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ARTICULATED SELVES:

THE ATTAINMENT OF IDENTITY AND PERSONAL VOICE THROUGH LANGUAGE AND STORYTELLING IN WORKS BY TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN AUTHORS

By

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ABSTRACT

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In Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, and Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony, four characters, three of whom are also the narrators, are invisible and voiceless--in part because of their race or sex--and are correspondingly denied full participation in their communities. Recent findings of language and composition theorists about language and writing processes concur with the themes of these works: that such voiceless characters can find their way into, and, in fact, create their worlds, by utilizing and mastering language and storytelling.

Effectively rendered mute and invisible, Hurston's Janie begins after Joe's death to participate vocally in the community. A careful examination of the third person narrative suggests that Janie's mastery of language and her creation of her self and world lead to her ability to become the anthropological narrator of the novel.

Ellison's invisible man is invisible and voiceless and blindly complies in his oppression throughout the course of

the novel. His acquiring visibility and voice is a process invisible to the reader, occurring through his writing his account, not through his adventures.

In Kesey's novel, the central character and controlling consciousness is the mute and invisible Chief Bromden. McMurphy is a fictional character based on Bromden's father and Taber, a fiction whom Bromden creates in order to do battle with the similarly imagined Ratched (modeled on Bromden's mother) and the Combine. In the end, Bromden establishes a voice of his own and renders his two creations--McMurphy and Ratched--mute.

Tayo, in Silko's novel, participates in a ceremony of acquiring wholeness which is marked by his first living the ceremony and concludes with his telling the story to the tribal elders. Silko's novel offers storytelling not only as a means of organizing experience, but as a means of survival.

Works by Margaret Atwood, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Toni Morrison, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Jerzy Kosinski address similar issues and express the importance of language and storytelling in the discovery of personal voice, self, and community identity.

For Mom

Acknowledgements

In producing this study of mute and invisible characters who usually find their voices in solitude and without the assistance of others, I have fortunately had the encouraging guidance of Linda Wagner-Martin as I struggled to discover my own voice. Her proffered comments and criticisms, swift response to drafts and revisions, and her respectful regard of insights often at variance with her own served to facilitate my own making of meaning. I am grateful especially for her friendship.

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INTRODUCTION

For the past twenty years, language and composition theorists have proposed a paradigmatic shift in the study and teaching of language and writing. They have urged that teachers reject the "product approach" to writing, in which students write on assigned (canned) topics, fit their thoughts into prescribed forms (most notorious was the five-paragraph essay), and submit the final product to the teacher for his or her evaluation. This evaluation, more often than not, assesses how well the students capitulate to the form rather than evaluating the content of their ideas, "as though," C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon attest, "the surface decorum of texts were more valuable than quality of thought; indeed even as though decorum were equivalent to intellectual quality" (4).

Instead, numerous teachers and writers have called for consideration of language learning and writing as a process, whereby the steps which lead to growth in and facility with language and which result in these written products warrant observation in the teaching of English. In this regard, they speak of the recursive and overlapping steps of pre-writing, drafting, and re-writing, phases of the process which were formerly beyond consideration in the classroom.[1]

What these people prefer is a practice of teaching that reflects the innate language capabilities of all students. They want to substitute a philosophical and pedagogical attitude that stresses the language ability students possess for one that emphasizes the skills they lack. Ann E. Berthoff counsels subscribing to the maxim: "Begin with where they are as language animals, endowed with the form-finding and form-creating powers of mind and language" (The Making of Meaning 9). In proposing a such an attitude, these writers suggest that the processes of "real" writers--published essayists, novelists, short story authors, poets--deserve to be encouraged in the classroom.

The "real" authors whose fictional works are the focus of this study offer, through their narratives, support for this notion of the writing process. Their characters--often the narrators themselves--utilize "the form-finding and form-creating powers of mind and language"; through the process of mastering language facility and telling their stories they are able to form themselves into autonomous, authentic selves. In turn, the assertions made by language and composition theorists, applied to these works as critical tools, open up the texts to new readings. The characters' steps toward self-actualization can be better understood if readers observe carefully the process of self-forming inherent in these narratives.

In the four novels which are the primary focus of this study--Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God,

Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, and Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony--four characters, three of whom are also the narrators and thereby the authors of their respective works, are invisible and voiceless. Not some science fiction term, invisibility indicates that Janie, the invisible man, Chief Bromden, and Tayo are overlooked and virtually unseen by the dominant culture. The problem is that, because their physical forms don't conform to prescribed criteria, society does not recognize their humanness, much as the best student essays often fail to fit narrowly prescribed configurations and therefore challenge classroom assumptions. In response to these characters' nonconformity, the dominant culture imposes stereotypical roles upon them instead of allowing them to form their own identities; often, in this regard, they also either lack identifying names or are named by others. In the latter instances, the namers exert control over the named, and the characters find themselves trapped in limiting roles if and when they accept their imposed identities. As Anya Peterson Royce notes in Ethnic Identities,

> [i]f one accepts the labeling, then one's options for maneuvering advantageously are drastically reduced as one's range of expression is limited. It is often easier to accept the false classification than to insist on being recognized as an individual with many aspects. (199-200)

Similarly, these characters' voicelessness grows out of the culture's withholding language practice and training from them and/or allowing them to speak only in

circumscribed roles and forms. Their voices are effectively squelched through censorship and "correction"--methods of ensuring the "surface decorum" of their utterances, whether written or spoken. Even if they are allowed to speak, what they have to say is disregarded, perhaps even unheard. The result is their deep-seated lack of self-esteem born of the evidence before them that they are unheard, unseen, invisible ciphers.

This suppression of identity and self, demonstrated in these works through the dual motif of invisibility and voicelessness, is in large part a result of their race or sex. Hurston's Janie and Ellison's invisible man are both black, and Janie's mutedness is further complicated by her femaleness. Both Kesey's Bromden and Silko's Tayo are Native Americans of mixed ancestry; the fact that they feel ignored by whites and Indians alike further frustrates their attempts to discover their identities and voices. Each character falls into the predicament of the excluded in American culture as delineated by Lillian S. Robinson and Lise Vogel:

> To be conscious of race, class or sex with respect to high culture is to be conscious, first of all, of exclusion. The black, the woman, the worker and the peasant are all forced to acknowledge the existence of a mainstream, self-proclaimed as the whole of "culture," in which they do not--or do not fully--participate. But "exclusion" is not in itself a critical position; to be the Other is, by definition, to be the element that is <u>not</u> the subject, defined only in relation to it and only negatively. (281-82)

Denied full participation in the prevailing culture,

these characters tend to doubt their own worth as well as their capacity to contribute meaningfully to their communities. These characters accept, for a time, the confinement placed upon them, one result of which is their limited participation in their communities. Often their compliance in allowing society to define their roles for them places them in additional conflict with those who are similarly oppressed. This acquiescence to their own mute invisibility denotes an acceptance of the negative stereotypes of other members of their race or sex.

In the chapters which follow, I examine the ways in which each of these characters suffers from invisibility and voicelessness and the means by which each seeks to overcome circumscribed roles and identities. All of these characters eventually find their way back into (and, in fact, create) their worlds, by utilizing and mastering language and storytelling. By applying the findings of composition and language theorists--most notably James Britton--to extensive explication and analysis of these four texts, this dissertation explores the ways each of these authors and the events of their novels support Britton's notion that language is a fundamental means of making sense of a hostile and chaotic world and of creating a self and world of one's own. If, as Britton has observed, language is "a key way," "a highly organized, systematic means of representing experience, and as such it assists us to organize all other ways of representing" (19, 21), then it seems plausible to

expect that these characters can perhaps best define their roles for themselves and gain individual and community identities through facility in and manipulation of language.

This is precisely what occurs in the self-made narratives of Janie, the invisible man, and Bromden, and through the living and eventual telling of the story by Tayo. They each come to possess a reality, a world, of their own. Language facility affords them the opportunity to fashion an ordered world view, a sense of self within the scheme of that world, and a new conception of their own human potential long kept from them. Furthermore, implied in this application of these theoretical works to the narratives is the notion that the development of language facility in students is crucial to their conception of themselves as human and social beings--to the development of a self-identity.

Chapter 1 analyzes Hurston's novel Their Eyes Were Watching God and offers as its primary focus the suppression of Janie's self and voice. Until the death of her second husband--the self-proclaimed "big voice," Joe Starks--Janie is denied participation in the talk and storytelling of the community. Effectively rendered mute and invisible (Joe keeps her hidden within the confines of the general store), Janie begins after Joe's death to participate vocally in the community. A careful examination of the third person narrative in conjunction with Britton's observations in Language and Learning supports the argument that Janie's

mastery of language and hence her creation of her own self and world lead to her ability to become the distant, anthropological narrator of the novel.

Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man is the subject of Chapter 2 which purports that the invisible man's invisibility, lack of identity, and loss of voice, admittedly imposed from society, are reinforced by his own blind complicity. In his naive blindness, the invisible man fails to see the ways he is repeatedly defined and confined by others. Even when delivering his public speeches, he merely repeats words and arguments which are dictated to him. I argue that his process of attaining identity and voice is itself invisible to the reader, occurring as it does through the process of writing, not in the chronicle of events recounted in the chapters between the Prologue and Epilogue. Calling on Britton's comments as well as those of Joseph Church, the chapter stresses that the invisible man's "infinite possibilities" are rendered more believable through his successful development, like Janie's, of what Britton terms the spectator voice. Both Janie and the invisible man achieve insight into their own lives and their vocal suppression after a period of removal from their unwelcoming communities.

Chapter 3 presents a discussion of Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and grows first from a comparative analysis of the invisible man's and Bromden's invisibility and muteness and the pain both acknowledge in writing their

experiences. Contrary to much of the prevailing critical response to Kesey's novel, I suggest that Bromden, not McMurphy, is the central character of the book. Kesey's own comments and Bromden's accumulated memories of family, the war, and the psychiatric ward serve as the foundation for the argument that the hallucinating Bromden actually created McMurphy. Based on his own father and Taber--another victim of Nurse Ratched and the mechanistic Combine--McMurphy serves Bromden, through the therapeutic process of writing his fictional account, as a puppet-like figure set in opposition to the dehumanizing forces which compelled him to play at being deaf and dumb. In the end, Bromden acquires an identity and a voice of his own, while rendering McMurphy and Nurse Ratched voiceless, through the creative act of writing a story that is "the truth even if it didn't happen" (13).

Tayo, the central character of Ceremony, is the focus of Chapter 4. Another invisible man, he shares traits with both Bromden and the invisible man. Although this novel is narrated in the third person voice of someone other than Tayo, Tayo's ceremony of recovery and healing and his acquisition of wholeness is marked by his first living the ceremony and concludes with his telling the story of it to the tribal elders. The importance of story as an oral form connects Ceremony with Their Eyes Were Watching God which is partially an exhibition of traditional folktales. Silko's novel purports that storytelling serves not only as a means

of organizing experience--much as Britton indicates language does--but as a means of survival.

