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Du Bosian Double Consciousness in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Ellison's *Invisible Man*

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By
Til Prasad Poudel
Central Department of English
University Campus, Kirtipur
Kathmandu, Nepal
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Tribhuban University

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Nepal

The thesis entitled Du Bosian Double Consciousness in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Ellison's *Invisible Man* submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Til Prasad Poudel has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Research Committee Members:

—————Internal Examiner—————

—————External Examiner—————

Head
Central Department of English
T.U. Kirtipur, Nepal

Date:

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ABSTRACT

Double consciousness, defined by Du Bois as the African American's sense of always looking at himself through the eyes of White Americans, is examined in the present thesis, in the light of two African-American novels; Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. The locus of the research is that double consciousness is indeed a source of frustration for a large number of the fictional characters, but that it doesn't always result in frustration and alienation. This is due to the fact that some of the protagonists are not only capable of minimizing the anxieties that double consciousness sometimes produces, but of avoiding them altogether. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* calls attention to the media and American standards of beauty as factors that create a sense of twoness among African-Americans who see themselves as a mark of ugliness and abnormality. In Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the protagonist's quest to make American way, and his growing identification with his community, reveal double consciousness as a desire to transcend a state of liminality and achieve union in community.

Chapter I: Introduction

Double consciousness, defined by Du Bois as the African American's sense of always looking at himself through the eyes of white Americans, is examined in the present thesis, in the light of two African American novels; Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. I shall use the term double consciousness in the sense that Du Bois defines it, as a feeling of twoness resulting from the African American's effort to unite his black and white cultural heritages or cultural selves. My position is that double consciousness is indeed a source of frustration for a large number of the fictional characters, but that it doesn't always result in frustration and alienation. This is due to the fact that some of the protagonists are not only capable of minimizing the anxieties that double consciousness sometimes produces, but of avoiding them altogether. Thus, although I follow Du Bois and two authors and their works as mentioned above in addressing the frustration and debilitation effects of double consciousness, I also explore the positive aspects of double consciousness by applying Du Bois own insight that African Americans, born with a veil, are also "gifted with second sight in American world" (3). Du Bois holds that due to their double consciousness, African-Americans possess a privileged epistemological perspective. Both inside the white world and outside of it, African-Americans are able to understand the white world, while yet perceiving it from a different perspective, namely that of an outsider. The white person in America, by contrast, contains but a single consciousness and perspective, for he or she is a member of a dominant culture, with its own racial and cultural norms asserted as absolute. The white persons look out from themselves and see only their own world reflected back upon them - a kind of blindness or singular sight possesses them. Luckily, as Du Bois makes clear, the dual perspective of African-Americans can be used both to grasp the essence of whiteness and to expose it simultaneously, in the multiple senses of the word "expose." That is to say, second sight allows an African-American to bring the white view out into the open, to lay it bare, and

to make a critique of it, showing the problematic that traces it. The destruction of “whiteness” in this way not only makes whites open to the experience of African-Americans but also opens a cultural breach for the African-Americans, the breach through which they could enter with their own legitimate and legitimating perspectives.

I however don't intend to study the novels instrumentally only for a better understanding of Du Bois, I am rather interested in DuBoisian double consciousness as a point of reference to interpret analogous experiences in African-American texts, thereby speaking about the relationship of the two novels to DuBoisian double consciousness. For this purpose the present research will consist of five chapters: the first chapter will be a general introduction and the second a general overview of double consciousness with special focus on DuBoisian double consciousness. The third chapter, a discussion of Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, calls attention to the media and American standards of beauty as factors that heighten double consciousness in the Black Community. The Breedlove family is a metaphor for those African-Americans who view their dark skin and other African features as marks of 'Otherness', ugliness and abnormality. In Pecola's case, the result is self-hatred and, ultimately, insanity. The fourth chapter centers for understanding double consciousness in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. The dim and muted dual existence of the protagonist in his quest to make it according to the "American" way against his growing identification with his black community reveals double consciousness as desire to transcend a state of liminality and achieve union in community.

Both Ellison's *Invisible man* and Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* are circular texts as far as their plot and structure are concerned. Beginning after Pecola's insanity, after the death of her baby, and after she is abandoned by all in the community, *The Bluest Eye* actually has as its end its beginning, and as its beginning its end. Thus, Morrison's novel, in a manner similar to

Ellison's novel, represents time as a circular phenomenon. This treatment of the concept of time demonstrates Morrison and Ellison's attempt to go beyond their training as western artists. Both novelists display their African American consciousness in their literary styles, but manage to balance such consciousness with their European influences. Morrison's novels and black fiction in general is a consistent emphasis on the need to resist forces stemming from society which may serve to destroy continuity of the black cultural heritage by a conscious embracing of the past combined with a concurrent quest for identity. Regarding the characteristics of Morrison novels Patrice Cormier-Hamilton in her essay "Black Naturalism and Toni Morrison: The Journey away from Self-Love in *The Bluest Eye*" mentions:

A universal characteristic of Morrison's published novels has been her depiction of male and female protagonists failing or succeeding on the difficult journey to freedom through self-awareness. Of course, the struggle to realize one's identity has surfaced repeatedly in literature; however, Morrison's steadfast concentration on the importance of the past indicates that for her, self-realization for African Americans can only be achieved through an active acknowledgement of one's cultural past. Only by understanding and accepting the past can African Americans achieve a psychological wholeness in the present and strengthen their power as a race in the future. (110-111)

Morrison's novels present characters striving with these issues: the danger of indiscriminate internalization of white Western mores, the need for advocacy of African American values, and the importance of self-discovery. Morrison in her novels explores "two challenges African Americans face: first, the inherent difficulty all minorities have in assimilating into a dominant society without betraying one's race; and second, the danger of alienation from oneself and one's past due to this betrayal"(Cormier-

Hamilton 114) . For all minorities, a certain amount of assimilation is important: one must learn the language and the customs of an adopted society in order to function successfully within it. The difficulty occurs when individuals over-assimilate to ride the road to material success, power or societal acceptance. This is distinctly a minority issue and unlike other minorities, blacks often experience a greater desire to assimilate because of a stronger sense of alienation instilled in them by white society due to the division along color line. And this very situation leads to the double consciousness. Regarding character in Morrison's novel Cynthia A. Davis in "Self, Society, and Myth in Toni Morrison's Fiction" writes:

All of Morrison's characters exist in a world defined by its blackness and by the surrounding white society that both violates and denies it. The destructive effect of the white society can take the form of outright physical violence, but oppression in Morrison's world is more often psychic violence. She rarely depicts white characters, for the brutality here is less a single act than the systematic denial of the reality of black lives. (323)

The theme of 'invisibility' is, of course, a common one in black American literature, but Morrison avoids the picture of the black person 'invisible' in white life. Instead, she immerses the reader in the black community; and represents the white society's ignorance of that concrete, vivid, and diverse world. The constant censorship of and intrusion on black life from the surrounding society is emphasized not by specific events so much as by a consistent pattern of misnaming. Power for Morrison is largely the power to name, to define reality and perception. *The Bluest Eye*, for example, opens with a primer description of a "typical" American family: "Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house." And so on (1). In all these cases, the misnaming does not eliminate the reality of the black world; invisibility is not non-existence. But it does reflect a distortion. Blacks are visible to white

culture only insofar as they fit its frame of reference and serve its needs. Thus they are consistently reduced and reified, losing their independent reality. Mrs. Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* has a nickname, "Polly," that only whites her; it reduces her dignity and identifies her as "the ideal servant" (99).

Bernard Bell in *The Afro-American Novel and Its Traditions* describes Morrison as a writer of Gothic fables. Referring to *The Bluest Eye*, he says that Morrison distils history and fact with a kind of poetic freedom and gothic vision. She is able to achieve this effect because of her gifts of formal devices metaphor, metonymy, as well as her handling of specific characters. These characters, Bell notes, "are eccentric and maimed as a result of their experience as black men and women in an environment that rigidly defines their humanity by economic, sexual, and racial myths, but still they persevere in their efforts to cope with and triumph over the obstacles in their path to self-esteem, freedom, and wholeness" (276-77). Bell's observation is especially helpful in introducing the kinds of obstacles that Morrison's protagonist in *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola, must confront. Moreover, most of the other characters with whom Pecola associates are so burdened by problems of their own that they cannot help the girl work through any of her difficulties, even Pecola's own mother is incapable of helping her to triumph over her problems of self-esteem and double consciousness.

Regarding narrative structure Rachel Blumenthal in his article "Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*" mentions:

Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye*, is a text, in part, about the way in which narratives intersect to form a social and political history. Morrison organizes her work into three main narrative structures: The Dick and Jane primer (which occurs as preface and chapter headings), Claudia's memoirs (which account for the first chapter of each seasonal section), and the

omniscient narration of Pecola's story (as well as surrounding characters, which occupies the remainder of the text). (117)

The Dick and Jane story is the framework against which Morrison structures the Pecola story. It is inserted as a preface to the book in three forms, each one more "formless" than the last (by the time we reach the third one, all the words of the "here-is-the-family" Dick and Jane story have been run together in one long mess). Morrison is clearly interested in the chasm between the Dick and Jane Utopia and the Breedlove reality, but it is the construction of the sociohistorical narrative that Morrison ultimately emphasizes. It is the question of how we come to understand social and political history that Morrison addresses in her novel. Indeed, she articulates this problem in her "second" preface when she writes, "There is really nothing more to say-except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in the how" (8). This rather cryptic reference to the why and the how is perhaps Morrison's way of directing her readers not only to the reason for the difference between the Dick and Jane story and Pecola's story, but to the way in which those differences are disseminated through larger narratives, and to the results of a collision between those narratives.

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is a comprehensive exploration of a black American character's search for acceptance and identity. The book is a compendium of one man's experiences related through twenty-five chapters of flashback. The reader is introduced to the narrator and his philosophy in the prologue and the philosophy are reinforced in the epilogue. Each experience can be related to a different identity assumed by the narrator, whose name is never revealed. As the tale unfolds, the character looks back on a journey that is both literal and figurative. He literally journeys from his native south to New York's Harlem, and physically matures from an idealistic high school student through years as an industrial worker and political leader. Richard Ohmann describes *Invisible Man* as an example of the

"illness story," which, he argues, appears throughout postwar U.S. fiction as a formal reification of white-collar middle-class experience (Qtd in Hoberek 3). Ellison's novel "comprehends racism itself within the illness story and the adolescent rite of passage," Ohmann suggests (Qtd in Hoberek 3). This maturation peaks when circumstances lead him to retire from society, at which time he writes his memoirs. Perhaps the best illustrated in the novel is the characters' mental maturation, which encompasses the road from innocence to experience. The author describes his character's journey as one that commences from "passion to purpose to perception", and the story as one that tells about "about innocence and human error, a struggle through illusion to reality" (Shadow-177).

The Prologue of *Invisible Man* introduces the major themes that define the rest of the novel. The metaphors of invisibility and blindness allow for an examination of the effects of racism on the victim and the perpetrator. Because the narrator is black, whites refuse to see him as an actual, three-dimensional person; hence, he portrays himself as invisible and describes them as blind. The narrator's central struggle involves the conflict between how others perceive him and how he perceives himself. Racist attitudes cause others to view him in terms of racial stereotypes—as a mugger, bumpkin, or savage. But the narrator desires recognition of his individuality rather than recognition based on these stereotypes. The "blindness" of others stems from an inability to see the narrator without imposing these alien identities on him. The narrator notes that, given this situation, it does not matter how he thinks of himself, because anyone—even the anonymous blond man on the street—can force him to confront or assume an alien identity, simply by uttering a racial insult. Thus confined, the narrator flees the outside world in search of the freedom to define himself without the constraints that racism imposes.

Ellison's protagonist embarks on an equally frustrating quest for stability in American life. Published in 1952, *Invisible Man* anticipates the social unrest and sweeping changes that

came to characterize the decades of the fifties and sixties. In terms of African-American literary style, didacticism and the literature of protest were quickly giving way to the ironic and existential mode. In addition to his political concerns, Ellison saw himself as a wordsmith who was consciously aware of how language and words could be manipulated.

Acknowledging that *Invisible Man* might appear to be a novel of protest, he writes in "The World and the Jug." from *Shadow and Act*:

I tried to the best of my ability to transform these elements into art. My goal was not to escape or hold back, but to work through, to transcend, as the blues transcend the painful conditions with which they deal. The protest is there, not because I was helpless before my racial condition, but because I put it there. If there is anything "miraculous" about the book it is the result of hard work undertaken in the belief that the work of art is important in itself, which is a social action in itself. (57)

Ellison's protagonist is constantly on a social quest, albeit a mistaken and misdirected one. However fruitless his efforts, rarely are there times when he is not on the move, as he forever seeks to establish his place in American life. In the tradition of the 'Good Negro', Ellison's protagonist is, at the beginning of the novel, filled with high hopes. But after the power that be ordain that, being black, he shall be invisible, the novel ends with him disillusioned in a manhole for a suspended state of 'hibernation'. He has tried the way of "humility." of being a "good Negro". He has struggled to become a good cog in American industry; he has attempted to attach himself to the leftist politics tried to no avail all those things that would seem to help a black achieve visibility in American life. But Ellison's protagonist does not yield to despair as he is reawakened to his black heritage. As Brentt Ostendorf points out "Ellison's himself refused to give in to the notion of pathology in black

life. Instead he has tried to bolster black pride and self-respect by stressing the celebration, the self help and survival wisdom in black life" (129).

