor shows that black people are moved from visibility in existence to invisibility in human existence and society simply by the way white people perceive them or see them through their *inner* eyes.

The most natural theme, to begin with, is that of invisibility. What is an invisible man? How is the kind of invisibility Ellison writes about different from the physical invisibility of the English writer H. G. Wells' famous book *The Invisible Man*? A reading of Ellison's novel suggests that the theme of invisibility has different dimensions: (a) Invisibility suggests the unwillingness of others to see the individual as a person. The narrator is invisible because people see in him only what they want to see, not what he is. Invisibility, in this sense, has a strong sense of racial prejudice. White people often do not see black people as individual human beings^{oooo}

Through a perception, and *inner* eyes, or an intuition of mind based on prejudices, stereotypes, racism, and white men superiority and hegemony; the white people transform black people existence into an invisible existence. They

^{mmmm} Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN*, (the Second Vintage International Edition of March 1995, Copyright renewed 1980 by The Ralph and Fanny Ellison Charitable Trust, Vintage Book Edition), (Epilogue) pp. 576-577.

ⁿⁿⁿⁿ Anthony S. Abbott, *RALPH ELLISON'S THE INVISIBLE MAN*, (C) Copyright 1985 by Barron's Educational Series, Inc., p. 155

^{oooo} Anthony S. Abbott, *RALPH ELLISON'S THE INVISIBLE MAN*, (C) Copyright 1985 by Barron's Educational Series, Inc., p. 45.

automatically consider them as invisible men in the society and in human existence depriving them all human beings status and value.

Responding to the question, why do white people construct black people visible existence into an invisible existence as being the result of the perception that white people have about black people, a critic says: “The Invisible Man is the rhetorically flamboyant unnamed narrator of Ellison’s novel. He is invisible not because he is a “spook”—literally unseen—but because he is a black man living in the racist atmosphere of America in the 1920s and 1930s, unrecognized because of his skin color^{pppp}”:

One final point: The narrator is an Afro-American. Part of the reason he’s invisible is that Ellison feels white people do not see black people. Much of what he suffers comes at the hands of white people and those blacks who work for white people. From this point of view, the narrator may be interpreted as a symbol for the black person in America.^{qqqq}

This clear answer means that it is invisibility, that white people put on black people simply because black people are born black and, this invisibility encompasses no consideration for black people, a loss of identity and value as a human being for black people, and also a quest for recognition by white people. So, in conclusion, black people are invisible because of their black color of skin or their *blackness*, and both this invisibility and this *blackness*, in turn, hide their real identity in the society.

You might think of the Prologue as a personal introduction. “I am an invisible man,” is the first sentence of the novel. It establishes immediately the fact that this is to be a first-person narrative and that the theme of invisibility- which gives the novel its title- is extremely important. The nameless narrator explains that this invisibility is not literal but metaphorical or symbolic. He is invisible, he tells you because people don’t see him. They see only “my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination.” One reason for this is racial. A narrator is a black man, invisible because white people in America refuse to see black people as human beings, as individuals. He is also invisible because he has never developed his own identity but has instead played the roles that other people, especially white people, have required of him. But he doesn’t know that yet. It is something he will come to learn as he tells his life story.^{tttt}

Realizing that all the problems the black people encounter in the white American society or the world are due to their color of skin and also to another *blackness* that surrounds this black color of skin; Ralph Ellison advises *light* but exactly *full of light* to solve the black people problem. Indeed, Ellison proposes a metaphorical solution or weapon which is *light* to solve black people's problems for thanks to light black people will be visible, will have true existence, will have a true identity and will get recognition by white people. In clear, thanks to *light* but exactly *full of light*, as recommended; the black man or “Invisible Man” will at last move from invisibility to visibility, from non-existence to true existence, from a problem of identity to a self and true identity which will contribute to his recognition as an equal human being by white people in the world and the white American society.

Well, there are certain themes, symbols, and images that are based on folk material. For example, there is the old saying amongst Negroes: If you’re black, stay back; if you’re brown, stick around; if you’re white, you’re right. And there is the joke Negroes tell on themselves about their being so black they can’t be seen in the dark. In my book, this sort of thing was merged with the meanings which blackness and light have long had in Western mythology: evil and goodness, ignorance and knowledge, and so on. In my novel the narrator’s development is one through blackness to light; that is, from ignorance to enlightenment: invisibility to visibility. He leaves the South and goes North; this, as you will notice in reading Negro folktales, is always the road to freedom- the movement upward. You have the same thing again when he leaves his underground cave for the open.^{ssss}

^{pppp} Harold Bloom, “List of Characters”, *Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man*, Bloom’s Guides: Invisible Man, Copyright © 2008 by Infobase Publishing, p. 15.

^{qqqq} Anthony S. Abbott, *RALPH ELLISON’S THE INVISIBLE MAN*, (C) Copyright 1985 by Barron’s Educational Series, Inc., p. 24.

^{tttt} Anthony S. Abbott, *RALPH ELLISON’S THE INVISIBLE MAN*, (C) Copyright 1985 by Barron’s Educational Series, Inc., p. 51.

^{ssss} Anthony S. Abbott, *RALPH ELLISON’S THE INVISIBLE MAN*, (C) Copyright 1985 by Barron’s Educational Series, Inc., p. 154

Being the core issue in this paper, through this in-depth analysis of the relationships between perception, visibility, and invisibility we observe that generally speaking the perception that white people have about black people is a perception which transforms black people visible existence into an invisible existence in human life and human society with all its drawbacks. And Even if Descartes states that perception “may be imperfect and confused”^{****}, we should admit that through their racist perception and all that contribute to this perception, the black man is moved from a visible existence into an invisible existence in human life and human society. In clear terms, we observe finally that their racist perception about black people constructs black people invisibility in the world. And the topicality of racism through today's world justifies the fact that such a perception constructing black people's visibility into an invisible existence is, therefore, transhistorical and transnational because it goes beyond the frontier of the white American society and it is also still topical.

Conflict of interest statement

The author declared that she has no competing interests.

Statement of authorship

The author has a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The author has approved the final article.

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^{****} “[P]erception is neither an act of vision, nor of touch, nor of imagination ... but only an intuition of the mind, which may be imperfect and confused ... or clear and distinct ... according as my attention is more or less directed to the elements which are found in it, and of which it is composed ...” <https://newlearningonline.com/new-learning/chapter-7/descartes-i-think-therefore-i-am>

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