The concluding Chapter 5 examines several additional narratives in which invisibility and muteness play a role of some prominence. After fairly extensive analysis of Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, in which the self-forming and self-sustaining value of storytelling is crucial, I note more briefly Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye, Maxine Hong Kington's The Woman Warrior, and Jerzy Kosinski's The Painted Bird and Being There. These works similarly address some or all of the issues discussed in the other four novels. These include the suppression of voice, identity imposed from other sources, and the discovery of personal voice and self and community identity.

In addition, this chapter offers suggestions concerning the ramifications of the language processes playing such a major role in these various works. The prominence of storytelling as a way of fashioning a world and a self indicates the accuracy of the theorists' belief in the vital importance of language in the lives of students. Creating an environment which fosters language facility--speaking, listening, writing, reading, and thinking--can open up broader possibilities to individuals seeking a place of their own in American culture.

All of these works support the argument that language plays a crucial role in personal development. Pictured as

these characters are as isolated and without voices, language--oral and written--provides the best method of understanding and overcoming their estrangement. In the end, language and storytelling become their last and best hope for forming, and hence articulating, themselves into authentic, autonomous beings who are able to contribute to their communities as they shape their own potentialities.

NOTES

[1] There are many works devoted to observing, understanding, and delineating this process. Among them: Ann E. Berthoff, Forming/Thinking/Writing and The Making of Meaning; James Britton, Language and Learning; Britton et al., The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18); Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell eds., Research on Composing; John Dixon, Growth Through English; Peter Elbow, Writing With Power and Writing Without Teachers; Janet Emig, The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders; Stephen N. Judy and Susan J. Judy, The Teaching of Writing; Dan Kirby and Tom Liner, Inside Out; C.H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon, Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing; Ken Macrorie, Uptaught; Nancy Martin et al., Writing and Learning Across the Curriculum 11-16; John S. Mayher, Nancy Lester, Gordon M. Pradl, Learning to Write/Writing to Learn; James Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse; Donald M. Murray, A Writer Teaches Writing. Although each of these writers espouses a process approach to language learning and the teaching of writing, the clustering together of these titles is by no means meant to suggest that they agree among themselves as to the elements contained in that process.

Chapter One

The Anthropological Narrator of Hurston's

Their Eyes Were Watching God

> From the earliest rocking of my cradle, I had known about the capers Brer Rabbit is apt to cut and what the Squinch Owl says from the house top. But it was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn't see it for wearing it. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at that. (Zora Neale Hurston, Mules and Men 3)

As a child in Eatonville, Florida, Zora Neale Hurston lived fully in the folk-culture of her native home. As many people do, she took for granted the society and culture in which she was immersed. It was not until she began her wanderings northward, eventually attending Howard University and finally Barnard College, where she studied under Dr. Franz Boas and took up the "spy-glass of Anthropology," that she was able to see the cultural wealth of the community in which she spent the early years of her life.

Anthropology afforded Hurston the opportunity to return to Eatonville (as well as travel to Alabama, Haiti, and other regions) as a cultural ethnographer, to observe and record the folk tales and legends in the authentic narrative voice of the native inhabitants. This fieldwork helped her

to legitimize an insatiable thirst for knowledge and understanding. "Research," Hurston wrote, "is a formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell therein" (Dust Tracks on a Road 174). Thus it was necessary for Hurston to separate and disassociate herself from her community and culture in order that she might come to fully appreciate and comprehend the "cosmic secrets" of her childhood years and the people of her community.

If participation in an event makes one blind to the full merit and value of it, and if removal of oneself from the scene of that event is necessary for the clear and fruitful observation and understanding of the event and one's participation in it, then Hurston shrewdly created an appropriate narrator for Their Eyes Were Watching God--one who moves freely between these poles of spectator and participant. Full participation is required so that the "garment" may be experienced first-hand, and the advantage of the spectator's distance from that "garment" allows and warrants observation, speculation, and evaluation from without.

This movement from spectator to participant and back again in the narrative voice of Their Eyes Where Watching God has troubled some critics who, upon encountering the dialect of the various characters within the third person narrative, become confused as to which is narration and

which is dialogue. Darwin T. Turner, in his In a Minor Chord, provides one of the worst misreadings of the novel. "She weakened the plot," Turner claims, "by a careless shift of point of view and by digressions. Although she narrated most of the story through Janie, she shifted to Nanny in the second chapter" (107). On the contrary, although Chapter 2 features short first person narratives by both Janie and Nanny, the frame narrative continues throughout the novel in the third person. Lillie P. Howard, in Zora Neale Hurston, is also troubled by this "rather awkwardly told" tale that employs both "an omniscient narrator" and Janie to relate it (94). Even Robert E. Hemenway, whose Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography treats Hurston with compassion and empathy, mentions that the "ending seems poorly plotted, and the narration shifts awkwardly from first to third person" (233).

Other recent critics--Barbara Christian, Missy Dehn Kubitschek, Wendy J. McCredie, Elizabeth A. Meese, and Maria Tai Wolff, in particular--have come to terms with the fact that the novel, although told by a third person narrator, relies quite heavily upon tales told by various characters and much dialogue among characters. These careful readers have recognized the importance of storytelling itself as a vital element in the creation of the novel, in the creation of the communities of Eatonville and Belle Glade and the individuals who live within them, and in the creation of the Janie whose life this story-within-a-story recreates for the

benefit of the reader.[1] As Christian writes in Black Women Novelists, "Janie Stark[s] tells the story of her childhood, her life, and her loves to her best friend, Pheoby, and to the community to which she has just returned. This aspect of the novel is critical to its substance, for Janie Stark[s] is not an individual in a vacuum; she is an intrinsic part of a community, and she brings her life and its richness, joys, and sorrows back to it. As it has helped to form her, so she also helps to form it" (57). This notion of creation of self and community is critical to understanding Hurston's novel.

Hurston attempts, through the vacillation between perspectives, to deliver the best of both worlds. In the voice of the spectator, she provides keen observation and explanation of the life experiences of Janie Crawford Killicks Starks Woods, and, in the sharing voice of the participant, she brings a sense of immediacy and intimacy to the "garment" as worn by Janie.

This description does not imply that the spectator and participant roles in the novel are to be equated with the incidents of third and first person narration. Any first person narration in the text occurs within quotation marks and has been selected and presented by the third person narrator herself. Certainly these passages occur frequently. Indeed, they might be said to make up the bulk of the novel, and they similarly increase the reader's involvement in the action of the text. However, the third

person narrative itself warrants close scrutiny, as it is within the voice of this narrator that these movements from outside observer to inside sharer and participant occur. Further, this motion is demonstrated by the choice of diction and the utilization of the "standard" dialect and the dialect of the characters (by turns) within this narrative voice. In addition, this movement, although it may begin so, is for the most part, not a matter of fluctuation between pole positions. Rather, the power of the narrative grows out of a fine blending of the spectator and participant roles that partakes of many points of the spectrum between them.

Karla F. C. Holloway in The Character of the Word: The Texts of Zora Neale Hurston also comments on this intricate blend of voices.[2] Holloway's comprehensive study of the linguistic voices in Hurston's works argues that this sharing occurs in a bi-directional fashion; the diction of the participants enters the language of the narrator, and the formal and poetic narrative voice intrudes upon the language of the characters. For my purposes, the eventual inclusion of the dialectal features of the characters' voices--particularly the gradual blend of Janie's voice with the narrator's--is of interest, for it parallels Janie's progress from silence and invisibility to articulation and self and community identity. Holloway observes this simultaneous movement in Hurston's other works as well: "Because all of Hurston's novels are stories of journeys

toward self-awareness and actualization, the external voices of character gradually blend into the narrative structures in each of them" (52).

In Their Eyes Were Watching God, the narrator opens the novel with a detached view of the contrasting life of men and of women and then narrows her vision to the life of one woman.

> Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men.
>
> Now women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly. So the beginning of this was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead. (9)

Interestingly, in her study of women's psychological development, Carol Gilligan, speaking of the idea that men find it necessary to escape relationships in order to realize their dreams, sounds much like the narrator in these opening paragraphs. Gilligan summarizes Daniel J. Levinson's The Seasons of a Man's Life (New York: Knopf, 1978) as suggesting that "the road to mid-life salvation runs through either achievement or separation" (152) and that for men "relationships . . . play a relatively subordinate role in the individual drama of adult development" (153). She observes that

> Levinson's choice is the same as Virgil's, charting the progress of adult development as an arduous struggle toward a glorious destiny. Like pious Aeneas on his way to found Rome, the men in Levinson's study steady their lives by their

> devotion to realizing their dreams, measuring their progress in terms of their distance from the shores of its promised success. (152-53)

The narrator's description of "the life of men" depicts the "achievement" of the dreams coming in with the tide or the separation necessary for men to, in Gilligan's words, "measure their progress in terms of their distance from the shores of its promised success."

Gilligan's primary thesis is that for women the route toward individuation of self is through intimacy, which is threatened by such separation, while for men intimacy is the threat and separation the path of choice (8). Hurston's narrator, then, wisely understands the distinctions discovered only recently in studies of the psychological development of the two sexes.

The "distance" Hurston's narrator notes in the first line is similar, as well, to the distance the narrator espouses at this introductory juncture. The language here is simple but has a detached, abstract, removed tone.[3] The reader's eyes are turned first toward the horizon and the dreams of men, carried afar on the distant ships, and then turned back to the shore, where women <u>live</u> their dreams, unlike the men who live only <u>for</u> their dreams. Finally, the reader's gaze, guided by the narrator, singles out and rests upon this woman who has returned from burying her dead. The voice speaks seemingly objectively in a "standard" dialect which borders, here and elsewhere, on the poetic.

Judgment and commentary soon enter the narrative voice

as it notes the jealousy and envy of the porch-sitters and gossips who line the road. The narrator observes the mix of the disembodied voices--"Words walking without masters; walking altogether like harmony in a song" (10)--and then allows the reader to hear them, in a dialect far removed from her own. "'What she doin' coming back here in dem overhalls? Can't she find no dress to put on?--Where's dat blue satin dress she left here in?'" (10). These speakers, too, are observers, but unlike the narrator who sees from outside the community, they are fully immersed within it and are hostile to (and fearful of) influences outside it. In this first chapter, the narrator, who resembles the cultural ethnographer, authentically records and presents the townspeople's gossip, their exchange with Pheoby, and Pheoby's dialogue with the newly returned Janie. The narrator's voice continues in the detached "standard" dialect until the very last line, when one word enters her reportage that suggests a sharing with the speech of the people she is chronicling. "Time makes everything old so the kissing, young darkness became a monstropolous old thing while Janie talked" (19). "Monstropolous" adds to the poetry of the line at the same time that it strikes the reader as a bit of a shock. An invented word, more enormous than "monstrous" or "monstrosity," and sounding like something Janie or Pheoby might create, the term trips up the unsuspecting reader, requiring a look back in order to read it again.