Chapter II: Double Facets of DuBoisian Double Consciousness

DuBoisian double consciousness has been primarily used to designate a variety of negative feelings and conditions, from an awareness of one's status as an outsider to a state of severe confusion in which one lacks the energy to relate either to himself or to the larger world around him. But by limiting double consciousness to the realm of the pathological interpretation only keeps us from comprehending Du Bois's own insight that African-Americans, born with a veil, are also "gifted with second sight in this American world" (3). Although DuBois often stressed the negative, debilitating forces of double consciousness, he is not as well be demonstrated, unaware of its positive aspects or of its complex character in American life. Therefore, in this chapter, I shall explore both the positive and the negative use of the term double consciousness in Du Bois and examine the various interpretations of Du Boisian double consciousness by other critics. In his famous work, *The Souls of Black Folk* which appeared in 1903, DuBois initiated the concept of double consciousness:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a particular sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (3)

DuBois explains that African Americans are forced to view themselves from, and as, the negative perspectives of the outside society. Having two antagonistic identities means that a lot of time and energy is spent negotiating and enduring the conflicts between who one is as a person and how one struggles to live with the misrepresentations of the outside world. Having one's own sense of self and also having imposed contempt for an ascribed self, having twoness, is what DuBois calls double consciousness. Moreover, "Double consciousness" is here defined by DuBois as the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." This sense of measuring one's soul by the tape of others create in the African-American Subject a feeling of "twoness," i.e., of his cultural status as an American and as a Negro. Double consciousness for DuBois is thus very similar to Frantz Fanon's notion that it's not just American blacks who are forced to view themselves through the perspectives of others that colonized people have DuBoisian double consciousness too. In *The Wretched of the Earth* He writes:

Speaking as an Algerian and a Frenchman"... Stumbling over the need to assume two nationalities, two determinations, the intellectual who is Arab and French..., if he wants to be sincere with himself, chooses the negation of one of these two determinations. Usually, unwilling or unable to choose, these intellectuals collect all the historical determinations which have conditioned them and place themselves in a thoroughly universal perspective. (155)

The conflicting two perspectives, or the two identities and selves, seem comparable to the "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body," that define DuBoisian twoness. One thought and striving is self-defined while the other is imposed from the outside, whites' world. DuBois and Fanon both struggle with contradictions between these two warring ideals while whites, both in the U.S. and in the

broader world, do not even have to realize that they are seen by and as racial others. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon reiterates the double consciousness of colonized people as "The colonized intellectual, at the very moment when he undertakes a work of art, fails to realize he is using techniques and a language borrowed from the occupier. The colonized intellectual who returns to his people through works of art behaves in fact like a foreigner"(160).And he further writes:

[T]he first duty of the colonized poet is to clearly define the people...

We cannot go resolutely forward unless we first realize our alienation.

We have taken everything from the other side. Yet the other side has given us nothing except to sway us in its direction through a thousand twists, except lure us, seduce us, and imprison us ... We must focus on that zone of hidden fluctuation where the people can be found ... (163)

Fanon explains extensively how colonized intellectuals try to liberate their people, but the colonized liberators talk, think and act like the colonizers. It is only when these intellectuals return to the general population that they can regain their indigenous perspective from which to critique their colonized perspective. It is the people who liberate the intellectuals, not the other way around. Liberation, in Fanon's sense, includes assessing one's colonized perspective through one's indigenous perspective. He does not claim that people can or should forget the white European perspective, but he maintains that people should not be dominated by, and limited to, the outside perspective. This is the merging of strivings that DuBois also seeks. Fanon makes this point in *Black Skin White Masks*:

Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was a liberation, running over my body suddenly abraded into non being, endowing me once more with an agility that I had thought I had

lost, and by taking me outside the world, restoring me to it. I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there... (109)

This adaptation, or assimilation, leads to harmful unilateral double consciousness when it includes developing a sense of inferiority of one's indigenous language and culture. It is then that one's own people are needed to take one outside the world and restore one to the world, returning one from non-being. This harm of unilateral double consciousness would be prevented if the cultural exchanges were engaged equally by all parties, not just the people of color or colonized people. Then, all parties would be both hosts and guests, sharing the challenges of measuring up to each others' cultures. The status of white or European cultures and languages would be equal with the status of African cultures or cultures of color when people of all groups learn about each other and themselves from each others' perspectives. Fanon comes closest to DuBoisian double consciousness by saying, "Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has to place himself...[H]is customs and the sources on which they are based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him" (Black 110). DuBois defines double consciousness as seeing oneself through one's own self-defined perspective and also through the perspectives of others. Fanon shows that the problem of double consciousness extends far beyond the dynamics between black and white Americans.

What DuBois furthermore describes as "looking at one's self through the eyes of others," is that the White American takes the role of the White other toward the self without any fundamental contradiction and thus essentially without being aware of doing so. White Americans do not take the role of Black Americans toward themselves. African Americans, on the other hand, because of the essential inequality and incompatibility between the two communities, are forced to take the role of White others toward themselves and are as a

consequence uncomfortably aware of looking at themselves through the veil. The African American self is, according to Du Bois, because of this twoness, incomplete. He argues that the paradox of having a self reflected back through the veil of color, the conflict between the two views of self and the different moral and cultural commitments that they reflect, account for this incompleteness. The African American, according to Du Bois is

... always torn in two directions, held accountable to two communities, two sets of values. He describes this as a fundamental conflict between the two social forms and the resulting conflict between the values of the two communities, not as a conflict between the values accorded to social roles within a single community. It is the contradiction of double aims. The double-aimed struggle of the black artisan-on the one hand to escape white contempt for a nation of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, and on the other hand to plough and nail and dig for a poverty-stricken horde-could only result in making him a poor craftsman, for he had but half a heart in either case.(6) African Americans have one aim and one set of needs, while White society has another set of values with which to evaluate the ultimate worth of human action. White aims and goals will value negatively those actions that are truly useful to African Americans, according to Du Bois, and positively value actions that are not useful. The reverse, he says, is also the case.

Du Bois proposes a duty to the racial group for Black Americans to counteract this conflict. Double consciousness can be interpreted in terms of this duty, wherein the strength of the racial group to use Du Bois's term- counteracts the effects of the negative self reflected through the veil. It is in order to permit the full development of self-consciousness within the veil, a self-consciousness that transcends the conflict between the two sides, that Du Bois advocates the formation of, and commitment to, a Black community, or nation in its own

right. This Black nation is not formed to create separation between races, but rather, in order to enable the Black self to transcend an already existing separation. Within this Black nation the Black consciousness can aspire to full development. In a passage that appears to be autobiographical, Du Bois writes that the "child" realized that "to attain his place in the world he must be himself and no other" (9).

Du Bois chooses to cite social situations in the chapter "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" before presenting his theory, suggesting by the order in the text (social situation then double-consciousness) that the development of the consciousness results only after participants in society make one aware of one's racial difference. Du Bois presents social situations that anyone of color may have experienced at one point in his life:

They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word. (15)

Although this awkward social dance between whites and blacks is familiar to most, if not all black Americans, the encounter and observation are uniquely Du Bois's. Although he creates a universal connection to readers in the opening of the essay, Du Bois is still merely offering a personal anecdote despite the universal chord the anecdote strikes. Du Bois continues the essay with another personal experience identifying the moment he became aware of his racial difference:

I remember well when the shadow swept across me. . . In a wee wooden

schoolhouse, something put it into the boys' and girls' heads to buy
gorgeous visiting-cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The
exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,—refused
it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain
suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart
and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. (16)

Du Bois recounts his childhood memory with specifics that inform the reader of the importance the moment held for him in his life. He remembers the setting, the situation, the price of the cards, and the fact that the offending girl was “a tall newcomer.” Most importantly, he recalls the feeling of difference and the awareness of exclusion and rejection awakening within him. After identifying this never-before felt emotion, Du Bois explains that this feeling did not stem from anything internal; on the contrary, he and the girl shared internal similarities. Instead, he alludes to an external difference by metaphorically relating his skin to a “vast veil.” In all the ways one may consider it, a veil is never used for something inside. Instead, a veil is a covering, an outermost layer that protects or hides what is within. Despite the general understanding of the purpose of the veil and the effect the veil has upon young Du Bois, a clear definition of the veil is a crux for this research.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, arguably W.E.B. DuBois' most famous work, he introduces and addresses the concept of ‘veil’ that describes the quintessential Black experience in America. The idea is not merely that the social roles of Black are negatively valued by the majority. Du Bois portrays the two sides of the veil in terms of separate societies clashing, not just over cultural differences, but over large-scale aims and values: capitalism vs. community. The two societies are essentially different in their social, moral, and economic relations. One is capitalist and individualist, the other anti-capitalist and

community-oriented. Moreover Du Bois borrows the veil notion which belongs to the religious women who cover themselves from strangers; cover their intelligence, beauty, souls and energies. They are not known or realized by others, and some of them may only wonder what's beneath the veil might be but without seeking to discover it. Du Bois uses of the metaphor of veil refer essentially to what separates blacks from whites, but he goes deeper and deeper to make us figure out the ugliest discrimination that based on color or race in the history. They bother themselves to wonder what's beneath this veil, or seek to discover that marvelous beauty of their souls, intelligence, and their humanity; the veil prevents the whites to see the real blacks. The veil metaphor thus represents discrimination based on color and race in all aspects of the African-American's life: socially, economically, educationally and religiously. Regarding veil, Du Bois writes: "In those sombre forests of his striving his own soul rose before him, and he saw himself – darkly as through a veil: and yet he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another" (Qtd in M. Burke 91). As these lines indicate, Du Bois doesnot think of veil as one-dimensional, merely suggesting a wall or uncrossable line between the races.

For DuBois, the veil concept primarily refers to three things. First, the veil suggests to the literal darker skin of Blacks, which is a physical demarcation of difference from whiteness. Secondly, the veil suggests white people's lack of clarity to see Blacks as "true" Americans. And lastly, the veil refers to Blacks' lack of clarity to see themselves outside of what white America describes and prescribes for them. There are three main interpretations of the use of the "veil" in *Souls*. The veil serves as a separation between blacks and whites and a layer of white people's ignorance of black perception of white America, and as the symbol of mystic vision" (Sundquist 565). The veil introduced in *Souls* interestingly affects both black and white readers. The black reader's recognition of the exclusion Du Bois cites in

the introduction of double-consciousness operates as a veil, while the white reader's lack of understanding of the consciousness of black people also serves as a veil. The more complicated explanation of "mystic vision" encourages spirituality of the African American, but more specifically promises a "reunion with an African ancestral spirit that could be achieved by a 'modern lifting of the veil'" (Sundquist 565). In this explanation of the veil, the veil is both an inhibiting and enabling: Du Bois's echo establishes the Veil not only as a visual impairment within the world, but also as a metaphor for worldly perception. Once again the Veil interferes with self-knowledge, but this interference applies equally to white and black America. The simplest explanation of the veil as "mystic vision" suggests prophecy or the enabling power to "see dilemmas far into the future" (Lewis 283).

Complete self-consciousness, for Du Bois, requires the social solidarity of the Black group and a commitment to their own values over those of the White majority. In order to transcend racial oppression and stop taking the role of those on the other side of the veil toward themselves, African Americans must use race as an emblem for achieving group solidarity, according to Du Bois (11). Only as a result of achieving solidarity can the "race" boundaries that made solidarity possible in the first place be transcended. In this paradoxical vision of race leading to the transcending of race, Du Bois offers a blueprint for world equality and world peace led by the African American example.

There is an interesting parallel between Du Bois and Karl Marx on this point. The proposal that race as an emblem could serve to unify the group is similar to Marx's argument that working-class status could be used to unify workers around the world. In both cases the unifying emblem is the very thing created by others to exploit the group in the first place. Both emblems also have the advantage of originating with capitalism and developing out of an opposition within it. Therefore, they both transcend traditional cultural beliefs and values. This transcendence of tradition is one critical distinction between the African American

community and traditional African culture. Thus, in both cases, using the emblem to create solidarity in opposition to the dominant group allows for a transcendence, not only of the false consciousness formerly associated with the emblem, but also of traditional beliefs, values, and inequalities.

It is essential to point out that an altogether different and powerful source of psychic distress in *The Souls of Black Folk* could be found in a process of misrecognition, or disrespect encountered on a daily basis—that is, in the general refusal on the part of whites to acknowledge the humanity of blacks. DuBois has mentioned the systematic humiliation black people faced on a daily basis:

But before that nameless prejudice that leaps beyond all this he stands
 helpless, dismayed, and well-nigh speechless; before that personal disrespect
 and mockery, the ridicule and systematic humiliation, the distortion of fact and
 wanton license of fancy, the cynical ignoring of the better and boisterous
 welcoming of the worse, the all-pervading desire to inculcate disdain
 for everything black, from Toussaint to the devil,—before this there
 rises a sickening despair that would disarm and discourage any nation
 save that black host to whom "discouragement" is an unwritten word.(
 23)

This despair was an expression of the anguish experienced by African Americans who could not help but have internalized at least some of the negative sentiments that white society held towards them. The perils of such distorted self-consciousness among blacks did not pass unrecognized by other educated Afro Americans. Du Bois asks:

Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both? Or is it my duty to cease
 to be a Negro as soon as possible and be an American? If I strive as a

Negro, am I not perpetuating that very cleft that threatens and separates Black and White America? Is not my only possible practical aim the subduction of all that is Negro in me to the American? Does my black blood place upon me any more obligations to assert my nationality than German, or Irish or Italian blood would? (27)

Du Bois here seems to indicate a fundamental discord between a simultaneously held American national-civic identity and a Negro group identity-hinting, without benefit of example, at the existence of fundamental political differences at the heart of the issue.