In the subsequent chapter, Janie begins her narrative, telling in her own words the story that she entrusts to Pheoby in the first chapter: "'You can tell 'em what Ah say if you wants to'" (17). However, the opening paragraph is in the voice of the detached narrator once again, and moreover, Janie's first person narrative continues only for a little over two and a half pages, when the narrator takes over, synthesizes Janie's story, and comments upon the events of the beginning of "her conscious life"--her sexual awakening.

> She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. (24)

This idiom is a far cry from the diction of Janie and Nanny's dialogue which follows. For example, when Janie struggles to explain to Nanny her kiss with Johnny Taylor--"'Ah don't love him at all. Whut made me do it is--oh, Ah don't know'" (30)--the stark contrast between the narrator's formal language and Janie's informal, colloquial speech reiterates the distance of the spectator narrator from the characters she observes.

After Nanny's chapter-concluding monologue, Hurston in Chapter 3 returns anew to the narrator's formal voice and distant tone. She again works in generalizations, commenting on the mind in general and then focusing her observation on the character of Nanny.

> There is a basin in the mind where words float around on thought and thought on sound and sight.

> Then there is a depth of thought untouched by words, and deeper still a gulf of formless feelings untouched by thought. Nanny entered this infinity of conscious pain again on her old knees. (43)

Neither Janie nor Nanny has demonstrated the ability to use such formal language. The narrator continues in this vein through Janie's disappointing marriage until the introduction of Joe Starks in Chapter 4. Unlike the paraphrasing of Janie's introduction to her story of growing into womanhood, however, the narrator, in retelling Joe's tale, slips into the informal diction of Joe's dialect and voice.

> Joe Starks was the name, yeah Joe Starks from in and through Georgy. Been workin' for white folks all his life. Saved up some money--round three hundred dollars, yes indeed, right here in his pocket. Kept hearin' 'bout them buildin' a new state down heah in Floridy and sort of wanted to come. (47-48)

Although this passage captures the spirit of Joe's voice and draws on many of his own words and phrasing, these are not intended to be his remarks. Joe is referred to in the third person ("his life," "his pocket"). This section seems to be a synthesis of overheard remarks, and most important is the narrator's informing us that Joe "had always wanted to be a big voice, but de white folks had all de sayso where he come from and everywhere else, exceptin' this place dat colored folks was buildin' theirselves" (48). The attraction of this place--Eatonville--for Joe is the potential freedom to be a "big voice," and a big voice Joe soon will show himself to be. Unlike Joe, who is a smooth, fast, and big talker,

Janie, at this time in the past of her story, has a small voice. Whenever she speaks it is in response to others. A Joe Starks, a Logan Killicks, or a Nanny speaks first and Janie's responses, usually quite brief, are offered in answer to their direct questioning of her.

In spite of her lack of sexual, sensual feeling for Joe, Janie is attracted to his big voice. "Janie pulled back a long time because he did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon. He spoke for change and chance" (50). Part of Joe's fascination for Janie is his voice. Janie lacks this facility with oral speech, the ability to put words to dreams. In fact, first husband Logan is caught off guard when on one occasion Janie addresses him with uncharacteristically outspoken candor, complaining, "'Mah mama didn't tell me Ah wuz born in no hurry. . . . Youse mad 'cause Ah don't fall down and wash-up dese sixty acres uh ground yuh got. You ain't done me no favor by marryin' me'" (52-53). Such words, rushing out of the mouth of the usually reticent Janie, so surprise Logan that he "dropped his shovel and made two or three clumsy steps towards the house, then stopped abruptly," and he warns her, "'Don't you change too many words wid me dis mawnin', Janie'" (53).

Wounded by Logan's fierce attack with language, laced as it eventually becomes with threats of murder, Janie retreats into silence. "When the throbbing calmed a little she gave Logan's speech a hard thought and placed it beside

other things she had seen and heard" (53-54). Janie usually deals with her pain and her dreams in this interior fashion; she does not verbalize her experience so much as she internalizes it. In the face of such language bulldozers as Nanny and Logan, who expect her merely to speak when spoken to, and then only niggardly, Janie's language ability has been plowed under and suppressed.

But Joe Starks, big talker and big dreamer, seems to offer Janie a new chance. When she escapes Logan Killicks and leaves to marry Joe, her new hopes are conveyed in the words of the formal, poetic narrator. "From now on until death she was going to have flower dust and springtime sprinkled over everything. A bee for her bloom. Her old thoughts were going to come in handy now, but new words would have to be made and said to fit them" (54-55). For the first time, Janie believes she will have her sexual, sensual longings fulfilled, and, more than that, that a whole new world of experience and discovery awaits her. This new world will require the invention of new words to fit her old thoughts.

James Britton, as well as other educators, language acquisition theorists, and some child psychologists, has noted the importance of language in creating and understanding the world. In Language and Learning, Britton states that "we use language as a means of organizing a representation of the world--each for himself--and that the representation so created constitutes the world we operate

in, the basis of all the predictions by which we set the course of our lives" (7). If, as Britton suggests, language is the key means to organizing experience and "we habitually use talk to go back over events and interpret them, make sense of them in a way that we were unable to while they were taking place" (19), the stifling and suppression of Janie's oral speech by these other characters forces her into depending upon others for a view of the world. Much as she hopes that this dreamer of far horizons--Joe Starks--will bring her to the world of "flower dust" and "new words," in reality, Janie's bud soon begins to wither on the stem and the words remain Joe's as he inhibits her development of oral versatility and in so doing further retards her growth.

As Joe and Janie arrive and settle in Eatonville, this further suppression of Janie's talk becomes apparent as Joe talks, questions, and schemes without Janie's participation. For a while it seems as if she isn't even there, but she is--as window dressing. As the townspeople gather on the Starks' porch for the first time, the order of things is swiftly established. "Joe was on the porch talking to a small group of men. Janie could be seen through the bedroom window getting settled" (59). The narrator's selection of the passive to refer to Janie's non-participation in this scene--she is seen by others--and the choice of location for Janie--in the bedroom--illustrates Joe's expectations of his wife. Although he seemingly gives Janie the position of

presiding over the store, she is to remain in the store--a way of prohibiting her participation in the talk which continually occurs on the porch--and to dress better than the other ladies in the town. "She must look on herself as the bell-cow, the other women were the gang" (66). This ostensible high visibility as the best-dressed woman in town, coming as it does from Jody's demand that she maintain a particular image, is actually a means of rendering her invisible. Further evidence of Joe's expectations of Janie and indications that he alone is the talker and dreamer of the family come as the town selects him mayor. When the townspeople suggest that "Mrs. Mayor Starks" say a few words, Joe cuts in to say "'mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's a woman and her place is in the home'" (69). With this usurpation of Janie's vocal role in the community and the home, Joe clears the haze from Janie's eyes as to her position in his life. "It must have been the way Joe spoke out without giving her a chance to say anything one way or another that took the bloom off things" (70).

Joe commandeers the talk in the community and in the home, leaving Janie ever more stifled in her attempts to use talk to create and maintain her world. This makes the sharing of his dialect on the part of the narrator when Joe first enters the novel particularly apt. It is almost as if the "big talk" of a Joe Starks encroaches upon and usurps the narrator's voice as well. Britton states that an

individual's representation of a situation results from "two processes, that of internalizing and that of externalizing" and that "at the same time as we are drawing in from the outside world . . . we are also projecting our own wishes, our hopes and fears and expectations about the world" (Language and Learning 14). Janie's attempts at externalizing, at projecting her world, are sorely limited by the efforts of Joe and others to thwart her attempts to put words to her thoughts. "[T]he secrets of the female adolescent," according to Gilligan, "pertain to the silencing of her own voice, a silencing enforced by the wish not to hurt others but also by the fear that, in speaking, her voice will not be heard" (51).

At this point in the novel, the narrator begins to share the talk of the townspeople, for they too are big talkers. They gather on the porch and, unlike the suppressed Janie, are afforded the opportunity to vocalize their fears, misgivings, and attempts to make reason of this new world cast in the image of Joe Starks. As the narrator synthesizes their reactions to the fancy spittoon that Joe brings to the store, she again slips into their dialect, moving from the anthropological, poetical narrative voice of the distant spectator into the informal voice of the participants themselves.

> Said it was a spittoon just like his used-to-be bossman used to have in his bank up there in Atlanta. Didn't have to get up and go to the door every time he had to spit. Didn't spit on his floor neither. Had that golded-up spitting pot right handy. But he went further than that. He

> bought a little lady-size spitting pot for Janie to spit in. Had it right in the parlor with little sprigs of flowers painted all around the sides. It took people by surprise because most of the women dipped snuff and of course had a spit-cup in the house. But how could they know up-to-date folks was spitting in flowery little things like that? It sort of made the rest of them feel that they had been taken advantage of. . . . It was like seeing your sister turned into a 'gator. (76)

Here the narrative voice indicates a blending. The narrator uses very simple, down to earth, informal language interspersed with the more colloquial slang and phrasing of the townspeople. Since these people have their own voices and therefore their own identities, born of a self-created reality, those voices creep into the narrative voice, bringing forth such words and phrases as "used-to-be bossman," "Didn't . . . neither," "golded-up," "right handy," up-to-date," and "'gator," among others. Unlike Janie, they can create words to fit their thoughts. And although this voice lacks the poetical tone of some of the previous narration, it remains much less casual than in the directly quoted dialogue and in the narrative when it was overcome with Joe's dialect.

The narrative voice rests for a short time in this blend of diction and returns to it again briefly when the townspeople are shocked when Janie finally stands up to Joe ("It was funny if you looked at it right quick" [121].), but for the most part the narrator continues to recount and comment on events in the more formal, poetic voice. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that during nearly all

the time in Eatonville, from the time of Janie's and Joe's running off together, until very near the death of Joe, the narrator never once again shares Joe's voice. She shares only the voice of the porch-sitting gossipers. The lone exception to this comes immediately before his death when the voice of Joe barely enters the third person narrative in his refusal to see the doctor. "These medical doctors wuz all right with the Godly sick, but they didn't know a thing about a case of his" (129). This is not the viewpoint of the narrator, but rather that of Starks; the sharing, however, occurs only in the "wuz" and the "Godly sick," leaving other words ("these," not "dese") in the narrator's diction.

Immediately prior to Joe's death, the narrator records an outburst on the part of Janie, a speech quite similar in tone and unexpectedness to her last words to Logan mentioned earlier. She resolves to speak this last time, overriding Joe's protest and unwillingness to listen to her. "'Ah ain't gointuh hush. Naw, you gointuh listen tuh me one time befo' you die. . . . Ah run off tuh keep house wid you in uh wonderful way. But you wasn't satisfied with me de way Ah was. Naw! Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours in me'" (133). For twenty years her mind, her self, has been pushed aside and has yielded to Joe's wishes and dreams and view of the world.

Until the death of Joe, the narrator has shared only the participant diction of the community and Joe; Janie as

yet has had neither a story to tell nor the opportunity to do so. With Joe gone, Janie is thrust into the community for the first time. Her self- and world-representation have depended upon the views forced upon her by others--particularly Joe Starks--but now she begins the process of internalizing her own view of the world. Slowly she comes around to externalizing it through becoming a porch sitter in her own right. During her six months of mourning, she spends much time in her own thoughts, thinking of Nanny (and admitting her hatred of her) and observing Hezekiah's manner as a replication of the old Joe. After the mourning period, she turns more to her "kissing friend" Pheoby for talk, fishing, and relaxation. During this stage of the narrative, the narrator remains distant, with a rare, occasional slang word creeping into her voice when Janie's thoughts and feelings are being expressed.

In addition to Janie's new movement toward forming her own view of the world, she also begins to develop a self-image quite removed from that formerly imposed upon her. Mary Helen Washington remarks the Janie's search for identity "begins to take shape as she throws off the false images" previously prescribed by others (15). Nanny had informed her that the black woman was "'de mule uh de world'" (29) and held out the hope that Janie would fulfill Nanny's "'dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do'" (31). Nanny's limited conception of the possibilities open to a young black woman serves as her justification for arranging

the marriage of Janie and Killicks. Killicks' notion of Janie's role in marriage is that she "'ain't got no particular place. It's wherever Ah need yuh" (52). When she leaves Killicks for Jody, she casts off the confining garment of her married role with exhilaration.

> The morning air was like a new dress. That made her feel the apron tied around her waist. She untied it and flung it on a low bush beside the road and walked on, picking flowers and making a bouquet. (54)

A major reason for her taking up with Starks is that he seemed to see her in a new way, as he flatters her that "'[a] pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo'self and eat p'taters dat other folks plant just special for you'" (49). However, not only is Jody soon to effectively stifle Janie's attempts to speak for herself; he also keeps her physically apart from, and hence invisible to, the community. As noted earlier, Jody, like Killicks, decides for Janie where her "proper" place should be, either in the home or in the store with her hair covered, and allows her to come out only on special occasions as a mute "bell cow" (66). The queenly role of honor he provides for her is antithetical to her finding a place within the community. Barbara Christian notes Jody's failure to see Janie as anything more than a suitable spouse for an up and coming Mayor. "He sees only the mulatta image. The appropriate one for a man of his stature. He forcibly installs her as Queen of the Porch and cuts her off from any real contact with the community. She becomes his

showpiece, his property" (Black Women Novelists 58). In effect, Jody renders Janie both mute and invisible to the community, without either a voice or identity she can call her own.

On the evening of Jody's funeral, Janie takes an important first step toward visibility, toward establishing an image of her own making. Similar to her earlier flinging off her apron and the role imposed by Killicks, she "burnt up every one of her head rags and went about the house next morning with her hair in one thick braid swinging well below her waist" (137). Fast on the heels of this emancipation of her hair comes the realization of her hatred for Nanny that Janie had kept "hidden . . . from herself all these years" (138). She had long suppressed her feeling, but comes to understand that,

> Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon[,] . . . and pinched it into such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it around her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her. She hated the old woman who had twisted her so in the name of love. (138)

Indeed, Nanny, Logan, and Jody had essentially pinched Janie's image of herself into "such a little bit of a thing" as well. She was denied the autonomy necessary to fashion an authentic self. "She found a jewel down inside herself and she had wanted to walk where people could see her and gleam it around. But she had been set in the market-place to sell. Been set for still-bait" (138). Pinched effectively into an invisible commodity, she was thwarted in her attempt "to show her shine" (139).

Now that Jody is gone, the young, flirtatious Tea Cake surprises Janie with his interest in her seeing "her shine." He teases her with his appraisal of her appearance, something she has not considered for a very long time. "'Ah betcha you don't never go tuh de lookin' glass and enjoy yo' eyes yo'self. You lets other folks git all de enjoyment out of 'em 'thouht takin' in any of it yo'self'" (157). Her response to this compliment reveals her lack of self-esteem and satisfaction with her appearance: "'Ah never gazes at 'em in de lookin' glass. If anybody else gits any pleasure out of 'em Ah ain't been told about it'" (157). However, that night, after saying goodbye to Tea Cake for the evening, "she took a good look at her mouth, eyes and hair" (160) wondering, perhaps, what Tea Cake could see there. By the next day, her own self-doubts turn to thoughts of possibility, as she revives that image of many years ago and imagines that Tea Cake "could be a bee to a blossom--a pear tree blossom in the spring" (161).

The most noticeable initial blending of Janie's voice and the formal "standard" diction of the aloof narrator occurs concurrently with this reawakening of her self-awareness. Tea Cake begins to turn her head, and she doubts him (as she doubts her own self-worth), which is quite understandable considering her past experience with men.

> He's just saying anything for the time being, feeling he's got me so I'll b'lieve him. The next thought buried her under tons of cold futility. He's trading on being younger than me. Getting ready to laugh at me for an old fool. But oh, what wouldn't I give to be twelve years younger so

I could b'lieve him. (159)

In this brief piece of narrative, the narrator takes a step toward the diction of Janie in the first sentence (and into her thoughts), then steps back again into a removed commentary on that exposed thought in the next sentence, and finally returns to sharing traits with Janie's voice once more.

Notice, however, that the narrator is not as yet completely overcome (as was the case with Joe's introduction and the voices of the porch sitters) with the voice of Janie, but merely picks up a word ("b'lieve) or phrasing ("trading on"). This is quite different from the sort of narrative found in the beginning of Chapter 12 which opens with the presentation of the townspeople's reaction to Tea Cake and Janie enjoying each other's company so much. "Joe Starks hadn't been dead but nine months and here she goes sashaying off to a picnic in pink linen. Done quit attending church, like she used to. Gone off to Sanford in a car with Tea Cake and her all dressed in blue!" (166). In this excerpt, the narrator's voice is once again submerged in the voices of the speakers as it had been earlier. However, in the diction sharing occurring thus far between the narrator and Janie, it is a matter of a word or two, the way a sentence is structured, which creeps into the narrative voice, without the narrative diction surrendering to the dialect of the spoken words as recorded (and presented in quotation marks) by the novel's narrative

ethnographer.

Janie has, until now, never completely come into her own as an internalizing and externalizing being. When Tea Cake runs off with her 200 dollars, however, her fears for him--and more importantly for herself--finally break the surface and the narrator succumbs to her voice.

> She had ten dollars in her pocket and twelve hundred in the bank. But oh God, don't let Tea Cake be off somewhere hurt and Ah not know nothing about it. And God, please suh, don't let him love nobody else but me. Maybe Ah'm is uh fool, Lawd, lak dey say, but Lawd, Ah been so lonesome, and Ah been waitin', Jesus. Ah done waited uh long time. (180)

Like a dam breaking, the words and feelings just cascade out, overpowering both Janie and the narrator--her personhood has been stoppered up for so long. The alteration of the first person pronoun to "Ah" is the most telling feature here; up to this point Janie's self has been suppressed, but now she has a personalized existence as an "Ah." Similarly, when Tea Cake is out gambling in order to win back Janie's money, she again fears for his safety and the narrative voice alters once again. "She better not hear none of them old backbiters talking about <u>her</u> husband! Please, Jesus, don't let them nasty niggers hurt her boy. If they do, Master Jesus, grant her a good gun and a chance to shoot 'em" (188-89).

The subsequent chapters follow Janie's bud's belated flowering. In the company of Tea Cake, Janie begins to experience love, life, and community as her old suppressed self is replaced by her growing, blossoming self. After Tea

Cake returns home with his winnings and repays Janie her 200 dollars, the narrator describes the rebirth of her soul through her love for Tea Cake: "He drifted off into sleep and Janie looked down on him and felt a self-crushing love. So her soul crawled out from its hiding place" (192).

In Belle Glade, she begins to find her voice and to create a place for herself in the community. "The men held big arguments here like they used to do on the store porch. Only here, she could listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to. She got so she could tell big stories herself from listening to the rest" (200).[4] Missy Dehn Kubitschek accurately notes the importance of Janie's active participation in the creation of these stories:

> These storytelling sessions are crucial to community unity and self-definition, since they generate and develop communal tradition. Participation in this process is also crucial for the individual's self-definition, since communal traditions define available roles. Janie's previous passivity, enforced by Jody and by her own avoidance of a confrontation with him, locks her into a fixed role. (112)

Returning for a moment to Gilligan's study may help explain the course Janie followed in gaining authenticity as a participant. Gilligan notes that "[i]ntimacy goes along with identity, as the female comes to know herself as she is known, through her relationships with others" (12). Janie's successful intimacy with Tea Cake afforded her the opportunity to blossom in ways that her previously thwarted attempts at intimacy did not allow. Also noteworthy is the intimacy, limited though it might be, she experiences with

the Belle Glade community. In Eatonville, even after Joe's death, she was Mrs. Mayor Starks; Joe brought her to town as silent baggage and a dependable servant, and since she was not allowed to contribute to the creation of the community, her role was defined for her. Janie arrives at Belle Glade in the company of a man she can play, laugh, and talk (as well as disagree and fight) with. According to Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "the romance plot becomes communitarian and Janie [becomes] a multiple individual through Tea Cake's love. Through Tea Cake, Janie becomes one with the black folk community; indeed marrying Tea Cake is a way of marrying the community" (157). In the process of her intimate relationship with Tea Cake and the Belle Glade community, Janie experiences the freedom to become, to create, her own person and to participate in community activities.

As the narrative continues, it occasionally utilizes features of all the characters' dialects, intermixing elements of their idioms with the formal, poetic voice of the narrator. When reporting action and events, the narrator's voice is usually formal and poetic in tone; when thoughts and words are synthesized for retelling, the idiom of the thinkers and speakers is integrated into the narrative voice. The inclusion of the language of the characters within the narration indicates participation on the part of the narrator; she seems to share an intimacy with the community and the people who comprise it. The reader, too, is brought closer to the story, and yet, the

"standard" idiom of the poetic narrator allows the reader to trust the observations and evaluations--even the selection of retold events--she presents.