Du Bois's double consciousness thus presupposes the existence of a hierarchy of values, since the tensions that result from trying to measure up to the standards of others rest upon privileging one culture and its way of life over others. For DuBois the privileged culture and attending values were not those of Blacks of African descent, but those of White America. In the *Art and Imagination of W.E.B. DuBois*, Arnold Rampersad has commented on how DuBois saw the separate identity of Blacks in America, noting that the African-American was

both American--by citizenship, political ideals, language, and religion--and African, as a member of a "vast historic race" of separate origin from the rest of America. In spite of their citizenship, the destiny of blacks was not absorption into or a "servile imitation of Anglo-Saxon culture, but a stalwart originality which shall unswervingly follow Negro ideas." He was speaking of the fate of blacks everywhere, of a "Pan-Negroism" in which black Americans were to be the advance guard. The stress was on the separate identity of blacks; the difficulty was in trying to describe the gift of the folk in "that black tomorrow which is yet destined to soften the whiteness of the Teutonic today. (61-62)

In discussing the specific character of African-American culture, although Du Bois did not lose sight of the importance of Western influences, he was quick to point out, however vaguely, what he took to be "African" and "Black" qualities. Again, as Rampersad, makes clear that Du Bois has "set against the money-mad, Philistine white America the original music, folk tales, and 'pathos and humour' cultivated by blacks. He declared that blacks were 'the sole oasis of simple faith and reverence in a dusty desert of dollars and smartness'" (62). But included in Du Bois's characterization is the acknowledgment that 'aesthetic' qualities were not the only ones by which Blacks were to be defined. As products of America, a nation itself marked by contradictions and value conflicts- i.e., material versus spiritual progress- thrift, industry and "smartness" were also part of their nature as well.

DuBois however sees that the life of the African-American was a constant struggle to achieve material betterment within the dominant white culture. Since this struggle sometimes entailed denying or repressing the values and life style of one's own racial heritage, the results were often frustrating and painful. On the other hand, when seeking to live up to the standard of others does not require abandoning one's cultural and racial values, then the awareness of one's "twoness" need no be construed as a negative experience. It rather comes across as a healthy pluralism of the sort Du Bois describes when he speaks of merging his double self into a truer and better self:

In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows. (3)

In this passage, to be a Negro and an American still means to retain a sense of duality and doubleness. But given DuBois's call for reciprocity and mutual recognition, the duality does not result in tension or pathology. A persistent and central concept in Du Bois's thought, "dualism" is, philosophically, any system of thought which insists on the existence of two independent, separable, unique realms: supernatural/natural; spirit/matter; soul/body; visible world/invisible world good/evil; Black White. Indeed, a detailed examination of "Our spiritual Strivings" reveals that Du Bois's discussion of double consciousness is actually an attempt to transcend the dualistic view of human consciousness in favor of the monistic notion of unity.

The tension between dualism and monism, unity and diversity, remains quite obvious here. Du Bois's desired unity appears in the final analysis to be perhaps harmony, or the Hegelian notion of a higher "synthesis," since he is very clear on the need to keep the best of both selves. Despite DuBois's desire to merge his double self into a better and 'truer self, he nevertheless remains a dualist in acknowledging that neither of the older selves should be lost. It is in this sense that Du Bois's dualism must be understood as the precondition for harmony, as he makes it, very clear that he wants it possible for a man to be "both," Black and American. But even though Du Bois's ideal consciousness strives for harmony, it remains in reality, as Hegel would have it, an "Unhappy Consciousness"- that is an "Alienated Soul which is the consciousness of self as a divided nature, a double and merely contradictory being? (251), it is at this point in *The Phenomenology of Mind* that Hegel explicitly employs the expression "double consciousness":

This unhappy consciousness, divided and at variance within itself, must, because this contradiction of its essential nature is felt to be a single consciousness, always have in the one consciousness the other also; while being an undivided consciousness, it is a double-consciousness. It is itself the gazing of one self-consciousness into another,

and itself is both, and the unity of both is also its own essence: but objectively and consciously it is not yet this essence itself--is not yet the unity of both. (251) The problematic of how to harmonize the two selves, or, correlatively, how to live with double- aims, contradictory desires, and "unreconciled ideals" without being "torn asunder" sets the stage for the drama that has characterize so much Black-white relationships in American life since the American diaspora.

Bernard W. Bell, anchoring his discussion of double consciousness in the African-American literary tradition, places emphasis not on the dark vision that double consciousness is felt to usher in; but on its more positive implications. In a section of his *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* (1987) titled "Sociopsychological Roots: Double-Consciousness, Double Vision, and Socialized Ambivalence," Bell states that:

...the historical. pattern of contradictions between the ideals of white America and the reality of black America has resulted in what I prefer to call ethnically rather than racially different cultural heritages and a complex of double consciousness, socialized ambivalence, and double vision which are healthful rather than pathological adjustment by blacks to the rigors of the New World. (5-6)

Furthermore, Bell argues that "over a long period processf acculturation has settled in the deep consciousness of the individuals who went through it as both self-protective and compensatory cultural behaviour, the double-consciousness that African-American novelists, sometimes self- consciously but often unconsciously illuminate for readers" (9). Double consciousness, for Bell, thus preoccupies the African-American, but it does some more through affirmation than negation, from this perspective, double consciousness may well be

seen as the negative other of America, but it is the positive space of personal harmony for African-American themselves.

Chapter III: Self-hatred in *The Bluest Eye*

The Bluest Eye essentially is the story of Pecola, and her obsession for blue eyes, she is not the only female in the novel intent of doing away with her Negroid features, and indication for Morrison, perhaps, that modern Black women's experiences with double consciousness have more to do with their interest in physical appearances than with their interest in other areas such as education, employment, and economic advancement. Pecola has been influenced by her culture's assumption that blue eyes, blond hair, and white skin are the true and only marks of beauty. She has been influenced by an aesthetic which maximizes Europeans standards of beauty while minimizing those of African-American origin, making it impossible for Pecola to accept herself as either beautiful or loveable. Pecola, in short, explicitly states her desire to be physically white, making double consciousness in Morrison's novel: a desire to annihilate the African-American race.

Claudia, the novel's narrator, reflects on one summer of her childhood, relating to readers her sense of shame and guilt over the incestuous rape of 11-year-old Pecola Breedlove. Pecola is victimized by a society that conditions her to believe that she is ugly and therefore worthless, and because she doesn't epitomize white Western culture's idea of beauty. Pecola believes that if her eyes were blue she would be pretty, virtuous, and loved: friends would play with her at recess, teachers would smile at Pecola the same way they smile at Maureen Peel, and even her parents might stop fighting because they would not want to "do bad things in front of those pretty eyes" (40). For Pecola, beauty equals happiness, and it is difficult to fault a young girl for the misperception; certainly both white and black communities in her world seem to support the idea.

Morrison indicates how damaging careless adoption of Western values can be for African Americans in two memorable incidents. In one incident Morrison provides to illustrate the debilitating effects of the infiltration of Western ideas on African Americans is the scene in which Pecola is expelled from the neat, orderly, and sterile house of Geraldine. By straightening their hair, clothes pinning their noses and suppressing "the dreadful funkiness of passion" (64), these brown women have groomed away their identities with the hot comb of self-hatred. Although Junior tells his mother that Pecola killed the cat, Geraldine's strong reaction against Pecola goes far deeper than her cat's death. Geraldine calls Pecola a "nasty little black bitch" because Pecola reeks with the funkiness and the poverty Geraldine has so stridently avoided (72). As Geraldine stares at Pecola over the silky black of her dead cat, she notes Pecola's soiled clothes, muddy shoes, slipping socks, and loosely plaited hair, despising the little girl for being poor and too black: "She had seen this little girl all of her life ... They had stared at her with great uncomprehending eyes. Eyes that questioned nothing and asked everything. Unblinking and unabashed, they stared up at her ... And this one had settled in her house" (72). She has, in short, been influenced by an aesthetic

which maximizes European standards of beauty while minimizing those of African-American origin, making it impossible for Pecola to accept herself as either beautiful or loveable. Morrison is quite successful in making this point with Maureen Peal, a young Black girl with a complexion which African-Americans frequently describe as high yellow and one that, until the sixties, many African-Americans greatly envied. Not only was Maureen light skinned but she also possessed "long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back" (47). Hair of this kind "as at one time called "good hair" by Black people. Maureen's physical Characteristics, Morrison suggests, are partly responsible for the acceptance and approval which she receives from so many individuals. "When the teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in the halls; white boys didn't stone her" (48). Little dark black girls themselves even catered to Maureen, stepping aside to allow her easy access to the bathroom. It matters a great deal that Maureen herself also believes that her physical appearance sets her apart and makes her special. When, for example, Pecola, Frieda, and Claudia -sister of Frieda and narrator of the story are quarreling with Maureen, Maureen makes one or two very revealing remarks. She refers to Pecola's father as "her old black Daddy" (55), "black" at one time being one of the most disparaging epithets one could utter to an African-American. Frieda and Claudia defend Pecola, both physically and verbally, shouting to Maureen, "You think you so cute!" (56). Maureen retorts, "I *am* cute!" And you ugly. Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute" (56). With Maureen's acknowledgment that she does believe herself to be cute, comes the other girls' thought that perhaps they are not. Light-skinned women aspire to a genteel ideal: green-eyed Frieda "enchanted the entire school," and "sugar-brown Mobile girls" like Geraldine "go to land-grant colleges, normal schools, and learn how to do the white man's work with refinement (64)." The problem with such internalization is not that it is ambitious, but that it is life-denying, eliminating "The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the

funkiness of the wide range of human emotions" (64). One who really accepts the external definition of the self gives up spontaneous feeling and choice. Morrison, in other words, seeks to expose the economic and racial codes that create the ultimate horror of Pecola's story. Consider, for instance, the "high-yellow dream child" (47), Maureen, who injects (or at least lets loose) a "shades-of-black" racism on the community. Maureen's entrance into the story inflicts on Claudia a sharp realization of her own social "inferiority" to lighter-skinned African Americans. "When teachers called on her [Maureen], they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in the halls; white boys didn't stone her" (48). Claudia makes us privy to a whole list of insults and offenses she sustains because of her darker skin. The reason, in this instance, is the standard of white physical beauty. Injected into American culture at every turn (as we see with Pauline at the movie theater), this biased and impossible standard lets loose a bag of horrors on Lorain's African American community.

The next incident occurs when neighborhood boys dance "a macabre ballet" around Pecola, berating her for the darkness of her skin, singing "Black e mo. Black e mo" (50). Pecola could not help covering her eyes with her hands. In describing the episode, Claudia remarks that "it was the contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth" (50). Pecola is an easy victim, responding with tears rather than insults because, like her mother, she has completely assimilated the values the majority culture presents in billboards, advertisements, and motion pictures. Though Frieda and Claudia are also affected by double consciousness, they are not affected to the extent that Pecola is. Pecola is much more psychologically delicate, and, hence, it is much more difficult for her to cope with being the bearer of physical traits that many consider to be ugly. Even when she was born, her own mother considered her ugly, an attitude which the mother maintains and projects from time to time. Pecola's mother, Mrs. Pauline Breedlove works as a housekeeper for a White family. One particular day Pecola is at work with her when the girl is visited by her friends, Frieda

and Claudia. They decide to walk home together when it is time for Peola to leave. Minutes before their departure, Pecola accidentally spills a pan of hot berry cobbler which splatters everywhere, including Pecola's legs. Mrs. Breedlove is furious, yells at Pecola and knocks her to the floor. The mother does not attempt to comfort her daughter at all, screams at her instead and calls her a "crazy fool" (85). As all of these incidents are in progress, a little White girl dressed in pink, who lives at the house, watches and whines because the pie has been ruined. Mrs. Breedlove, whom the little girl addresses as Polly, comforts her while ignoring her own daughter. She hugs, soothes, and assures her that she will bake another pie. Mrs. Breedlove then proceeds to eject Pecola and her friends from the White home, not even acknowledging to the White child that she knows that three girls. The child asks her, more than once, who those three girls were, and each time she fails to tell her. Mrs. Breedlove simply responds, "Hush. Don't worry none" (85). Her failure to admit that Pecola is her own daughter is another indication of Mrs. Breedlove's own problem with double consciousness. The obvious message she transmits in the pie scene is that White girls with straight golden hair are cute and special while Black girls with kinky black hair are not. Moreover, Mrs. Breedlove has a nick-name, "Polly," that only whites use and it reduces her dignity and identifies her as "the ideal servant" (99). Moreover, White girls, or light-skinned Black girls (like Maureen), are worthy of good treatment and special gifts. As Pecola's own mother demonstrates, Black girls are too insignificant to warrant berry cobbler, a warm hug, or even recognition from another Black person, in this case Pecola's own mother. Such treatment by her own mother can only accentuate Pecola's sense of double consciousness and sense of worthlessness.

In the "Afterword" to her novel, Morrison reveals that she uses racist ideology to focus "on how something as grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of society: a child; the most vulnerable member: a female"

(168). In Pecola's case, her vulnerable position as an adolescent, black female makes her quest for self-definition especially crucial but when she turns to her parents in order to establish a positive link between childhood and adulthood, she only finds an overwhelming source of racial self-hatred. She further mentions:

The extremity of Pecola's case stemmed largely from a crippled and crippling family ... But singular as Pecola's life was, I believed some aspects of her woundability were lodged in all young girls. Thus, Pecola's misery over her 'blackness,' and thus her ugliness, originates in her family's perception of themselves. Morrison writes that...In exploring the social and domestic aggression that could cause a child to literally fall apart, I mounted a series of rejections, some routine, some exceptional, some monstrous, all the while trying hard to avoid complicity in the demonization process Pecola is subjected to. (168)

Pecola's parents were traumatized children themselves; they continue the trauma by denying their own weakness in their abuse of parental power, by instilling their own fears of impotence, and by calling upon their children to fulfill their own unmet needs. A particularly cruel form of this parental abuse is the passing down of their racial self-hatred to the extremely vulnerable Pecola. The result is that she is unable to develop any type of racial consciousness that could counteract the degrading influence of a dominant and racist society.

Pecola's dreadful visit to Soaphead Church for the blessing of blue eyes shows that many African Americans still suffer from a dangerously low sense of self-esteem originating from their internalization of the prejudices of white culture. After her rape, Pecola eventually makes her way to Soaphead Church, a West Indian mystic/prophet. Angry at God for ignoring the wishes of this small, "pitifully unattractive" child (137), anger that he directly

expresses in a letter to God, Soaphead Church grants Pecola's wish, giving her the blue eyes she longs for, even though "no one else will see her blue eyes" (162). Soaphead Church is a self-admitted child molester, a man abandoned by his wife years before his arrival in Lorain and his encounter with Pecola. Morrison describes Church as a man who "all his life had a fondness for things" (131). At some point, perhaps after his wife deserts him, Church's "attentions . . . gradually settled on those humans whose bodies were least offensive-children" (132), specifically the bodies of "little girls," whom he finds "usually manageable and frequently seductive" (132). In her novel, Morrison also demonstrates the forces in white society that eat away at Pecola's self-esteem and sense of self-worth with her encounter with Mr. Yacobowski. Pecola visits Mr. Yacobowski's store eagerly willing to spend her pennies on a handful of Mary Jane candies. Although Pecola is a paying customer, Mr. Yacobowski's glazed eyes betray a "total absence of human recognition" while his hand gingerly takes the pennies from the little girl's fist, careful not to brush her black skin (36). When Pecola leaves the candy store, she once again sees herself as ugly and meaningless as a weed straining through a crack in the sidewalk.

Pecola is not only prevented from developing her nature and growing to her fullest potential, she is also wrested from existence "into the chaos of life" first when she is "put outdoors" and forced to live with Claudia and Frieda, and second when her father, Cholly Breedlove, rapes her (11). In the opening pages of the novel, Claudia describes the significance and horror of Pecola's plight: "Outdoors, we knew, was the real terror in life... There is a difference between being put out and being put outdoors. If you are put out, you go some- where else; if you are outdoors, there is no place to go ... Outdoors was the end of something, an irrevocable, physical fact" (11). Pecola furthermore participates in her own destruction; she is passive, folding into herself because she lacks the strength that love of oneself and one's identity provide to "stand erect and spit the misery out on the streets" as

Claudia does (61). Yet it remains difficult to fault Pecola for a destructive lack of self-awareness and self-love. Pecola lives in a brutal world of rejection, deprived of even parental affection. The relationship between mother and daughter is so distant that Pecola invariably thinks of her mother as "Mrs. Breedlove (32)." Pecola's sense of double consciousness is something which she, to a large extent, inherited from her mother. She is a tragic figure who begins life at the bottom, living in a grubby storefront, taunted and alienated by her classmates and either beaten or ignored by her parents. Moreover her mother, brainwashed by the white movie industry, decides her daughter is irretrievably ugly: Pauline Breedlove "was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen" (95). Sitting in the local cinema day after day, Pauline Breedlove dreams of looking like Jean Harlow, parting her hair on the side and pulling a curly lock over her forehead. When Pauline loses her front tooth, she realizes how terribly impossible and foolish her dream was. Pauline begins to hate herself, unconsciously believing the messages paraded on the silver screen that only beautiful women like Jean Harlow and Norma Shearer deserve love and happiness. More significantly, however, the perception of Mrs. Breedlove's shortcomings also comes from the inside - from the core of her existence, the soul to which Du Bois refers. The internal damage sustained by Mrs. Breedlove is first recognized in a passage where her adversity with northern Whites (and Blacks) is painfully expressed: Mrs. Breedlove recalls:

Me and Cholly was getting along good... We come up North ... Everything changed. It was hard to get to know folks up here, and I missed my people. I weren't used to so much white folks. The ones I seed before was something hateful, but they didn't come around too much. I mean we didn't have too much truck with them. Just now and then in the fields, or at the commissary. But they want all over us. Up here they was

everywhere - next door, downstairs, all over the streets - and colored folks few and far between. Northern colored folk was different too. Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness. (91) The meanness of the few Black people with whom Mrs. Breedlove mingled, specifically Black women, caused her to feel inferior and uncomfortable with herself. Her natural hair style was an object of ridicule. Although she was not accustomed to wearing makeup, she nevertheless experimented with it only to gain acceptance from the other Black women who wore it and with whom she associated. Eventually clothes and money also were among her chief preoccupations, resulting in Mrs. Breedlove's self-degradation and self-renunciation, emotions that came about because Mrs. Breedlove lost touch with her true identity. The truth of the matter was that Mrs. Breedlove "did not really care for clothes and makeup" (92). In order to extend her experiences with her pseudo-identity, namely, her White European side, Mrs. Breedlove ventured into a world of fantasy and make-believe: Cinematic escape was where she found her only pleasure (95). She was charmed by the likes of Clark Gable and Jean Harlow, and tried even to look like Harlow.

The onliest time I be happy seem like was when I was in the picture show. .

.White men taking such good care of they women, and they all dressed up in big clean houses with the bathtubs right in the same room with the toilet. Them pictures gave me a lot of pleasure, but it made coming home hard, and looking at Cholly hard. I don't know. I remember one time I went to see Clark Gable and Jean Harlow. I fixed my hair up like I'd seen hers on a magazine. A part on the side, with one little curl on my forehead. It looked just like her. Well, almost just like. Anyway, I sat in that show with my hair done up that way and had a good time... I got up to get me some candy . . . I taken a big bite of that candy, and it pulled a tooth

right out of my mouth. There I was, five months pregnant, trying to

look like Jean Harlow, and a front tooth gone. Everything went then. Look like I
just didn't care no more after that. I let my hair go back, plaited it up, and
settled down to just being ugly. (95-96)

This "silver screen" scene is one of Morrison's more effective metaphors for double consciousness. It demonstrates that Mrs. Breedlove is a victim of double consciousness and that she is torn between two worlds. She cannot comfortably exist in her own natural condition (unstraightened hair) or in her own natural environment (small and perhaps cluttered home). Whether inside the theatre or out, Mrs. Breedlove is reminded that her Negroid features and her humble lifestyle set her apart from the larger community, the White world. Furthermore, during the birth of Pecola, the White doctors' excessive attention to the White mothers and a neglect of Mrs. Breedlove, again convinced her that she was different and did not belong. And when her daughter is born, regardless of Pecola's pretty head of hair and soft wet eyes, she sees Pecola as ugly too. Not only is Pauline's awful sense of self-worth passed on to her child, her impossible dream of blond blue-eyed beauty is passed on as well. After Pecola's birth, Pauline avoids the black culture, transferring her anger from herself to her family and reinvents herself, "split[s]" herself in the home of a white couple:

She looked at their house, smelled of their linen, touched their silk draperies,
and loved all of it . . . She became what is known as an ideal servant, for
such a role filled practically all of her needs . . . Soon she stopped trying
to keep her own house . . . More and more she neglected her house, her
children, her man they were like the afterthoughts one has Just before
sleep . . . (98-99) She finds order in beauty in a white household;

she lives out her glamorous life in her own version of the movies. The problem here is not Pauline's dreaming about the movies and beauty and glamour, but rather her failure to share

this fantasy with her own family: Pauline kept this order,
 this beauty, for herself, a private world, and never introduced it into
 her storefront, or to her children. Then she bent toward
 respectability and in so doing taught them fear : fear of being clumsy, fear of
 being like their father, fear of not being loved by God, fear of madness like
 Cholly's mother's. Into her son she beat a loud desire to run away, and
 into her daughter she beat a fear of growing up, fear of other people,
 fear of life. (100)

By living vicariously through the movies and the white world and by rejecting the black world, Pauline handicaps herself and her family specifically her daughter Pecola. She literally offers Pecola no chance for happiness. Thus Pecola views herself always as an outsider, deformed, and ugly. Pauline's aspiration for a superlative form of physical beauty - a goal unattainable - becomes a severe handicap both to herself and to her daughter and eventually causing Pecola to go insane as she searches for hope.

Moreover with white houses as the standard of beauty, Pauline finds everything in her home decor wanting. She compares her zinc tub to her employer's porcelain one, her "stiff, grayish towels" to their "fluffy white" ones, her daughter's "tangled black puffs of rough wool" with the Fisher girl's silky, yellow hair (99). Measuring her own success by a consumer yardstick, Pauline employs a semiotics of home decor, in which one's home furnishings are read as part of a system of symbols indicating one's social status and self-perception. The fuller description of the Breedloves' decor makes apparent that they feel demoralized by their inability to use their possessions to convey a positive self-image. Morrison uses a description of this decor to signify their double consciousness caused due to the internalization of Whites' cultures and values. Their sofa "had been purchased new," the narrator explains, "but the fabric had split straight across the back by the time it was delivered. The store would not take

the responsibility" (26). The Breedloves are held responsible for the sofa and the debasement it represents, but Morrison makes it clear that the accountability should be directed elsewhere. The sofa functions as a sign of the Breedloves inability to compete in American consumer culture. The literal humiliation of the ripped sofa and the metaphorical shame of consumer impotence also affect other parts of the family's life: "If you had to pay \$4.80 a month for a sofa that started off split no good, and humiliating-you couldn't take any joy in owning it. And the joylessness stank, pervading everything" (26). The ripped sofa is just the outward manifestation of the Breedloves' all-pervasive alienation from themselves which contribute to their double consciousness. This comment makes Pauline's acceptance of the equation that home decor equals identity apparent because she believes that she is squalid and dark like her apartment and the Fishers are stately and clean like their house. Pauline can only maintain a positive self-perception by affiliating herself with the Fishers. Yet houses such as theirs are clean because she and others like her labour in them; they are big because white employers can still find black labour to exploit. Moreover, the white men are viewed as good caretakers because they protect white women not only from economic vicissitudes but also from the supposed threat of the rapacious black male predator.

When the narrator details the history of Pauline's life, her apparent preference for the white family over her own is revealed to be much more complicated, and at least partially connected to her overcompensation for the unhappy reality of her own family life, especially as it contrasts to Mrs. Fisher's. It is apparent from the description of the Breedloves' home where they remain "festering together in the debris of a realtor's whim," that systematic obstacles stand in the way of their successful adoption of the breadwinner/homemaker model (25). Considered in this light, Pauline can be understood to embrace her role as the Fishers' servant in order to trade in her own troubling body and history. Pauline wills herself not to know her own history because it is too painful. She seems to forget her own role in creating

the seeming naturalness of Hollywood's image of " 'white men taking such good care of they women, and they all dressed up in big clean houses'" (97). *The Bluest Eye* is thus about Mrs. Breedlove and her daughter Pecola. Both the mother and daughter search for beauty amidst the restrictions of life. They are in search of a link between the "physical self and the developing spiritual psyche" (25). The trouble is, of course, that the sought-after harmony is never realized. In the case of Mrs. Breedlove, the incongruity manifests itself through pretences, i.e., enchantment with films and actors, and busyness in the White home of her White employers. For Pecola, the result of the incongruity of the physical and the spiritual is complete insanity - □ total destruction of her being. Self-degradation and self-effacement, the result of African-Americans' discomfort with their natural qualities, are two important components of double consciousness. The more African-Americans can emulate White culture and assume White characteristics, the happier they think they will be. As a way of dealing with double □ consciousness, such efforts more often lead to failure. When they lead to personal failure, they serve as a source of frustration. An example of personal frustration from *The Bluest Eye* is Geraldine who berates Pecola for her dark skin and consequently contributes to her double consciousness.

Geraldine, herself a victim of double consciousness, is preoccupied with hot-combed straightened hair. "She stiffens when she feels one of her paper curlers coming undone from the activity of love. She hopes he will not sweat - the damp may get into her hair" (65). Geraldine also takes great care with the hair of Junior, her son. He maintains a hair cut that is as close to his scalp as possible "to avoid any suggestion of wool," the term that African-Americans commonly used to describe tightly curled hair (67). Geraldine also coated her son's face with lotion to prevent it from becoming ashen: "In winter his mother put Jergens Lotion on his face to keep the skin from becoming ashen. Even though he was light-skinned, it was possible to ash ... the watch had to be constant (68). Moreover, she, attempting to

inculcate racial hatred to her son, teaches him about the difference between coloured people:

She had explained to him the difference between coloured people and niggers.

They were easily identifiable. Coloured people were neat and quite;
niggers were dirty and loud. He belonged to the former group: he wore white
shirts and blue trousers; his hair was cut as close to his scalp as

possible to avoid any suggestion of wool, the part was etched into his hair

by the barber.(67) Geraldine views African-American characteristics

as ugly, and attempts to diminish if not altogether eliminate them. It is little wonder that

Pecola once again experiences feelings of rejection and worthlessness, this time because of

Geraldine who discovers her in her home with her son, Junior. When Geraldine is told by her

son that Pecola killed their cat, the mother promptly orders the girl to leave their home. She

quietly says to Pecola, "Get out ... You nasty little Black bitch. Get out of my house" (72).

Like his mother, Junior, an abusive child, views Pecola as nothing more than an object to

kick around. He not only invites Pecola inside his home and torments her with the cat, but is

responsible for the animal's death. As he was attempting to throw the cat on Pecola, he let go

of it, causing it to land and singe against the hot radiator. He lies to his mother, blaming

Pecola for all that has occurred. The result is that Pecola internalizes once more that her

ugliness--her physical appearance--is what makes her unworthy of respect and the decent

treatment that should be accorded to any human being. In short, the awareness that she is

Black but has not been accepted by the "dicty" Black folk, who themselves are trying to be

White, exacerbates Pecola's sense of double consciousness.

Morrison's treatment of *The Bluest Eye* suggests that double consciousness presents itself as a problem only when African-Americans allow themselves to be affected by

opinions, their own and those of others. The entire Breedlove family is a case in point.