Much of the critical controversy and uncertainty surrounding Their Eyes Were Watching God stems from legitimate concerns about the nature of the narrator's identity. Upon initial examination of the narrative, one might expect to find convincing evidence to support a reasonable assumption that the narrator is Pheoby, Janie's "kissing friend," to whom she entrusts her tale and to whose judgment Janie leaves the decision as to whether or not the townspeople should ever hear it. "'Ah don't mean to bother wid tellin' 'em nothin', Pheoby. Tain't worth de trouble. You can tell 'em what Ah say if you wants to'" (17). However, such a supposition is inaccurate and false. If one is to believe that the newly participatory Janie continues to grow into selfhood, as the ending of the novel seems to indicate--"Of course he [Tea Cake] wasn't dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking. The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see" (286)--the ethnographic recorder and transcriber appears to be the storyteller, Janie.[5]

Finally coming into her own as a participant, the next

step for Janie on her passage to self-definition and visibility is the move to spectatorship. As Hurston said of her own experience in the quote from Mules and Men noted earlier, Janie's experiences with life--with wearing the tight-fitting "chemise"--occur first, and out of that immersion in the talk and events of her culture and community comes the participant role. However, the ability to see herself as "somebody else and stand off and look at my garment" and to make evaluations and comments upon her life, culture, and community, requires a necessary movement to the role of the spectator. Britton comments on these roles, saying,

> As participants we generate expectations from past experience, put them to the test of actuality, and modify our representation of the world (our predictive apparatus, the basis of all our expectations) in the light of what happens. . . . Events do not wait for us, so we participate as best we can, but when the experience is over we are left with a positive need to take up the role of spectator and work upon it further--in order, as we say, 'to come to terms with it.' (Language and Learning 118)

Although it may seem that the narration of the novel follows a progression of voice from spectator to participant, it should be noted that the story begins near the end--that is, with the return of Janie from her journey into the world of the dreams of men which eventually brought her to the creation of her own dreams. In fact, the process actually follows the opposite progression. The story as Janie tells it to Pheoby--those two and a half pages in Chapter 2--is primarily in the voice of the participant. As

Britton puts it, "When we use language in the participant role we select and order our material according to the demands made by something outside ourselves, something that exists in the situation" (Language and Learning 124). These demands on Janie as participant arise from the curiosity of Pheoby and the Eatonville inhabitants Pheoby represents.

But the story as told to the reader has been carefully sifted through by the narrator and has been reshaped in the voice of the spectator narrator in order to meet the needs and requirements of the narrator--Janie herself--and in order to share it with the wider community of the world at large. "But in language in the role of spectator we operate on a different principle. We select and arrange our material first to please ourselves: and secondly, not to please other people but to enable others to share our pleasure" (Language and Learning 124).

Moreover, the blending of idioms which occurs in the narrative voice indicates the deeply personal involvement (participation) that the narrator experiences in the retelling.[6] The growth and strength that was necessary for Janie to return to Eatonville in order to tell her story and, in so doing, to demonstrate her acquiring a voice and an identity much different from the self she left with, indicate the new sense of self-identity and community-identity which would quite probably lead to her development of the spectator, narrator role in retelling her story for her own pleasure. Janie has finally been able to create her

own representation of the world; she has availed herself of the opportunity to internalize and externalize her experience. Furthermore, her "coming to terms" with her experiences as a participant leads her to select and arrange the material to meet her own needs as an authentic recorder, spectator, and ethnographer of the culture which she at last has helped to create.

NOTES

[1] Missy Dehn Kubitschek observes that Janie "discovers her own soul only through the art of storytelling" and similarly criticizes Darwin T. Turner for "overlooking the frame story" (109). Wendy J. McCredie notes that the novel "is a many voiced text that constantly folds in upon itself" (25), while Maria Tai Wolff argues that "The text, the story, is the narrator's: Through Janie's story, the narrator tells another" (33). Elizabeth A. Meese similarly discusses the relationship between Janie's storytelling and the frame narrative and draws attention to the importance of language to Janie's growth: "By transforming Janie's orality--Hurston's intertexts--into textuality, the writer creates both herself as a writer and her own story, while Janie creates her life through language" (44).

[2] For Holloway's discussion of the vocal blending in Their Eyes Were Watching God, see especially 47-73.

[3] Holloway contends in an observation applicable to all of Hurston's writings that "[t]he disembodied nature of the narrative voice gives it a kind of Faulknerian purpose: it presides over the activity of the novel, it is omniscient, and it functions as a link between the conscious and visible activity of the novel and unconscious, passive awareness" (51-52).

[4] In contrast to this view of the importance of Janie's storytelling, Jennifer Jordan complains that the claim of feminist critics "that Janie's growing abilities to express her feelings and to tell a story make her an artist is tempered by the narrative structure of Their Eyes Were Watching God" (114). Jordan cites the third person narrative and the fact that the reader is not allowed either to hear Janie tell the porch stories or defend herself at the trial following Tea Cake's death, but only the beginning

and the end of her story to Pheoby. "At moments when Hurston could have given Janie the chance to prove her skill as a wordsmith we are not allowed to hear her voice" (114).

Robert B. Stepto similarly identifies the third person narration as the novel's "one great flaw." Hurston's failure to utilize Janie as a first person narrator of her own story "implies," for Stepto, "that Janie has not really won her voice and self after all" (166).

[5] It's interesting to note that in this final scene of Janie wrapping herself in the horizon as if it were indeed a garment itself demonstrates intimacy with her dream, as alluded to in the opening paragraphs of the novel. The horizon, like herself, is no longer "pinched" into something small. Gilligan claims that "male and female voices typically speak of the importance of different truths, the former of the role of separation as it defines and empowers the self, the latter of the ongoing process of attachment that creates and sustains the human community" (156). According to Gilligan, a woman, instead of separating herself from the community, "locates herself in relation to the world" (35). Janie has merged her development as an intimate being with her striving for identity.

[6] Holloway explains the blend of voices in linguistic terms. She says that in all of Hurston's works "[t]he narrator, as the deep structure of the novel, represents the underlying competence of a character who is eventually brought to a realization of self. The character, as the surface structure, only externally participates in the text until this level of self-knowledge is attained. Hurston does not allow a character's underlying competence to be exhibited until, through a series of activities that structure the literary areas of plot and theme, he comes to a degree of self-knowledge that matches the narrative understanding of him" (52). In my argument, the fact that Janie is the spectator narrator writing the story of her own failures and successes as a participant helps explain this shared knowledge on the part of the narrator and the central character.

Chapter Two

Invisible Writing:

Ellison's Invisible Man Illuminates and Defines His Form

Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man depicts the struggle of a young black man attempting to see both himself and others with clarity and desiring to be seen by others for what and who he is. The events of the novel eventually lead him to discover and understand his invisibility in the eyes of those he once believed were better equipped to see him than he was prepared to see himself. For the reader he remains unnamed, but during the course of his adventures, he is repeatedly named and identified in the image of others. This surrender of the autonomy of self-definition and self-identity keeps him invisible and perpetually on the run--if only on a treadmill heading nowhere--and, therefore, powerless. Although, through his heartfelt oratory, he sometimes comes close to "finding" himself, it is by way of the act of writing his adventures and chronicling his naivete, blindness, and invisibility that he attains sight and visibility, and--in the process--identity and voice. However, before that process can begin, the invisible man, like Janie, must first place some distance between himself and the experiences of his life.

When Ellison's narrator first introduces himself to the reader in the Prologue, he immediately confesses his invisibility. It's not, as he says, because he lacks substance, but rather "because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact" (3). Those who might, but "refuse" to, see him are able to "see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination" (3). Regardless of the few advantages of his invisible state--such as his rent-free apartment cellar home and his siphoned off energy from Monopolated Power and Light--he is not content to remain invisible. One of the reasons for illegally acquiring the electricity to light his 1,369 incandescent light bulbs is to give shape to his substance, visibility to the being that others fail to see. "Without light I am not only invisible, but formless as well" (7). For the invisible man the notion of light is tied in with illumination--in the sense of enlightenment and understanding--as well as visibility. He calls for "more and brighter light," because "[t]he truth is the light and the light is the truth" (7).

Truth, like visibility, depends upon the sight of others as well as his own ability (or inability) to see. The chapters which follow the Prologue, devoted as they are to an exposition (an exposure to the light, if you will) of the events that brought him to his "hole" beneath the city, portray the lack of illumination, understanding, and enlightenment due to his own inability to see and his

continued reliance upon the blindness and distorted vision of those who attempt to offer him direction and provide him with their own sense of truth.

His first chapter begins with an admission that he "was naive" because he had spent the last twenty years "looking for something . . . . I was looking for myself, and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer" (15). His "looking" entails sight directed outward from himself, a crippling dependence upon the vision of others. If we were to say that instead of looking within himself he looked without, the word "without" provides a perhaps more fitting appraisal of the lack involved in his rather hollow search.

In the scene which soon follows of the battle royal, the invisible man's eyes, like those of his nine fellow combatants, are covered with blindfolds. For much of the battle, the ten black youths strike blindly at one another for the "entertainment" of the white men who urge them on. When the battle winds down to two opponents--the invisible man and Tatlock--the invisible man offers Tatlock a bribe to take a fall. His insistence on winning serves as further indication of the invisible man's belief that in order to garner the support of the whites he must defeat his own race. Had his objective been merely to cease the fighting and the degradation before the crowd, he could have offered Tatlock money to allow himself to take a convincing fall. However, the invisible man wishes to be (if only for

appearance's sake) the victor. Perhaps he believes that he must win in order to move to the evening's next event which he supposes is the delivery of his speech, but his real concern is the way he appears in the eyes of the white men who incite them.

Once the battle ends with Tatlock's victory, there is the unanticipated next step of frantically groping for coins, some of which are worthless advertising tokens, upon the electrified carpet. Here too the competition is stiff; garnering the most wealth is another way for the black man to earn the "respect" of the whites. Yet, when that portion of the "entertainment" has ended, the boys are ushered out of the room and sent home. To the invisible man's pleasure and relief he is called back to give his speech for which he receives a briefcase and a scholarship to the Negro college.

The major components of the battle royal--blacks kept blinded and fighting amongst themselves, degradation of blacks as a means of both entertaining white audiences and reinforcing their notion of blacks as uncivilized brutes, and laughing tolerance of black speech when it appears harmless and humble--are repeated again and again during the course of the novel.[1] This first occurrence of the battle royal leads to the invisible man's being sent off to the Negro college.

In one of the very rare occasions in which the experienced narrator of the Prologue intrudes upon the usually innocent voice of the youthful invisible man, he

describes, with a mixture of elegiac longing and biting irony, the beauty and splendor of the college campus. At the center of the campus stands the statue of the college Founder, who seemingly is in the act of lifting a veil which obscures the vision of the slave who kneels at his feet. The narrator is swept back in time again to his innocent state when in wide-eyed wonder he stands "puzzled, unable to decide whether the veil is really being lifted, or lowered more firmly in place; whether I am witnessing a revelation or a more efficient blinding" (36). The ambiguous nature of the Founder's statue is further developed in the alternating revelations and blindings which follow.