Morrison notes that they lived and behaved as they did because they themselves believed that

they were ugly (29). They probably began to look upon themselves in this manner because someone else branded them with this description. Morrison suggests that perhaps

Some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said 'You are ugly people.' They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. 'Yes,' they had said. 'You are right.' And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. (28)

The Breedlove family is a metaphor for those African-Americans who view their dark skin and other Negroid features as marks of ugliness. The acceptance of this cloak of ugliness is the consequence of "the Look," an expression which identifies the actors and models employed in the film industry and in advertisements. In the majority of cases, these individuals are White, and thus transmit the message to many Blacks that being White means being physically attractive, being Black does not. Some African-Americans therefore spend their lives attempting to deny their African heritage and their Negroid features as well. The more closely they align themselves with what they consider to be White beauty and White success the more successful they consider themselves to be. As a result, much of their time is spent attempting to be White, but ironically, always going about their efforts with the consciousness that they are Black. African-Americans manifesting this sort of double consciousness exist in a perpetual state of agitation, fear, and concern that they are not White enough. As Geraldine's hair fixation strongly suggests, however, underneath the veneer of Dixie peach pressing oil and the hot comb lie the true characteristics of one's identity. Underneath the superficiality, Geraldine remains an African-American. Perhaps it could be argued that Pecola, affected by her strong desire to possess blue eyes, does manage

to eliminate one aspect of her African identity. In her mind, she replaces her dark eyes with blue ones, one physical attribute characteristic of the White race. However, Pecola is successful in replacing her eyes only because she simultaneously replaces her mind and her perception of herself. It thus seems that for Pecola, reality takes on a new meaning in that that which is real is whatever appears to be real in her own individual mind. As far as she is concerned, her blue eyes are indeed real. It is easy to see, however, that the acquisition of the blue eyes does not free Pecola of all her psychological problems. Even though in some respects her sense of double consciousness has been abated, it by no means has been removed. She still remains trapped by psychological problems.

Specifically, Pecola, after receiving her blue eyes, adopts a new form of double consciousness, one that is so severe that she is actually psychologically split: she becomes two individuals. One has blue eyes while the other one does not. In some instances it appears that the blue-eyed Pecola is not very happy with her new look. She expresses the fear that her eyes may not be blue enough. She wants them to be the bluest eyes ever. When her alter ego, the dark-eyed Pecola attempts to convince her that her blue eyes are perfect, the blue-eyed Pecola does not believe her (155). Moreover, there are times when the blue-eyed Pecola accuses the dark-eyed one of being jealous and resentful because the latter does not have blue eyes. Blue-eyed Pecola's attitude attests to the belief that many Blacks, after attempting to eradicate their Blackness, never are convinced that they are quite White enough. The renunciation of African identity, characteristics and so forth appears to be quite profound where some African-Americans are concerned, and serves to demonstrate that the obsession to take on White characteristics can be totally destructive.

Until now, Pecola has been the center of discussion, and rightly so, for the story that Morrison creates does revolve around her. But while *The Bluest Eye* is largely Pecola's story of double consciousness, the novel also addresses the double consciousness of two other

young girls, Pecola's friends--Claudia and Frieda, already alluded to in the foregoing.

Socially and economically they are more privileged than Pecola is. Also, their mother projects a kind of concern for them which obviously is absent in the relationship between Pecola and Mrs. Breedlove. Consequently, the two sisters appear generally to be much more psychologically balanced than Pecola. This is especially true in the case of Claudia who dismembered and totally destroyed the White dolls she received for Christmas. She recalls the manner in which all of her dolls were destroyed and the fact that she could not love and pretend to be the mother of a pink, blue-eyed baby doll. Claudia recalls also her revulsions toward Shirley Temple, whom she resented for being on screen with Bojangles and for dancing with him.

Claudia was raised in a house where "love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup" coated her childhood (14). Claudia has never experienced being put "outdoors" or, that we know of, watched violent fights between her mother and father. Claudia does not live in a squalid storefront and her mother is not absent for much of the day, working as a maid. Claudia has been equipped with the shield of self-love to combat negative influences from black and white society-Pecola has not. Therefore, because she has developed in a less debilitating environment than Pecola Breedlove, an environment that encouraged Claudia to feel pride for herself, while still a young girl. In the novel, narrator Claudia comments that the worst fear is of being "outdoors": "Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment" (11). Any excess that might challenge the powerful 'Look' and increase their isolation is terrifying. And so the images that caused the alienation, excluded them from the real world, are paradoxically received and imitated as confirmations of life.

Claudia is very conscious of the perversity of this position and of its roots in racist society. As a child, she says, she hated Shirley Temple, "Not because she was cute, but

because she danced with Bojangles, who was my friend, my uncle, my daddy, and who ought to have been soft-shoeing it and chuckling with me" (13). She recognized the diversion of feeling from her self and world into white values, emphasized by repeated references to white dolls, babies, and movie stars. She was fascinated by those images because they were "lovable" to everyone but her. She tried to "dissect" them, to discover or possess the "magic they weaved on others," but finally learned "shame" at her lack of feeling. Claudia knew, even as a child, the force of alien cultural images. She knew that white "ideals" denied her reality by forcing it into strange forms of appearance and experience. Her first reaction was appropriate: she could feel only "disinterested violence" for what, without relevance to her life, still regulated it (15). The child Claudia learns false "love" rather than cut herself off from the only model of loveliness she is offered. But Claudia the adult narrator sees that Shirley Temple cannot really be loved or imitated because she is just a doll, an image without a self behind it. The crime of the racist society is not only the theft of black reality; it is the substitution of dead, external classifications for free self-definition. A society based entirely on the Look, on the absolute reification of the Other, reifies itself. If blacks are defined as slaves, whites are defined as masters; the Third is not a person at all, only an abstraction. There is finally a Look with no one behind it, because the freedom to define the self is denied. The movie stars and pinup girls of the white culture are not models of selfhood. The message they carry is that human life is being and appearance, not choice. To model one-self on them is to lose one's responsibility to create oneself in a world of others; to "love" them is to deny the equal freedom of others. Morrison shows the subject-object pair and the triad created by the Third operating within a society so dependent on exclusion and reification that it creates "interlocking" systems to define individuals in multiple ways. So even Black women can find scapegoats. The prime example is Pecola, black and young and ugly. Claudia says,

All of us—all who knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us; her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous ... We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength. (163)

With these remarks, Claudia links the transference of the town's self-hatred onto a hyperembodied Pecola to the widespread scapegoating of Blacks in America, concluding, "The land of the entire country was hostile" (160). In a nation obsessed with purity, whether it be racial, sexual, or ideological, there need to be scapegoats.

Morrison indirectly comments on this process of acknowledging the existence of a national racial division followed by a subtle denial of responsibility when she characterizes Pecola Breedlove as a scapegoat. It is clear from her description that Morrison intends the scapegoating of this one young girl as a microcosm of the larger scapegoating process necessary for the bolstering of a narrative of national innocence. With this scapegoating reference, Morrison seems to be commenting on the displacement of blame for black inequality from a racially structured economic and social system in the larger culture onto the matriarchal structures of the black community. Pecola is the epitome of the victim in a world that reduces persons to objects and then makes them feel inferior as objects. In this world, light-skinned women can feel superior to dark ones, married women to whores, and on and on. The temptations to Bad Faith are enormously increased, since one's own reification can be "escaped" in the interlocking hierarchies that allow most to feel superior to someone. Only the very unlucky, or the truly free, are outside this system. Pecola is so far "outside" the center of the system—excluded from "reality" by race, gender, class, age, and personal history—

that she goes mad, fantasizing that her eyes have turned blue and so fitted her for the world. Pecola's final step into madness described by Claudia indicates the extent of Morrison's tragedy: "A little black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl, and the horror at the heart of her yearning is exceeded only by the evil of fulfillment" (162). She has been victimized on three debilitating fronts from the moment of her birth: by the majority white society, by the black community, and later by herself. Consequently, this cringing, retreating, alienated little girl never attains knowledge of herself or comprehends the complex forces that manipulate her reverence for blond-haired blue-eyed Shirley Temple figures. In desperation, then, Pecola creates a friend out of her imagination who will love her and assure her that she has the bluest eyes in all the world, bluer than the blue sky, bluer than "Alice-and-Jerry Story- book" eyes. With the demise of Pecola Breedlove, Morrison issues a direct and clear warning in the afterword of the novel regarding the importance of self-love for African Americans:

The assertion of racial beauty was not a reaction to the self-mocking, humorous critique of cultural or racial foibles common in all groups, but against the `damaging internalization of assumptions of immutable inferiority originating in an outside gaze. I focused, therefore, on how something as grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of society: a child; the most vulnerable member; a female. (168)

Claudia's rejection of the White standards of beauty on the other hand is an indication of her acceptance of her own African heritage, i.e., her dark skin and African features. The duality of her African-American existence appears not to have affected her to the point where she rejects any significant aspect of her being. Claudia, for example articulates her anger at the popularity of the white dolls which many adults loved and revered:

It had begun with Christmas and the gift of dolls. The big, the special, the

loving gift was always a big, blue-eyed Baby Doll. From the clucking sounds of adults I knew that the doll represented what they thought was my fondest wish. I was bemused with the thing itself, and the way it looked ... I learned quickly, however, what I was expected to do with the doll: rock it, fabricate storied situations around it, even sleep with it.

(13) Claudia resents the emphasis placed on the white doll with blue eyes. She wants to discover the secrets behind the doll and see what makes others love it so:

I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me. Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs--all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. (14)

Pecola does not have a loving family; she simply accepts the ideal of beauty and directs her anger and hatred at herself. She thinks she must be like the white doll to have any worth. To Claudia, however, the doll stands as an obstacle *in* the way of her attention from her family members. She rejects the image:

I couldn't join them in their adoration because I hated Shirley. Not because she was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles, who was my friend, my uncle, my daddy, and who ought to have been soft-shoeing it and chuckling with me. Instead he was enjoying, sharing, giving a lovely dance thing with one of those little white girls whose socks never slid down under their heels. (13) Although many blacks admired the doll, it does

not in any way comfort Claudia. It does not add to her sense of belonging. She explains:

"When I took it to bed, its hard unyielding limbs resisted my flesh--the tapered fingertips on

those dimpled hands scratched. If, in sleep, I turned, the bone-cold head collided with my own. It was a most uncomfortable, patently aggressive sleeping companion" (13-14). She rejects the doll and its beauty. Whereas Pecola lacks family support and love, Claudia enjoys both. Thus, her sense of being leads her to healthy self-worth. Claudia feels included in a loving family but Pecola remains marginalized. Along with her family, she resides not in a home, but in their makeshift storefront building and in collective ugliness. Morrison notes: "Breedloves wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them . . . And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. Dealing with it each according to their way" (28). While Mrs. Breedlove uses her ugliness as "a prop," and Sammy uses his as a weapon, Pecola just hides behind her "mantle" or veil (28). White society dictates her perception of beauty: "It was as if the master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question" (28). Pecola internalizes so much that she sees at such a young age. She has no outlet for her feelings, so she implodes; going insane at the end. This feeling of lack even becomes very real for Claudia, who has shown a healthier self-image thus far. In short, Claudia demonstrates a more healthy response to double consciousness.

Claudia's reflects on the inability of some seeds to grow and bear fruit in the soil of her community: "The soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live We are wrong, of course, but it doesn't matter." (164). In her novel Morrison is claiming that the soil - or the societal environment - should not fail in nurturing flowers like Pecola Breedlove. The seed of Pecola was not planted too deeply - Pecola's soul was denied nourishment. Affection was never showered on Pecola's forlorn, yearning soul; therefore, the fruit of self-love was never realized. Without the strength of love for one's cultural identity, vulnerable members of minorities are in real danger of being

starved by both black and white environments. Describing a society where whiteness is the yardstick of personal worth, where Shirley Temple and Jeanne Harlow set standards for beauty and "Dick and Jane" readers prescribe an oppressive notion of normalcy, where Pecola's shame at her mother's race serves as a model for self-improvement, where fathers deny their sons, mothers deny their daughters, and God denies the communal prayer for the privilege of blue eyes - in such a society, Morrison argues, marigolds cannot bloom. The marigolds are metaphoric, of course. The barrenness they signify goes beyond agriculture to include scapegoating and intraracism. There are several problems with this metaphor: it leaves the barrenness unaccounted for; it situates social and psychological oppression in the community that receives them (the "soil" in which the seeds were sown); it presents racism as an inescapable atavism; and it provides no means of recovery. Even though Pecola is a sort of scapegoat, she is, as we have seen, not without emotions, feelings, and personal desires. When Mrs. MacTeer "assumed that Pecola drank all of the milk out of greediness", she was not entirely wrong (16). Pecola was indeed greedy, but her insatiable desire is not for milk. Her greed is precipitated by her desire to enter into the White world and to become as Shirley Temple. This desire leads her to pray for blue eyes, which Soaphead Church gives to her. The trouble is that Pecola fears that they are not blue enough. Consequently, she never overcomes her double consciousness. Although the Black community as a whole does fail Pecola, and although Soaphead appears to help her, his efforts come about too late to allow the girl to become a healthy human being.

The only individuals who really seem to like Pecola and who don't mind helping her are Claudia and Frieda, two children who virtually are powerless. They play with her, defend her, and even respect her, particularly after the occurrence of her menarche. When Pecola is impregnated by the rape committed by Cholly, her own father, Claudia and Freida alone pray for the baby's survival while the adults of the community would prefer that the baby die,

which it does. The adults' disdain for Pecola and her unborn child is a manifestation of their own foibles, i.e., passion, frailty, lust, and double consciousness, in short, the realization that they will never be White. The two sisters, however, see no foibles in themselves, at least not until the death of Pecola's baby. They come to see themselves as failures because the baby dies. Their sense of failure so overwhelms them that even they find themselves discontinuing their association with Pecola. Regardless of their reasons, the result is that they end up acting as the adults in their community have acted. They all reject the little Black girl who wanted blue eyes. Morrison's novel reflects this dangerous internalization of racist values and the cycle of self-hatred passed on from parents to children it produces. By calling our attention to this self-perpetuating cycle in her first novel, Morrison is trying to eliminate the devastation of dandelions like Pecola Breedlove.

Chapter IV: The Visible and the Invisible: Double Consciousness in *Invisible Man*

The Du Boisian expression "veils" connotes concealment. It is also suggestive of a false face and masking - the act of claiming to be something one is not. Ellison's narrator in *Invisible Man* does just that, but becomes so absorbed in his pretence that he becomes disoriented and loses sight of who he is. While masking has been and continues to be traditional form of subversion and, hence, survival for African-Americans, its practitioners usually engage in masking with the intentions of triumphing over their oppressors. But the concealment seldom takes an inward turn to cause the kind of personal confusion and imbalance as it does with Ellison's protagonist. The uniqueness of Ellison's protagonist is that he dons a mask not so much to deceive White society as to deceive himself. The mask is a veil separating what is from what the protagonist wants to be. The tragic and often humorous result is that the protagonist all too often finds himself living in between these two states. While Du Bois has described this ambiguous suspended state of perpetual restlessness as double consciousness, and Ellison as "invisibility," Victor Turner calls it "liminality":

The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous ... Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and [ceremony] Thus liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, . . . and to an eclipse of the sun or moon. (147)

As a black person, the character Invisible Man (the narrator) is in conflict with those who comprise the majority. In trying to belong, he finds himself conforming to the white man's perception of him. This willingness to conform recurs in each of the major incidents; however as he grows older and wiser it occurs in lesser proportion. In the early chapters the young high school graduate is willing to subject himself to almost anything to gain

recognition by the town. As each incident is related, the reader finds that Invisible Man is slowly learning to think before he acts and to deliberate over the consequences of his actions. He never fully understands his condition, however, until the end of his adventures, which is, incidentally, where the book begins.

In the prologue, the protagonist (the narrator) introduces himself in a matter-of-fact way; he realizes his true status - his invisibility in relationship to others. His condition is not the result of any medical problems or supernatural events as he explains

... 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 . . . 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 the inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality. (7)

Invisibility means living in a world which forbids one's participation. The invisible person sees but is unseen and is vitally aware of a universe in which his very being is discounted, nullified, denied. Thus, invisibility is the ultimate alienation. The concept of alienation is extremely complex. It is multidimensional: it involves philosophy, psychology, sociology, religion, history et cetera. Alienation is particularly devastating to black people. In traditional Africa, everyone belongs to a group; everyone functions in harmony with his or her group. Torn from their homeland and forced to endure the most vicious form of racism, black Americans suffer an agonizing alienation which is caused by double consciousness. Once he is aware of his invisibility, he can accept himself and continue his life. The very absence of his awareness has kept him running haphazardly for nearly twenty years. Ironically, the

realization of his condition occurred only after his physical divorce from authority, displacement from surroundings and isolation from others. Having fallen, he is better able to come to terms with himself and to find a middle ground between self and community.

Moreover the concept of vision is introduced to the text, understood not only as the faculty of sight, but rather as a weapon for racism, a tool for identification, and a simultaneous excommunication and escape from white society. The narrator, known only to the reader as Invisible Man, understands his invisibility as both a product of the sight (or lack of sight) of others, and a means for subversion against those who created him as such. It is only his awareness of his invisibility, however, that allows him to empower himself; the narrator acknowledges that he “did not become alive until [he] discovered [his] invisibility” (7). By emphasizing the viewer's "poor vision," the narrator creates the possibility of an ontological condition of good vision, or true sight, wherein observers would be able to recognize the real person-not the negation or phantom-they are seeing. True sight would therefore resolve the apparent problem introduced by the negation of the subject in the process of its declaration. But in a fashion emblematic of the novel's structure as a whole, the narrator's positivism is shown to be untenable:

One night I accidentally bumped into a man.... I stopped the blade, slicing the air as I pushed him away, letting him fall back to the street.... He lay there, moaning on the asphalt; a man almost killed by a phantom.... Would he have awakened at the point of death? Would Death himself have freed him for wakeful living? But I didn't finger.... Poor fool, poor blind fool, I thought with sincere compassion, mugged by an invisible man! (7- 8)

The ambivalence of the encounter for the narrator is palpable: His compassion for the poor blind fool evinces a continuing belief in the possibility for true sight, but the question of whether the blind fool would have awakened at the point of death to recognize Invisible Man

is both left unanswered and, at the same time, by virtue of the extreme likelihood that the man would not have awakened, is highly pessimistic about the potential for "wakeful living". Indeed, the combination of contingency, unknowability, and absurdity that characterizes the accidental encounter between an anonymous phantom who later becomes institutionalized as a mugger is both introduced and left unresolved throughout the novel's remainder. Just as there is no clarity of sight available for the tall blond man to properly identify his invisible assailant, genealogical and typological methods of any kind to establish a coherent and stable identity will also always be subject to the same and unceasingly urgent conditions of impossibility.

In the battle royal episode he considers himself different from the other boys who have been brought in to fight each other for amusement of the white power structure. Yet he, too, is subject to the same pressures. He, too, is tempted by the nude blonde and forbidden both to look and not to look; made to fight his brothers blinded by a white blindfold; tempted by shiny gold coins which are not only electrified but also fake. Without the folk wisdom of his illiterate old grandfather he is nothing more than an educated fool. The protagonist's alienation from the black folk and from his native land is a level of alienation, that is, alienation from himself. For him, the components which comprise the Self are incomplete. He is a divided person. The double-consciousness of which DuBois speaks has distorted his concept of who he is. Unlike grandfather, who is keenly aware of what is mask and what is truth, the protagonist accepts the definitions of a hostile society. And so he is nameless, invisible. He is alienated from his own people, the black folk. Throughout the novel, the protagonist is both drawn to and mystified by the black folk heritage. He remains both a part of and apart from his people.

The narrator geographical mobility takes him from the Deep South and north to Harlem. Socially, he moves from a southern town through a Black college and into the urban

ghetto. Through this process, he meets and learns from two sets of master figures. The first set is readily acknowledged by the dominant society. He is urged to follow the lead of this group in order to find personal success and to improve the conditions of Black people.

Bledsoe (the college president), Norton (the White trustee), Lucius Brockway (the skilled laborer), and Brother Jack (the political activist) all try and fail to convince him to accept their model of social identity. The second group is overlooked by the first, and it is difficult even for the hero to recognize them. It includes his grandfather (an Old South Black), the Vet from the Golden Day (an institutionalized social deviant), Mary Rambo (a ghetto Black), and Tod Clifton (a disillusioned activist). The second group has a solid sense of Black cultural heritage and thus exposes the hero to values which make it impossible for him to accept uncritically any of the social roles available through the dominant society.

The term "fortunate' fall" was used by R.W.B. Lewis in *The American Adam* to indicate the following series of events: a fall, a separation, an encounter with evil, a period of isolation, and finally an emergence characterized by catharsis and self-renewal. The narrator is able to cast aside each of his roles after he falls into an underground hole. He lives in isolation, but the condition is not permanent, as evident in his remark, "I believe in nothing if not in action. Please, a definition: hibernation is covert preparation for a more overt action." (15). He also reveals his compulsion to "put invisibility down in black and white." (15). This desire can be construed to mean that both races share invisibility, or it can be interpreted as the narrator action of writing his memoirs. The author views his character as undertaking a social act that has positive value. "For the novel, his (Invisible Man's) memoir is one long loud rant, howl and laugh. Confession, not concealment, is his mode," Ellison writes (Shadow 57). In an interview he describes the novel as "a memoir of a man who has gone through and brings his message to the world. It's a social act; it is not a resignation from society but an attempt to come back and be useful. There is an implied change of role from

that of would-be politician and rabble-rouser and orator to that of writer"(Interview 159).

It is the resilience of the narrator that is a vital part of the American experience. Despite one shove after another, he is able to bounce back. Ironically, of all places, the injury and insult takes place in America, which was founded by those who had the courage to act against the dominant society - England. Within the very framework of freedom a black individual goes through the same rituals of rebellion, isolation and regeneration. This is another manner in which the novel reflects the peculiarly American traits of the country. It all began, the protagonist says, with his grandfather who, while on his deathbed, passed on the following advice:

Son, after I'm gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yesses, undermine 'em with grins; agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open. (17)

The grandfather admits here that he has been involved in a lifelong charade, pretending to go along with White authority but secretly resenting doing so. But the protagonist does not follow the wisdom of his grandfather, preferring instead to follow the plan which has been designed for him by White America. As Ellison points out,

One of the techniques which seems to have worked out for taking advantage of the high mobility which is possible in the states is forgetting what the past was, in the larger historical sense, but also in terms of the individual's immediate background. He is apt to make light of it. The immigrant will become ashamed of the language of the parents, the ways of the forefathers; and you have this, what I call 'passing for white,' which refers to a form of

rejecting one's own background in order to become that of some prestige group or to try to imitate the group which has prestige at a particular moment. ("Interview" 158)

It takes Ellison's protagonist some time to discover that the rules for proper behaviour in America he is attempting to follow have become meaningless in the eyes of those who have established them, i.e., the prestige group. Trueblood, for instance, has committed incest, impregnated his daughter, and become an outcast in the Black community. Yet after his tale to Norton and other White men, he is momentarily rewarded for his behavior. In contrast, the protagonist - law abiding, honest, and diligent- is repudiated. Even Trueblood himself is baffled by their action: "What I don't understand is how I done the worst thing a man can do in his own family and 'stead of things gettin' bad, they got better. The niggers up at the school don't like me, but the White folks treats me fine" (73). From the protagonist's point of view, White Americans like Norton outwardly encourage racial cooperation, uplift, morality and so forth, but inwardly are much opposed to any of these for Black Americans. That this is the protagonist's conclusion can be discerned from several comments he makes under his breath after Trueblood is given the hundred-dollar bill by Norton: "You bastard ... You no good bastard! *You* get a hundred-dollar bill" (61). This is a moment of illumination for the protagonist, yet he seems not to respond to the light. He is willing to pretend a while longer and hold fast to the belief that his "yesses," his cooperation, and his education will somehow elevate him and make him an American and a first-class citizen.

The protagonist's entire life has prepared him for this obsessive desire to make it the "American" way. As the novel opens, he is portrayed as one already the victim of Jim Crow laws and education. Ultimately, he abandons the South and seeks a better destiny in Harlem, only to find that his problem is philosophical/ideological, not geographical. The protagonist has allowed himself to be convinced that he must assume those identities that others feel best

suited for him. As a high school boy in the South, he is an accommodationist; in college, also an accommodationist but in the mode of Booker T. Washington. When he moves North, he works as a non-union laborer and then flirts for a while with Communism. Finally, he becomes a Rinehart, Ellison's word for the unattached, alienated, urban Black who deliberately endeavours to manipulate the fantasies of Whites and Blacks to his own advantage. It is only after he has divorced himself from society and the roles that each of its institutions has demanded of him, and after he has locked himself in a secret basement room between Harlem and New York City that the protagonist finally has the time and courage to view himself as he wishes himself to be. With his new awareness he plans to re-enter the world, not as a stereotype, invisible even to himself, but as an individual who finally wishes to be visible, at least to himself. Regarded as one of the best novels ever written, *Invisible Man* is interracial at all of its stages. The interracial quality of the text has led some to stress the novel's western influences and to approach the novel in terms of the Everyman motif. The Everyman approach to *Invisible Man* is rejected by Addison Gayle, Jr. who asserts:

The most descriptive comment about *Invisible Man* that the novel has—and this is the only work for it—soul. The idiom is that of African-Americans evidenced in the rhetorical excess of the black preacher and the racy idiom of the ghetto streets. Characters, excellent facsimiles of black people who have survived a precarious American existence, move in and out of its pages ... *Invisible Man*, therefore, is as much a novel about its people, their mores and folkways, as it is about the nameless protagonist who occupies the reader's center of attention. (204)

Gayle goes on to take up the theme of double consciousness, noting that "A search for the dominant theme of the novel leads not to the sources cited by Ellison--Dostoevsky, Melville, or T. S. Eliot--but to a passage from Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folks*: 'After the

Egyptian ... The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife--this longing to attain self-conscious manhood to merge his double self into a better and truer self" (205).

Taking as his starting point the African-American youth, Gayle states:

The Black ... knows that he is different from white people in terms of color and history, yet he is confused as to the quality of that difference because he has been told that such differences are negative, and that to validate his humanity, he must accept the roles and images prescribed for him by those in power and authority. The history of the black American, therefore, has been one of ambivalence concerning the value of the images projected in the American mirror and doubts about the authenticity of those existing somewhere in the collective conscious awaiting recreation by the novelist or the historian. The protagonist of *Invisible Man*, therefore, is both novelist and historian, recreator of images and destroyer of myths. His narrative is the sociological thesis of Du Bois given lyrical and allegorical form. (206)

Like Gayle, Houston Baker, Jr. Also sees the influence of Du Bois:

Informing both *The Autobiography of an Ex- Colored Man* and *Invisible Man* are the cultured stance and carefully delineated "Double consciousness" found in W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*. Both the invisible man and the ex-colored man are concerned with their relationship to what Du Bois calls "the problem of the Twentieth Century ... the color line: each modulates between an exclusive dedication to black American culture and an attempt to secure privilege, acclaim, and freedom from . . . the other world which does not know and does not want to know our power. (435)

The similarities between Du Bois's thinking on double consciousness and Ellison's protagonist in *Invisible Man* can be taken a step further if we extend the comparison to the

cultural thought of Ellison himself. For like Du Bois, Ellison feels that the goal of integration is to merge one's Black identity with one's national identity. Ellison makes this very explicit in an interview with Allen Geller:

Interviewer: Baldwin lately seems to have laid emphasis on his being a Negro; you seem to consider yourself an American in...

Ellison: I see myself both and don't see a dichotomy. I'm not an American because I arbitrarily decide so. I write in the American tradition of fiction. My people have always been Americans. Any way you cut it. If you want to think in racist terms, the blood lines were here before the Africans came over and blended with them, as they were here before the Whites came over and blended. So racially, in terms of blood lines and so on, American Negroes are apt to be just as much something else as they are Africans. (165)

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, the problem for Du Bois was finding a way to merge the two identities. In *Invisible Man*, the problem for Ellison's protagonist was living with the knowledge that the two identities are indeed different. As a result of the protagonist's confusion over what to be - confusion over which "warring soul" to assert - he decides to adopt the pragmatic attitude of doing whatever it takes to be accepted wherever he happens to be. He totally conforms, and even possesses dreams of becoming another Booker T. Washington. He humbly submits to what he takes to be the desires and wishes of whites.