While the invisible man awaits word from Dr. Bledsoe, the college president, as to the punishment he must endure for taking Mr. Norton, one of the white Trustees of the college, to the black slums on the outskirts of the campus, he first sits through a speech by the Reverend Barbee. In this oration, Barbee builds up the self-sacrifice and accomplishments of the Founder to mythic proportions. He portrays Bledsoe in this highly flattering light as the fitting recipient of the burden of the continuing operation of the college as the mythic torch of leadership is passed from the dying Founder to Bledsoe the favorite "son." Before Barbee's speech, the invisible man fails to see him up there on the platform next to Bledsoe. "My eyes had focused only upon the white men and Dr. Bledsoe" (116). To the invisible man, in the light (or shadow) of the white

Trustees and Dr. Bledsoe, who, although a black man, wields a power matched only by that of whites, an unknown black man like Barbee is invisible. (The invisible man soon shows his ignorance when he asks the boy sitting next to him who this Barbee is and receives a "look of annoyance, almost of outrage" [121].)

Nevertheless, the room soon swells with Barbee's loaded rhetoric as he adds to the legend of the Founder and, by association, Dr. Bledsoe as well. Ironically juxtaposed as a frame around this homily are two revelations. Prior to the speech, the narrator recalls that part of Bledsoe's legend is that his first job at the college was that of "feeding slop to the hogs but [he] had made himself the best slop dispenser in the history of the school" (114). The impression on the reader is that such a humble beginning prepared Bledsoe perfectly for his "slop dispensing" job as president. When Barbee concludes his speech, which relies heavily on the things Barbee has witnessed at the side of these two great men, the invisible man assumes his eyes are newly open: "Old Barbee had made me see the vision" (131). However, as Barbee steps back from the lectern to regain his seat, he trips over Bledsoe's legs and sprawls on to his hands and knees. Then the invisible man sees "the blinking of sightless eyes. Homer A. Barbee was blind" (131). From the blindness of the "vision" brought to the invisible man's eyes to the revelation of the blindness of the purveyor of that vision, it would seem that revealed truth is only as

true as the eyes that perceive it. This is but one of many occasions in which Ellison shows that those who ostensibly lift the veil from the invisible man's eyes, in actuality more carefully secure it. Or, as the narrator puts it in the opening lines of Chapter 1, he undergoes "much painful boomeranging of my expectations" (15).

Further pairing of revelation and blindness occurs when the invisible man receives harsh treatment from Dr. Bledsoe for showing Mr. Norton the harsher side of Negro life by taking him past the old slave cabins to speak with Trueblood (of whom the college community is greatly ashamed) and to the Golden Day, where institutionalized shell-shocked vets take periodic retreats in the company of their attendants. Behavior that the invisible man thought was the only acceptable form, namely doing the white trustee's bidding, turns out to cost him his place in the college. The invisible man is quite perplexed when, in words that echo his grandfather's cryptic deathbed exhortation "to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open" (16), Dr. Bledsoe bawls him out for having taken Norton where Norton wanted to go instead of using his "mother wit" and humility to deceive Norton into thinking he wanted no such thing. Bledsoe admits the way he acquired his power (a far cry from the dignified and saintly story contained in the Barbee speech): "'I had to be strong and purposeful to get where I am. I had to wait and plan and

lick around . . . Yes, I had to act the nigger!'" (141). As Edward Margolies has observed,

> [Bledsoe] informs the hero that he would not have achieved his exalted position had he not played along with the white man's Negro fantasies and cleverly manipulated these psychoses to acquire power for himself. He has the facility, he says, of making the white man do his bidding by insinuating his ideas into the white man's fantasies. Thus Bledsoe, despite his abject and humble exterior, is one of the most powerful men in the south, who sustains a vested interest in keeping the Negro invisible. (130)

Bledsoe's insistence on the insignificance of the invisible man's existence--his invisibility--and Bledsoe's revelation of his power over the whites, surprise and confuse the invisible man. "'You're nobody,'" Bledsoe tells him. "'You don't exist--can't you see that? The white folk tell everybody what to think--except men like me. I tell <u>them</u>; that's my life, telling white folk how to think about the things I know about. Shocks you, doesn't it? Well, that's the way it is'" (141). This revelation that humility is merely a cover for an unseen power strikes the invisible man as terribly disconcerting. Moreover, Bledsoe further shocks him by confessing the drastic measures he would be willing to take in order to retain his power: "'I'll have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am'" (141).

These admissions and revelations take the invisible man by surprise; he's been taken in by Bledsoe's seeming humility to the whites and by the cliche that "white is right"; therefore, these new "truths" seem just too much to

bear. The problem is that the invisible man believes truth is something that will protect him; Bledsoe, however, is telling him that truth--particularly telling Norton the truth about how Bledsoe is expelling him from the college--can only work against the desires of one so invisible and powerless as he is. The invisible man's disillusionment is so overpowering that he is forced, for his own self protection, to tune Bledsoe out.

> But I no longer listened, nor saw more than the play of light upon the metallic disks of his glasses, which now seemed to float within the disgusting sea of his words. Truth, truth, what was truth? Nobody I knew, not even my own mother, would believe me if I tried to tell them. (141-42)

For the invisible man it's as if his world has collapsed. At the close of this eventful interview, he stumbles out the door, vomits "[a]lmost a total disembowelment," and when he looks into the sky he sees a "double-imaged moon. My eyes were out of focus. I started toward my room, covering one eye with my hand to avoid crashing into trees and lampposts projected into my path" (143). With his vision thus distorted, one eye covered, and his thoughts whirling through his head, he decides that he will shoulder the blame for his actions and leave the college as quickly as possible. These revelations of Bledsoe's deserve a full-sighted, clear-headed consideration, not the cursory acceptance of a one-eyed glance (lacking in depth perception and binocular perspective), but unfortunately the invisible man is ill-

equipped to adjust his vision to such seemingly shocking incongruities.

Foreshadowed in the invisible man's monocular view of the world is Brother Jack's later dramatic revelation of his glass eye. While taking the invisible man to task for his participation in Tod Clifton's funeral, Jack theatrically plops his eye into a glass of water as a means of demonstrating his selfless dedication to the Brotherhood and in order to shame the invisible man into continued blind obedience. "He was gloating now, holding up the eye in the glass as though it were a medal of merit" (464). Following as it does on the heels of Jack's telling him "'We do not shape our policies to the mistaken and infantile notions of the man in the street. Our job is not to ask them what they think but to tell them!'" (462), the effect this action has on the invisible man is quite similar to that of Bledsoe's admission. First, he recoils in horror; then he leaps to the insightful conclusion that the meaning of discipline is "sacrifice . . . yes, and blindness; he doesn't see me. He doesn't even see me" (464; ellipsis is the author's). Here is the invisible man, more than 300 pages since Bledsoe informed him that he doesn't exist, finally, the reader thinks, coming to understand his invisibility in the eyes of those in power, be they white, black, brother, or other. However, this "understanding" is accompanied by confusion. The invisible man's thoughts are a jumble, racing through his head:

> Discipline. Is learning, didn't he say? Is it? I stand? You're sitting here, ain't I? You're holding on, ain't I? He said you'd learn so you're learning, so he saw it all the time. He's a riddler, shouldn't we show him? So sit still is the way, and learn, never mind the eye, it's dead . . . All right now, look at him turning now, left, right, coming short-legged toward you. See him, hep! hep! the one-eyed beacon. All right, all right . . . Hep, hep! The short-legged deacon. All right! Nail him! The short-changing dialectical deacon . . . All right. There, so now you're learning . . . Get it under control . . . Patience . . . Yes . . . . (465; ellipses are the author's.)

The invisible man's bewilderment results in his separation of himself in this internal dialogue into two selves: the "I" and the "he." Again, the truths the invisible man has based his life upon come toppling down around him and, without something solid to grasp, he is impotent. The narrative continues:

> I looked at him again as for the first time . . . . I looked at him carefully now . . . with the feeling that I was just awakening from a dream. I had boomeranged around. (465)

However, this is not the first, nor the last, of the invisible man's boomeranging experiences. And in this case, when he takes the antagonist role, his voice dripping with sarcasm, telling Jack "'maybe you'll recommend me to your oculist . . . then I may not-see myself as others see-me-not'" (466), he still does not realize how inadequate his own eyesight is, whether directed outwardly or within. He resolves to fight, but since he is not kicked out of the Brotherhood as he had been booted from college, he is determined to retain his position--"it was the only historically meaningful life that I could live. If I left

it, I'd be nowhere" (467). However, remaining within this crippling organization, one in which he is not paid to think but to act according to the wishes of others, keeps him impotent and renders meaningless what little power he thinks he has accrued.

Shortly thereafter, the invisible man, pursued by two of Ras' henchmen, dons the sunglasses and hat disguise in which he finds himself magically "transformed" into Rinehart. In his discovery of the many people this Rinehart seems to be--gambler, numbers runner, pimp, minister, lady's man--the invisible man once again shows his naivete when he misses the point. He thinks that Rinehart has seized the possibilities of being, and perhaps there is some truth to that, but the invisible man's being mistaken for Rinehart is actually further evidence of his own invisibility. Where before he was judged falsely because of the color of his skin, now he is additionally judged on the attire he wears. Admittedly, the treatment he receives seems to be better, but in neither situation is his self, his essential being, taken into consideration. In fact, he has a difficult time persuading a young hooker that he is <u>not</u> Rinehart, and that, in light of the intimacy the prostitute supposes with Rinehart, serves as evidence of Rinehart's own invisibility. One has no reason to suppose that Rinehart is aware of what the invisible man's involvement in these cases of mistaken identity allegedly indicates about Rinehart's nature. What the invisible man should learn from this experience--that

one's invisibility can become a potent force against those who oppress him--does not fully occur to him until he falls into his hole and begins to light his way by setting fire to and destroying the many tokens of his own Rinehart-like (in the sense that they are imposed from without) identities.

These are mistaken identities in two ways. On one hand, they are superimposed upon him by those who either see him in a false light (e.g. Norton's supposition that the invisible man is his fate; Brockway's assumption that the invisible man is after his knowledge, job and power; Mary's conjecture that he will be a standard bearer for his race) or see him with poor vision (e.g. Bledsoe's near-sightedness as evidenced by his eyeglasses and his appraisal of the invisible man in his letters of "recommendation," Brother Jack's monocular view of the black race and its place). On the other hand, these identities are taken on by an inexperienced, naive, unaware invisible man (mis-taken). The invisible man's complicity in his own oppression--his being kept running and his remaining invisible--is what he fails to see until he falls into his hole, or, as he more accurately portrays it, saw "the hole I was in" (559).[2] As Ellison has remarked, "Part of his problem was a refusal to demand that people see him for what he wanted to be. Always, he was accommodating" (Going to the Territory 59).

His final accommodation occurs when he thinks that he will at last take his grandfather's deathbed advice and embrace the tactic of overcoming his enemies with yeses. He

had witnessed its successful execution in the seeming humility of Bledsoe and determines, after being boomeranged by Jack and the Brotherhood, that he must fight from within the organization. "I didn't know what my grandfather had meant, but I was ready to test his advice" (497). Thinking that he is going to agree them to death and destruction, his accommodation--for example, falsely filing reports of neighborhood support for the Brotherhood--will, he believes, somehow be a method of wielding power. Instead, his accommodation affirms for the reader how little the invisible man has learned and the way he continually refuses to demand that others see him as he wishes to be seen.