When castigated by Bledsoe, the protagonist remains submissive and meek, another indication that he is attempting to play by the rules. His agreeableness causes him not even to question the president's interest in helping him in order to be established in New York. Bledsoe gives him several sealed letters and tells him that they are letters of recommendation to be given to prospective employers, all of whom are supporters of the college and acquaintances of the president. The letters turn out to be condemnatory and make

employment for the protagonist impossible. Bledsoe's letter stated, in part,

The bearer of this letter ... has been expelled for a most serious defection from our strictest rules of deportment. Due to circumstances the nature of which I shall explain to you in person on the occasion of the next meeting of the board, it is to the best interest of the college that this young man have no knowledge of the finality of his expulsion. For it is indeed his hope to return here to classes in the fall. (156)

Bledsoe's reprimand brings to the fore an issue central to Du Boisian double consciousness. Through some of Bledsoe's remarks, Ellison is echoing Du Bois's sentiment that Blacks must always be on guard. Black Americans are rarely in the position to act without giving consideration to the way their actions will be interpreted by White people. Mollification and placation are essential for survival. Bledsoe says as much when he is reprimanding the protagonist: "Why, the dumbest black bastard in the cotton patch knows that the only way to please a white man is to tell him a lie! What kind of education are you getting around here?" (116). African-Americans actually do constitute a unique and separate group in American society, one which warrants 'defence mechanisms' and being 'on guard', is constantly forced upon the protagonist after his expulsion from college. In order to revive Norton from Trueblood's shocking tale of incest, the protagonist takes him to the Golden Day, a place visited by Black, mentally ill, shell-shocked patients and veterans of First World War. Most of the patients had been members of the Black bourgeois - lawyers, teachers, and preachers - before the war. "Believing in the American Creed," Bernard Bell argues, "they had voluntarily served in the European war to make the world safe for democracy only to return to the undemocratic circumstances of their own country. The institutionalized brain surgeon symbolizes the disillusioned black victims of this travesty of the American Creed" (208). The surgeon's advice to the protagonist is to "Come out of the fog ... and remember you don't

have to be a complete fool in order to succeed. Play the game, but don't believe in it - that much you owe yourself. Even if it lands you in a strait jacket or a padded cell. Play the game, but raise the ante, my boy. Learn how it operates, learn how you operate" (118). This advice, which is essentially the same as that given by the protagonist's grandfather, is in keeping with what Bell calls "the improvisational quality of the novel, its repetitious but ever innovative and complex model variations on the theme of Afro-American double-consciousness"(209).

The narrator was born and raised in the South and knew this lifestyle well. The Battle Royal scene illustrates the frustration and pain which Blacks must accept under the conditions of overt racism in the South. The dominant culture has the power to force them to degrade themselves in order to gain access to the resources they need if they are to experience success. The opportunity to attend college automatically involves the Invisible Man in the Mainstream. The school is supported by Whites, so lifestyles associated with it are recognized and encouraged by the dominant society. The Invisible Man's first exposure to the Mainstream seems promising, but it proves treacherous. After receiving a scholarship and beginning his studies, he is dismissed because he offends the president, Dr. Bledsoe, who is a perfect dramatization of Blacks who accept this lifestyle and are eventually victimized by it.

Mainstream experiences lead to alienation and disenchantment. Mainstreamers are dependent upon White dominated institutions for their success. Whereas Black writers of the 1960s and 1970s attack Mainstreamers directly, Ellison uses the conventions of picaresque satire to present a subtler but no less savage condemnation of them. He shows Bledsoe acting one way toward Whites, on whom he depends for his status, and another toward his fellow and sister Blacks. On one occasion he then goes on to analyze himself quite as candidly as other master figures in the picaresque tradition by giving the apprentice-hero advice on how the world really operates:

I's big and black and I say 'Yes, suh' as loudly as any burr-head, when it's

convenient, but I'm still king down here. I don't care how much it appears otherwise. Power doesn't have to show off. Power is confident, self-assuring, self-starting and self-stopping, self-warming and self-justifying. When you have it, you know it. Let the Negroes snicker and the crackers laugh! Those are the facts, son. The only ones I even pretend to please are big white folk, and even those I control more than they control me. This is a power set-up, son, and I'm at the controls. You think about that. When you buck against me, you're bucking against power, rich white folk's power, and the nation's power—which means government power!" (119)

Thus Bledsoe exposes his own duplicity, but to show how subtle the issues and satiric methods can be, few readers of the novel realize that Bledsoe is actually a parody of "Great Black Americans" such as Booker T. Washington. This is the strategy typical to picaresque satire. The reader is accustomed to the "view from the top" which is authorized by social convention. The picaresque novel satirizes by giving the "view from the bottom". Bledsoe does indeed have power, but the immediate cost of it has been the denial of his own people. Particularly effective at donning this mask is Dr. Bledsoe, who, despite his pretensions of power over his white patrons, slips into blackface (or blank face) all too easily. Infuriated that the the narrator has driven Mr. Norton to the slave-quarter section of the college; Dr. Bledsoe swiftly changes his persona when addressing his white patron. The narrator describes his masking: "As we [Dr. Bledsoe and I] approached a mirror Dr. Bledsoe stopped and composed his angry face like a sculptor, making it a bland mask, leaving only the sparkle of his eyes to betray the emotion that I had seen only a moment before" (99). Swallowing his bile as the narrator had swallowed his blood, Dr. Bledsoe now adopts a tone of subservience and sycophancy. His voice is full of "a strange grandmotherly concern," and he "croon[s]" his apologies to Mr. Norton, affecting the behavior of a faithful servant toward his master. Even

in his dress, Dr. Bledsoe manages to "make himself look humble" (102). No matter how elegant his "striped trousers" and "swallow-tail coat," he looks as if he is wearing a costume: "Somehow, his trousers inevitably bagged at the knees and the coat slouched in the shoulders" (114-15). Like the black dandy popular in minstrel shows, Dr. Bledsoe is a black man dressed in the sophisticated attire of a white man. But lest he seem threatening, even subversive, Dr. Bledsoe makes sure the clothes don't quite "fit." He pays homage to whiteness but does not presume to appropriate it. Instead, he treats his white patrons with ingratiating respect, letting "his teeth flash" as he grins from behind his black mask. The legacy of minstrelsy haunts the narrator even after he leaves Dr. Bledsoe's college and heads North. Power would enable the narrator to satisfy his own personal ambitions and his sense of responsibility. As he prepares to leave college, he reflects:

How had I come to this? I had kept unswervingly to the path placed before me, had tried to be exactly what I was expected to be, had done exactly what I was expected to do-yet, instead of winning the expected reward, here I was stumbling along ... despite my anguish and anger, I knew of no other way of living, nor other forms of success available to such as me. (125)

He also learns that he must find a way to fulfill his other needs, too. An equally effective variation on the theme of double consciousness in *Invisible Man*, and glimpse of the protagonist's growing self-awareness, is the "Optic White Paint" scene. After being expelled from college by Bledsoe the protagonist goes to New York where he finds work at the Liberty Paint Company, whose motto reads "Keep America Pure with Liberty Paints" (160). He is told that the secret of the paint's special whiteness is that ten drops of black paint are stirred into the white solution until they disappear. The secret formula of the paint is maintained by the Black foreman of the factory, Lucius Brockway, to whom the protagonist is assigned. Brockway, the backbone of the industry, is an Uncle Tom. He and the protagonist

fight; there is an immense explosion; and the protagonist lands in the factory hospital. The horror of the Battle Royal is re-enacted in the examination room of the factory hospital, as the narrator is again electrocuted and again deprived of volition. He explains, "I wanted to be angry, murderously angry. But somehow the pulse of current smashing through my body prevented me. Something had been disconnected" (193-94). Subjected to the experimental whims of his doctors, the narrator is effectively debilitated. He becomes a puppet, his limbs and his emotions controlled not by his own will but by the will of his doctors. He becomes a dancing Sambo doll, spasming on the examination table like his fellow battle royal participant on the electrified carpet. One doctor exclaims, "Look, he's dancing" and another observes, "They really do have rhythm, don't they? Get hot, boy! Get hot!" (194). The narrator exists in an excruciating state of double consciousness, divorced from his native blackness, and divorced, too, from his coerced dark blackness. He cries, "Where did my body end and the crystal and white world begin?" and observes, "I seemed to exist in some other dimension, utterly alone" (198). Between the axis of whiteness and the axis of blackness, the narrator oscillates. Despite continuing attempts by the doctors to elicit his name, the narrator merely "lay fretting over [his] identity" until the "Director" calls it, which provokes a "stabbing pain" of recognition (200). The episode concludes with the narrator's in a state of confusion: "Things whirled too fast around me. My mind went alternately bright and blank in slow rolling waves. We, he, him-my mind and I-were no longer getting around in the same circles" (206). The factory hospital episode as a whole is one of the transition points in the novel: a movement from one condition or conceptual register to another-- transitions often marked by birth imagery, and always involving some form of paper exchange or transmission. This transition shares the iconography of vertical movement with each of the narrator's subsequent transitions (into the subway system, down the stairs of the burning building, onto the "load of coal"): The "train plunged," and he "dropped through the roar,

giddy and vacuum-minded, sucked under and out into the later afternoon Harlem" (208). The narrator's identity confusion had become submerged within them and lost is narrated as a plunging: He plunges his mind unsuccessfully for his name, and his confusion is troped as an underground or submerged subway that stresses agentless, chaotic transport over active, participatory self-transformation.

Despite the temporary loss of memory, and in contrast to the White doctor's conviction that his machine brings complete adjustment to the environment, it is while undergoing treatment that the protagonist is reawakened, in a fragmentary way, to his Black heritage. He recalls his mother, the folk tales, and his childhood identity as Buckeye the Rabbit and Brer Rabbit. The protagonist's growing glimpses of a Black world that exists outside the confines of prescribed social schemes and dogmas, he has tried to live by, take on an increased significance once he enters Harlem. He lives with the blues - singing Mary Rambo and freely immersing himself in the sights, sounds, and smells of his fellow Blacks. The sweet potato scene is of special importance, as it serves as a clear expression of the protagonist's affirmation of his identity. The sweet potato is, as William J. Schafer points out, "'forbidden fruit' because it recalls his unsophisticated country ancestry, but he eats it anyway, rebelling against the pressure of conformity: 'They're my birthmark.' I said, 'I yam what I am'" (215). He decides to take Mary's offer of a room where, unemployed, he broods over what to do with the "spot of black anger [which] glowed and threw off a hot red light" such as those which animate the stylized dudes at Men's House (241). Caught between alienation and hostility, he recognizes Mary's value to him:

Nor did I think of Mary as a "friend"; she was something more-a force, a stable, familiar force like something out of my past which kept me from whirling off into some unknown which I dared not face. It was a most painful position, for at the same time, Mary reminded me constantly that something

was expected of me, some act of leadership, some news-worthy achievement; and I was torn between resenting her for it and loving her for the nebulous hope she kept alive. (242)

While living with Mary the protagonist is further connected with his people and heritage when his speech decrying eviction incites a riot, and enables two elderly Black tenants to move back into their "dark little apartment that smelled of stale cabbage" (213). "I like them," the protagonist later proclaims, 'they reminded me of folks I know down South. It's taken me a long time to feel it, but they're folks just like me, except that I've been to school a few years'" (244).

After returning to Mary's boarding house, the protagonist decides to accept a job with the Brotherhood, a predominantly White organization which ostensibly sympathizes with Blacks and other oppressed groups. Although the protagonist needs a job, he has a greater need at this point in his life for something to live by. He needs a new construction, a new plan or faith to replace the one by which he previously sought to identify with White America. In terms of double consciousness, the protagonist deludes himself into thinking that his place and role in the Brotherhood is the possible merger of the warring consciousnesses. That is, he sees himself as submitting to a White definition or plan of action and purpose - the revolutionary cause of the Brotherhood - and bonding with Black people through working for their betterment. When initially approached by members of the Brotherhood and asked to unite with them, the protagonist is sceptical and does not choose to join. He decides to do so only after learning something about the Brotherhood's purposes and objectives. Brother Jack's comments concerning the mission of the organization convince the protagonist that the Brotherhood is a worthy group: "We are working for a better world for all people. It's that simple. Too many have been dispossessed of their heritage, and we have banded together in brotherhood so as to do something about it" (246)."You shall be," Brother Jack continues,

"the new Booker T. Washington,' but even greater than he" (248). Thus the protagonist looks upon the Brotherhood as a potential path to progress and harmony between the two races. But, much to his dismay, he discovers the Brotherhood -Black community union to be a special merger in which the actuality of division is as much a reality as in the conventional American social order. Just as his success mounts and the movement the protagonist inspires reaches its peak, the Brotherhood decides to switch its ideological direction and desert the cause of Blacks.

Although a source of deep disillusionment, the protagonist's relationship with the Brotherhood is nonetheless crucial for understanding his move from self-absorption, in his quest to make it the individualistic American way, toward a growing identification with his fellow Blacks and their humanity. In his first formal speech for the Brotherhood, the protagonist proclaims:

I feel strong, I feel able to get things done! I feel that I can see sharp and clear and far down the dim corridor of history and in it I can hear the foot□steps of militant fraternity! . . . I feel that here, after a long and desperate and uncommonly blind journey, I've come home . . . Home! With your eyes upon me I feel that live found my true family! My true people! My true country. . . I feel that here tonight, in this old arena, the new is being born and the vital old revived. In each of you, in me, in us all. (279)

In learning to accept and embrace his fellow Blacks, the protagonist learns, simultaneously, to accept and embrace all the poor and wretched that suffer under the American system--red, yellow, black or white. According to Jane Campbell, Ellison, accordingly, "allows the protagonist to kill Ras, the Garveyite and advocate of Black pride, not merely because of Ras's violence or refusal to recognize the beautiful absurdity of [his] American identity", but because he wants to rid himself of whatever hatred and violence he might possess (96).