When, under the guise of trying to spy on the enemy, he courts Sybil in hopes of learning some important Brotherhood secrets, he surrenders to her false image of a black man. Surprised to discover that that she wants to be raped by a big, black buck, he conforms, even if he creates only an illusion of a rape committed, to her expectations. He thinks to himself, "What does she think you are? A domesticated rapist, obviously, an expert on the woman question. Maybe that's what you are, house-broken and with a convenient verbal push-button arrangement for the ladies' pleasure" (510). His "yesing" of Sybil, even if he fools her into only <u>thinking</u> she has been "raped" by him, further reinforces a racist stereotype. Because he still sees the world in terms of absolute values--such as black and white, light and dark--he is unable to see the sophisticated

nuances that lie between yes and no. Therefore his embracing of the one becomes an acceptance of the other; his attempt to step around the stereotype of the animalistic black buck by creating the illusion of rape further instills the stereotype in Sybil's mind.

Similarly, what he supposes is a betrayal of the Brotherhood is instead a betrayal of Harlem. As Harlem erupts in fighting and destruction--a final appearance of the battle royal as the blacks are kept fighting among themselves for the amusement of the whites--he realizes that "By pretending to agree I <u>had</u> indeed agreed, had made myself responsible for that huddled form lighted by flame and gunfire in the street, and all the others whom now the night was making riper for death" (541). His yeses supplied to the Brotherhood (as well as to Sybil), false as they may have been, <u>seemed</u> to be true and that was enough. Acquiescence in word was compliance in deed.

The invisible man--boomeranged repeatedly in his quest for identity by the dominant culture, his own people, and the Brotherhood, all who (with the exception of Ras) accept the notion that white is right--fails to see himself and others clearly. Moreover, as Ellison has stressed, he fails to demand that others see him for who he is and who he desires to be. The veil remains firmly in place before his eyes throughout the narrative, with the notable exception of the Prologue and Epilogue. On each occasion in which it appears that the veil is briefly raised, thus allowing the

invisible man to see beyond the fabric, the invisible man's concern with the fabric before him instead of the reality beyond the veil keeps his sight confined and myopic. Furthermore, as with the slave in the statue of the Founder, the veil thus held before the invisible man's eyes not only obscures his vision, but keeps those who encounter him from seeing him as well, as demonstrated in his brief "role" as Rinehart. The invisible man's simple-hearted insights into his plight render him as sightless before his fall into his hole as he was when Chapter 1 began. Each conclusion the invisible man naively forms as the result of what he assumes is yet another illuminating discovery convincingly underscores his blindness and his invisibility in the eyes of those he encounters in his adventures.

The invisible man, then, is like the blind man, grappling with yet another portion of the elephant's anatomy, supposing and assuming that a mere part (or even the sum of them after repeated repositionings and subsequent encounters) will reveal the whole. But his memory, like his vision, is faulty. As each new aspect of the white race and his place in the society is revealed to him, he allows that facet to supersede and replace the previous aspect. The invisible man responds to each illumination as if that discovery were the answer itself rather than a piece of the puzzle. Like a stone sent skipping upon the sea, he merely skims the surface of events, until he finally plops into his hole and in the darkness begins to see with clarity and

precision where he has been and how he was sent skimming.

Whereas during the course of the novel, for the reader the invisible man remains unnamed, never once providing an identifying name for himself and hence remaining anonymous, he is repeatedly named by others. Beginning with degrading terms like "shine," "sambo," and "nigger" at the battle royal, through acquiring his Brotherhood name, to becoming in others' eyes--by his donning the disguising hat and sunglasses--Rinehart, the invisible man's journey comes full circle as he is termed a "boogy," "goddam black nigger sonofabitch," and "nigger in the coal pile" as he stumbles into his hole. The question Ellison poses is, how can the invisible man <u>be</u> anyone when everyone he encounters projects personality traits and stereotypical racial characteristics upon him? Grandfather, Bledsoe, Norton, the fat vet, Brockway, Mary, Brother Jack, Ras, and Sybil, among others, all suppose that they can readily identify the invisible man. When he slips into sunglasses and a hat, he finds himself transformed into a multi-personalitied Rinehart. Yet who he feels or desires himself to be goes ignored by these identifiers.

Norton tells the invisible man that he is Norton's destiny, yet the invisible man wonders how that can be when "you don't even know my name" (45). The irony lies in the fact that the reader likewise lacks any means of identifying the invisible man. However, the narrator seems to confess

to being identified by Norton (and other white men) as he refers several times to "following the white line" (of the highway) as he chauffeurs Norton about the campus and into the Negro slums. In the narration which follows his expulsion from college, the narrator's remarks indicate his blind submission to the white line and his shock at being punished for his obedience.

> 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, holding desperately to one of my eyes. (144)

He finds himself losing what he had earlier termed "the only identity I had ever known" (97), which may explain why he later feels it so important to retain his Brotherhood identity--yet another one forged for him by others--rather than return to anonymity. Brother Jack and the Brotherhood provide the invisible man with a means of becoming the speaker that he always wanted to be, but he must do so identified by a name which they supply. The power of the namer over the named appears obvious when Jack reveals that he and the Brotherhood furnish all ideas for the speech-maker.

But the invisible man fails to see that with <u>any</u> name he is anonymous in this culture. After the paint factory accident, the invisible man loses the ability to recall his own name. The hospital personnel repeatedly quiz him on his identity, his own and his mother's name, but he fails to recall it. This is perfectly fitting as they have claimed

to make him a "new man" and even to create new memories for him. Yet when he is released and is asked for the last time "'What is your name?'" he is not given adequate time to respond before the "tall austere-looking man in a white coat" says, "'Oh here, I have it'" (240). By "owning" his name, others control his identity. The power of naming becomes evident in the invisible man's response: "I heard myself say, 'Oh!' as a pain stabbed through my head and I shot to my feet and looked wildly around me and sat down and got up and down again very fast, remembering" (240). This denial by others of the invisible man's arriving at his own identity in his own good time serves as but one example of the ways in which those who name him control him. His response to the sound of his name, his suddenly shooting up and sitting back down, seems puppet-like. Like the Sambo doll that Tod Clifton later sells and gives his life for, the invisible man is without self-control, dependent for his movements and actions on the jerking of his string--something both whites and blacks are willing to do for him.

The fat vet at the Golden Day points out to Norton and the invisible man both the invisible man's situation and his inability to fathom it.

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

> walking personification of the Negative, the most perfect achievement of your dreams, sir! The mechanical man!" (92)

The vet understands that the invisible man thinks in terms of absolutes. The invisible man's reaction to the allegedly positive power of whites is to see himself as a negative, the opposite and lesser image, and in his blindness he is unable to digest these "simple facts of life." The vet realizes that the invisible man, like others of his race, "'believes in that great false wisdom taught slaves and pragmatists alike, that white is right'" (94). As long as this false wisdom, these polarities of white versus black, right versus wrong, prevails in the hearts of blacks as well as whites, it will persist in the society. Hence the invisible black thread which controls the mechanical, automaton-like actions of Tod Clifton's Sambo doll. The manipulation of the puppet-like invisible man stems not only from the visible machinations of the whites, but from the invisible collusion of the black race in his dominance as well. Yet the mimicry of the invisible man's actions embodied in the dancing doll--the ever-smiling two faces, the uncontrollable jerking about by the invisible thread--are as yet still beyond his comprehension, beyond the "digestion" of his accommodating and short-circuiting brain. Hartmut K. Selke recognizes the invisible man's continued blindness to his actions in that, with the image of the dancing doll, "Clifton is holding up a mirror to him, in which, however, he fails to see himself" (203).

The invisible man's fervent belief in the dictum that white is right--and the ancillary, "if you're black, stay back"--and his failure to see the invisible black thread lead to an unquestioning willingness to conform to the wishes of whites and mold himself in the cast of black models. He never aspires to being a Norton, or a Kimbro, or a Brother Jack. Instead he aspires to becoming a Bledsoe, a Founder, or a Booker T. Washington.[3] No wonder, then, that he--like Norton and Bledsoe--is so appalled at the audacity of the fat vet and his outspoken, fearlessness in the face of Norton. It's not that the vet speaks like a white man instead of a black man, but that he speaks like a man, a human being, rather than in the image of either role model regardless of color. The vet clearly does not know his place; he neither conforms to "the white line" nor responds to the invisible black thread. The invisible man recoils from the autonomy and fearlessness of the vet, who dares to see and be himself. The invisible man likely feels as Bledsoe does: "'A Negro like that should be under lock and key'" (138), and Bledsoe apparently acts swiftly to remove this threat to the college because the invisible man next finds the vet on the train headed north.

On the train, the vet again tries to explain the nature of the invisible man's invisible state to him, but without success. The invisible man is ill-equipped to fathom the vet's exhortations to him that he "'come out of the fog,'" "'play the game, but don't believe in it,'" and "'[b]e your

own father'" (151, 154). The vet's suggestions about playing the game echo Grandfather's death bed advice, but the invisible man continues to search "without" for his father, instead of looking within. His "yesing" which he plans for the north is that of the submissive and compliant Negro.

> When I met the big men to whom my letters were addressed I would put on my best manner. I would speak softly, in my most polished tones, smile agreeably and be most polite; and I would remember that if he ("he" meant any of the important gentlemen) should begin a topic of conversation (I would never begin a subject of my own) which I found unfamiliar, I would smile and agree. [Like that two faced Sambo doll.] My shoes would be polished, my suit pressed, my hair dressed (not too much grease) and parted on the right side; my nails would be clean and my armpits well deodorized--you had to watch that last item. You couldn't allow them to think <u>all</u> of us smelled bad. (155)

Lost in some mistaken notion of the American Dream, still persisting in his desire to "follow the white line," and as yet blind to the true (and invisible) contents of those letters to the "big men," the invisible man plans his new identity for the north, vowing to shape himself as they would have him be: "[H]ere in the North I would slough off my southern ways of speech" (161). And, when the counterman suggests that he might like the daily special of pork chops and grits, the invisible man takes pride in his resistance: "It was an act of discipline, a sign of the change that was coming over me and which would return me to college a more experienced man" (175).

These attempts to suppress himself in a more palatable

and presentable package to his potential white employers (those who he believes are his betters) are coupled with examples of his own elitist snobbery toward his fellow blacks. He is shocked to encounter a black policeman directing traffic, objectifies Negroes when he thinks with much sarcasm "they're a hell of a people," and finds an unusually ironic solace in a movie house while watching a typical Hollywood western. He obviously has no difficulty identifying with "out-numbered settlers winning each engagement" with the Indians, although "there was no one like me taking part in the adventures" (167). And later, further evidence of his racist attitudes surfaces, as he is unable to believe that Lucius Brockway can possibly be in a position of power ("I was so disgusted to find such a man in charge" [203]) and when he curses the "cotton patch ways" of the radiator-beating tenants in Mary's boarding house.