Both Brother Jack in the Brotherhood and Ras, the separatist, identify ways in which they can satisfy their personal expectations and improve the conditions of Blacks, but he finds flaws in their lifestyles, too. The first is the danger of racial violence which leads to futile conflict with the police. The second is the failure of available ideologies to meet the real needs of Black Americans. After Tod Clifton is shot by a policeman, he sees three young Street Blacks and thinks:

Who knew but that they were the saviors, the true leaders, the bearers of something precious? The stewards of something uncomfortable, burdensome, which they hated because, living outside the realm of history, there was no one to applaud their value and they themselves failed to understand it. What if Brother Jack were wrong? What if history was a gambler, instead of a force in a laboratory experiment, and the boys his ace in the hole? What if history was not a reasonable citizen, but a madman full of paranoid guile and these boys his agents, his big surprise! His own revenge? For they were outside, in the dark with Sambo, the dancing paper doll; taking it on the lambo with my fallen brother, Tod Clifton ... running and dodging the forces of history instead of making a dominating stand. (397)

From Ras's kind of militant action, he learns that the disastrous effects of racism cannot be overcome by separation or violence. Militancy seems to rebound back upon Blacks to the eventual benefit of the dominant culture. Even so, the militant lifestyle offers the opportunity to satisfy important needs. It does supply access to Black power, it has a long recognized tradition in Black culture, and it can force the dominant culture to recognize individual and collective concerns.

The epilogue of *Invisible Man* serves as a summary by the character of the knowledge he has gained while engaged in his journey from innocence to experience. It also serves as a

commentary by the author on the character's philosophies. If a reader is to assume that the novel is a compendium of the main character's memoirs, then the epilogue can also be perceived as an explanation of the book's purpose. The narrator ponders, "Why do I write, torturing myself to put it down? Because, in spite of myself I've learned some things. Without the possibility of action, all knowledge comes to one labelled 'file and forget' and I can neither file nor forget"(467). He recognizes that his experiences have been valuable ones, the sharing of which can benefit both himself and the community. For him, writing becomes a positive action, and the result of that action becomes a contribution to society. He feels that his contribution will help to ease the pain of re-entry when he does decide to emerge again. This tradition is marked by both American and minority themes, which share a common basis. The entry that gives birth to all of these ideals is the mind, which has no color or race. The narrator explains that he cannot remain underground forever because "there's the mind, damn it, it wouldn't let me rest" (560).

Ellison style of writing in the "Epilogue" emphasizes a paradoxical logic to the problem of identity declarations in the novel. Two contradictory forms of writing appear. First, writing is making "passive love to your sickness" or burning "it out" and going "on to the next conflicting phase" (464). Writing is "self-torture," "failure," and exceeds or thwarts or undermines intention: "The very act of trying to put it all down has confused me and negated some of the anger and some of the bitterness" (467). It is approached "through division" - through love/hate, denouncing/defending (467). Moreover writing is "disembodied," "invisible and without substance"; and is "disarming [oneself] in the process" (467). But, secondly, writing also brings one to the point of a decision, which implies imminent, "socially responsible" action, and which presumes some form of "self" that acts (467). And it gives "pattern to the chaos", and writing is the "true health" of knowing the "division" of invisibility (467). Thus, a self, disembodied and disarmed, writes the condition of its

invisibility; self and invisibility, like "man" and "invisible," are the terms opposed to one another in a paradox of declaration. The nature of the relation between possession and dispossession, identity and non-identity, naming and unnaming, visible and invisible, in *Invisible Man* is an unbounded problem of double consciousness undergone by African-American.

The protagonist admits to himself that he has been casting aside his personal interests and pursuits in order to please others. His servitude to authority has hindered his development as a human being. In conforming, he has chosen community at the risk of self; the extreme sets him off balance. Only after becoming aware of his imbalance can he begin to identify himself. He describes his self-torture:

Too often, in order to justify them, I had to take myself by the neck and choke myself, until my eyes bulged and my tongue hung out and wagged like the door of an empty house in high wind. Oh yes, it made them happy, but it made me sick. So I became ill of affirmation of saying 'yes' against the nay-saying of my stomach-not to mention my brain. (461)

Upon realizing that he has been stifling his self-growth, he finds the road to recovery. Despite great odds, he continues to hope for acceptance in a community that disdains him. This resilience remains with him even after he comes to the realization that he has been used. He bounces back into action after each repercussion, and he intends to do the same after his retreat from society. He plans to emerge because, regenerated, he can use his new found self and knowledge to find a place in society that will serve as a middle ground between idealism and authority, self and community. "I must come out, I must emerge," he cries, "I'm shaking off the old skin and I'll leave it here in the hole. I'm coming out, no less invisible without it, but coming out nevertheless ... who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you" (468-69). The concept of beginning again is part of American experience as is the idea

of exchanging the old, stifling philosophies for newer, democratic ones. The American goes through rituals of idealism, a rude awakening, rebellion, a period of isolation, and regeneration. The narrator explains: “Like almost everyone else in this country, I started out with my share of optimism. I believed in hard work and progress and action, but now after being first 'for' society and then 'against' it, I assign myself no rank or any limit, and such an attitude is very much against the trend of the times” (464).

After being duped by others and fleeing from society to undergo a period of cathartic self-examination, the narrator can see the two extremes he has experienced. He cannot make a decision as to his future even though he has the knowledge he needs to succeed. On one level, the novel ends at a standstill with the protagonist remaining in his underground refuge. On another level, the writing of his memoirs can be interpreted as an action that is positive and worthwhile on his part. He is aware that he must re-join society if he is to pursue his dreams. He realizes:

No indeed, the world is just as concrete, ornery, vile and sublimely wonderful as before, only now I better understand my relationship to it and it to me. I've come a long way from the days when, full of illusion, I lived a public life and attempted to function under the assumption that the world was solid and all the relationships therein. Now I know men are different and that all life is divided and that only in division is there true health. (464)

As final preparation for the hero's hibernation, Ellison portrays his protagonist purging himself of numerous false identities and masks. He is assumed first to be Rinehart the runner, then Rinehart the gambler, then Rinehart the briber, Rinehart the lover, and last of all, Rinehart the Reverend. Since all these roles involve, in some way or another, the possible or actual exploitation of others, the protagonist quickly abandons them. His inability to decide on what to be, on how best to be Black in White America, must not be construed as an

indication of weakness, but, as Du Bois suggests, as signs of the "double aims" that plague African-Americans.

This waste of double aims, this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals, has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand people,- has sent them off wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation, and at times has even seemed about to make them ashamed of themselves. (10)

The protagonist's double aims and multiple identities are also symbolized by his briefcase taken by one Harlemite as a 'cotton sack.' The briefcase represents his quest to make it the American way, but its contents serve as a reminder of his Blackness. Thus while the briefcase is not altogether a source of shame for the protagonist, it is nonetheless a symbol of the confusion, ambiguity, and double aims that have plagued him throughout the story. In the words of Robert Stepto, the briefcase contains

a motley array of cultural signs, mostly written 'protections' or 'passes' (diplomas, letters of recommendation, slips of paper bearing new names, etc.) that supposedly identify him and grant him 'full liberty' in the 'real' world beyond 'home.' Ellison's double-edged joke is that none of these 'protections' are worth more than the paper they're written on (they are indeed 'paper protections'), and that all of them ironically 'keep a nigger-boy running'. (173)

The briefcase also contains other important cultural items--Tarp's leg iron, Mary Rambo's grinning dark bank, Tad Clifton's samba doll, and the Rinehart-like dark glasses and high hat.

It is this journey of extremes in the quest for contentment that the novel captures. It explores the contradictions of noble ideals and actual conduct. In America, where the belief that all men are created equal prevails, actual fellowship among human beings of different races, colours and creeds is in discord with the ideal. This reality creates a double

consciousness with which the minority hero attempts to deal. In coming to terms with being a black American the narrator can better understand the words of his dying grandfather:

Hell, he must have meant the principle on which the country was built and not the men, or at least not the men who did the violence. Did he mean to say 'yes' because the principle was greater than the men, greater than the numbers and the vicious powers and all the methods used to corrupt its name? Did he mean to affirm the principle, which they themselves had dreamed into being out of the chaos and darkness of the feudal past, and which they had violated and compromised to the point of absurdity even in their own corrupt minds? Or did he mean we had to take responsibility for all of it, for the men as well as the principle because no other fitted our needs? (462)

The conflict between theory and actual practice is one that haunts black Americans as they discover that conformity means mediocrity and non-conformity leads to violence, and both of which lead to destruction. The narrator questions,

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 a lack of one. But seriously, and without snobbery, America is woven of many strands; I would recognize them and let it so remain. It's "winner take nothing" that is the great truth of our country or of any country. (465)

The winner who "takes nothing" has himself as a prize. When that prize is overshadowed by doubt caused by prejudices of a dominant society, not only is the winner hurt, but the entire society also loses worth. The narrator explains how prejudices can alter both the victim's and the abuser's views. "Thus, one of the greatest jokes in the world is the

spectacle of the whites busy escaping blackness and becoming blacker every day, and the blacks striving toward whiteness, becoming dull and grey. None of us seems to know who he is or where he is going" (465).

The black man has a rightful place in America and in its literature, as does every American. Not only does a black hero undergo struggles and rituals that characterize the American experience but he also brings to the reader's attention the need for respect of diversity, the mind and the individual. He points out that "equal" does not necessarily mean "same." These are the philosophies expressed by the character Invisible Man and the novel *Invisible Man*. The choices that come with knowing one's self include freedom, power and security, but all of these attributes can be misused. Invisible Man cannot yet emerge from his hole because he doesn't want "the freedom of a Rinehart or the power of a Jack, nor the freedom not to run" (463). He still has that hope of starting over with enthusiasm and optimism, but he now has the knowledge that he must proceed with caution as well. Here the tale ends, leaving the reader with a truly identifiable and believable minority character. That character was created by an author expressly for the purpose of adding a viable black American character into modern American literature. The author, Ellison, drew from his own experience and knowledge to create his fiction.

The protagonist's brightest moment of illumination is thus experienced when he is the blackest, in Harlem, on a bed of coal in a hole, and plunged into darkness. Black on Black in Black leads to virtual invisibility. But for Ellison, the possession of such Blackness in terms of identity and heritage is, as we have seen, only a beginning in the struggle to overcome double consciousness. Although the protagonist confesses while in his hole that "None of us seems to know who he is or where he is going and that one of the greatest jokes in the world is "the spectacle of the whites busy escaping blackness and becoming blacker every day, and the black striving toward whiteness, becoming quite dull and grey", one thing to him is clear.

"Our fate," he says, "is to become one, and yet many-- This is not prophecy, but description" (465). Overcoming double consciousness thus demands for the African-American not living in the absence of whiteness, but rather the pivoting of blackness and whiteness. They relate to each other around a psychic axis or hinge without which either is mistakenly understood. For both Du Bois and Ellison, that psychic axis is double consciousness.

Chapter V: Conclusion: Metaphor of Du Boisian Double Consciousness

A consequence of years of slavery and segregation, double consciousness has been described throughout this research as an awareness of the African American's sense of being not merely different from white America but wholly 'Other'. Some of the characters discussed manage to salvage something positive out of their status as outsider and other but the novels examined indicate that most of the characters view their outside status as negative which ultimately translate them into lost opportunities, negative self-images, and various other social and psychological problems of great magnitude. Moreover, that double consciousness presents itself as a problem in the novels explored suggests that the stories told by the two authors are not merely the result of their artistic imaginations. Each author, including Du Bois, actually lived with the realization that he or she was perceived as being different, a 'problem', and, therefore, an outsider in American life therefore. This double consciousness is at the very heart of African-American life. It undergoes mutations but never disappears. "One ever feels this twoness," says Du Bois, and it could be argued that if African-Americans were to forget or not constantly feel it, the entire character of their world would change.

The authors discussed in the research seem to agree that the latter path would be preferable, and both share Du Bois' hope that the merging of a double self into a "better and truer" self will offer the best fulfillment of the desire for full interpersonal and intrapersonal harmony that stirs in each African-American. Appreciation for the similarities among the authors cannot, however, be allowed to obscure the equally important differences in their treatment of the African-American's sense of twoness. By way of conclusion, it is necessary to briefly

highlight their respective visions.

Ellison's protagonist embarks on an equally frustrating quest for stability in American life. Published in 1952, *Invisible Man* anticipates the social unrest and sweeping changes that came to characterize the decades of the fifties and sixties. His protagonist is constantly on a social quest, albeit a mistaken and misdirected one. However fruitless his efforts, rarely are there times when he is not on the move, as he forever seeks to establish his place in American life. In the tradition of the 'Good Negro', Ellison's protagonist is, at the beginning of the novel, filled with high hopes. But after the power that be ordain that, being black, he shall be invisible, the novel ends with him disillusioned in a manhole for a suspended state of 'hibernation'. He has tried the way of "humility." of being a "good Negro". He has struggled to become a good cog in American industry; he has attempted to attach himself to the leftist politics tried to no avail all those things that would seem to help a black achieve visibility in American life.

The life of Pecola Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* is more horrible than that of the narrator in Ellison's *Invisible Man*. For Morrison, the source of this horror lies in the all-pervasive presence of mass media or, the American culture industry with its tendency to take white urban and suburban middle classes as typical Americans, the measure of what is good and beautiful. But it is not merely the American suburban ideal that heightens Pecola's sense of twoness. Her own family, her own community let her know that she is both ugly and other. Pecola studies her image for hours looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness. Accepting what both her family a white dominant culture have decided is ugly, Pecola feels worthless. Pecola is the visible victim of romantic love and physical beauty.

In spite of Soaphead's magic, and the fulfillment of her wishes, Pecola is even more hopeless, helpless, and removed from her real self at the novel's end than she was at the

beginning of the tale. Written in 1971, after the 'Black is Beautiful' slogans, and after calls of Black power and Black Liberation, seventy years after Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* □ truly testifies to the fecundity of Du Boisian double-consciousness. Thus, the metaphor of Double Consciousness, which is central to both novels, describe refer to a state of mind characterized by such diverse feelings such as invisibility in Ellison, self-hatred in Morrison and alienation in both of them. These are feelings and psychological states generated in many instances by the protagonists' social, political and cultural realities.

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