He originally moved to Mary's after his "treatment" at the factory hospital and his feeling of discomfiture at Men's house.

> I was overcome by a sense of alienation and hostility. My overalls were causing stares and I knew that I could live there no longer, that that phase of my life was past. The lobby was the meeting place for various groups still caught up in the illusions that had just been boomeranged out of my head. (250)

Once again, terming himself the "disillusioned dreamer," the invisible man believes that he has seen the light--another boomeranging--and feels contempt "for those still unaware that they dream" (250). His final act at Men's House is to

take a measure of revenge for Bledsoe's treatment of him by dumping what appears to be the contents of a spittoon upon the head of someone he mistakes for Bledsoe. "I . . . lifted it shining, full and foul, and moved forward two long steps, dumping its great brown, transparent splash upon the head" (251).

His disillusionment has obviously not improved his vision in the slightest. The victim of this "baptism" turns out to be a prominent Baptist preacher and not Bledsoe at all. Perhaps his attack, out of misplaced revenge though it may be, has a certain ironic sweetness--the blind invisible man taking revenge on a preacher reminiscent of the blind Barbee, both blind men steadfast in their certainty of what they have seen, particularly of Bledsoe. Unfortunately, although the invisible man finally accepts the fact that Bledsoe cannot and will not help him, this scene illustrates that he continues to see his place in the world in terms of Bledsoeness, modeling his identity on what he still believes the myth of that man to be. Once a champion of Bledsoe, he now sees himself as a victim; either way his image of himself is cast in otherness.

The invisible man does, however, manage for a brief moment to come close to feeling and being himself. In the yam eating scene, he forgets to be afraid of what the Northern whites will think of him. When he had felt resentment at the counterman's suggestion of the pork chop and grits special, followed by pride at having orange juice

instead, he was denying the fulfillment of his own desires and tastes in order to appear as he thinks northern whites would want him to be. He feels it necessary to order what he doesn't want, or to not order what he does want, in order to appear to be who "they" want him to be. The orange juice he settles for is portrayed as an unpalatable substitution: "A seed floated in the thick layer of pulp that formed at the top of the glass. I fished it out with a spoon and then downed the acid drink" (175). His action further indicates the distance between his aspirations and what he may become, between who he may be and who he feels he must become in order to be anyone at all.

He encounters the yam man some months later. The invisible man has been living on his Liberty Paints compensation and enjoying--with the notable exception of "her constant talk about leadership and responsibility"--living in Mary's boarding house, but he "had lost my sense of direction" (252).

> I had no doubt that I could do something, but what, and how? I had no contacts and I believed in nothing. And the obsession with my identity which I had developed in the factory hospital returned with a vengeance. Who was I, how had I come to be? Certainly I couldn't help being different from when I left campus; but now a new, painful, contradictory voice had grown up within me, and between its demands for revengeful action and Mary's silent pressure I throbbed with guilt and puzzlement. I wanted peace and quiet, tranquility, but was too much aboil inside. (253)

His reaction to his betrayal by Bledsoe has been to retreat into anonymity. He has braced himself to his inability to return to campus, but has replaced that aspiration with

nothing but confusion and puzzlement. "One moment I believed, I was dedicated, willing to lie on the blazing coals, do anything to attain a position on the campus--then snap! It was done with, finished, through. Now there was only the problem of forgetting it" (253). Unable to resign himself to complacence, however, he finds himself inhabited by "contradictory voices shouting inside my head" and wishes they would "sing a song in unison" rather than in dissonance and avoid "the uncertain extremes of the scale" (253). His own need to discover a single voice amidst these warring voices leads him to fear losing his self-control, "[a]nd the more resentful I became, the more my old urge to make speeches returned. While walking along the streets words would spill from my lips in a mumble over which I had little control" (253-54). His need both to speak and to forge some sort of identity--to replace his losing the only identity he had ever known in Bledsoe's care--lead him in a most vulnerable state to the yam vendor.

Wandering through Harlem rather aimlessly, "with the hot inner argument continuing" in his mind, he focuses on a window display containing "[a] black statue of a nude Nubian slave" grinning out at him and another display featuring products for "ointments guaranteed to produce the miracle of whitening black skin," promising that the black consumer will "'[w]in greater happiness with whiter complexion'" (256). With the blatant stereotype of the grinning black image and the salves and ointments used to "cure the

affliction" of blackness freshly impressed on his mind, he smells the odor of baking yams which are accompanied by "a stab of sweet nostalgia." Rejuvenated by childhood memories of yam-eating in the past, the invisible man hesitates not at all in swiftly purchasing one. His encounter with this treat provides an epiphany of the self.

> I walked along, munching the yam, just as suddenly overcome by an intense feeling of freedom . . . . I no longer had to worry about who saw me or about what was proper. To hell with all that, and as sweet as the yam actually was, it became like nectar with the thought. (258)

Free, suddenly, of his compunction to behave and appear "proper," and putting aside, for once, his obsequious following of the white line, he finds great joy and release in his yam eating. This experience leads him to contemplate the way his people are so easily humiliated by being confronted with something they like. In his fantasy of confronting Bledsoe with Bledsoe's own hidden desire for chitterlings, the narrator observes that such a public accusation "would be worse than if I had accused him of raping an old woman" (259). Taken with the delicious irony of the scene conjured before him as well as with the deliciousness of the yam, the invisible man vows, "'[T]o hell with being ashamed of what you liked. No more of that for me. I am what I am!'" He even relishes the word play of substituting "I yam" for "I am," parodying the self-naming of God (who indeed started his creation with the Word).

And just as quickly his joy gives way to sadness and

understandable regret.

> What and how much had I lost by trying to do only what was expected of me instead of what I myself had wished to do? What a waste, what a senseless waste! But what of those things which you actually didn't like, not because you were not supposed to like them, not because to dislike them was considered a mark of refinement and education--but because you actually found them distasteful? The very idea annoyed me. How could you know? It involved a problem of choice. I would have to weigh many things carefully before deciding and there would be some things that would cause quite a bit of trouble, simply because I had never formed a personal attitude toward so much. I had accepted the accepted attitudes and it had made life seem simple . . . . (260; ellipsis is the author's.)

Having never been called upon before to express his own opinion and having been conditioned to defer opinions to those of educated and powerful men, he is unable to form an identity all his own. Expression of taste or attitude or desire in a Negro is out of the question in the time and age depicted in the Invisible Man. Neither Norton nor Bledsoe ever cared what the invisible man thought.

In this brief scene and at the eviction speech which follows, the invisible man comes the closest--prior to his falling into his hole--to feeling himself to be a whole human being, secure in his tastes and attitudes and ideas. It marks the first occasion of his rejecting the white line. His expression of pleasure is without censure; it stems from himself, not from what is expected or demanded of him. Similar as it is to Janie's burning of the head rags--emblems of the identity Jody imposed on her--and her pleasure in the lessons in playing, fishing, and shooting

Tea Cake gives her, the invisible man's epiphany is not the turning point that Janie experienced. However brief this feeling and expression of personal identity may be, it is indeed a high point for the invisible man.[4]

In the immediately subsequent eviction speech, the invisible man, for the first time, finds the voice--amidst all those teeming within him--that comes closest to that new-found (and soon to be lost) identity. He allows himself to forgo the self-control that he earlier expressed fear of losing. Moreover, that self-control he so prizes is the control he has exerted in order to obfuscate and withhold from view the real self--the "unexpected" and unanticipated self--that he has been taught is not good enough, is wrong. Just as he might be expected to whiten his skin to fit in with the proper social set, so is he required to "whiten" his attitudes, beliefs, and his very self to please others. His willingness to possess his own beliefs for once in his life gives him the presence of mind to own his voice as well.

Unlike his speech of humility at the battle royal, where his white-displeasing slip of saying "social equality" instead of the white-pleasing "social responsibility" angered his listeners, who required him to recant and reshape his speech to meet their requirements, at the eviction he speaks his own mind. Unlike the later Brotherhood speeches, born of his indoctrination and re-education in the "scientific method" and gutted of emotional

and sensual appeal, the words of the eviction speech flow from his heart and mind. This extemporaneous speech seems to emerge of its own volition, out of the control of the invisible man, perhaps because it is the one occasion in which he speaks without restraint and without being expected to restrict himself to the prepared text or the party line. He is without fear of what others may think or say; his fear is rather of the language and its power. He admits to the almost involuntary beginning of the speech when "I heard myself yelling" the first words and begins "talking rapidly without thought but out of my clashing emotions" (269).

Because this speech is spontaneous, he feels unprepared for the nearly overwhelming emotions that accompany its delivery. "Oh, God, this wasn't it at all," he worries. "Poor technique and not at all what I intended" (270). However much he criticizes his speech, he effectively uses cynicism and irony to move the people to action. Soon he is surprised when "no longer struggling against or thinking about the nature of my action" (275) he also participates in deed in the event. When the police arrive, he fears "[t]he whole thing had gotten out of hand" and wonders "[w]hat had I said to bring on all this?" (277). In effect, an emotional chord was struck in him by the dispossession of these people, and his playing it touched a similar chord in them. While feeling a certain lack of control, he also experiences a sense of excitement and exhilaration, a sense of freedom similar to that of the yam eating incident.

Unfortunately, his newfound sense of being and his discovery of his voice are short-lived. Shortly thereafter, Brother Jack offers to make the invisible man the new Booker T. Washington and gives him a new name for his Brotherhood role.

> But to hell with this Booker T. Washington business. I would do the work but I would be no one except myself--whoever I was. I would pattern my life on that of the Founder. They might think I was acting like Booker T. Washington; let them. But what I thought of myself I would keep to myself. (303-04)

He thinks that he can fool them, but he will fool only himself. His freely confident "I [y]am what I am" will soon degenerate--hidden under his new Brotherhood identity--into "I am what they think I am" (370). He continues to try to convince himself that this new identity is the real identity or that a name is nothing, but the reader remains unconvinced. After all, just before the invisible man takes the proffered position with the Brotherhood, Ellison presents his comic and poignant scene of the invisible man struggling, yet unable for all his efforts, to dispose of the racially stereotypical coin bank he removed from Mary's. Although he is able to smash it to bits, the "self-mocking image"--the picture of the smiling darky in the white world--is not so easily shed, particularly when one is blind to the many ways in which one is forced to perpetuate the stereotype. However shattered it may be, the invisible man will continue to carry that image in his battle royal briefcase until he falls into his hole.

Upon joining the Brotherhood, our illuminated and enlightened invisible man, boomeranged yet again, he supposes, out of his disillusionment, begins to substitute the Brotherhood "line" for the white line, but as both are founded on the second class status of the black race, the alteration is not that difficult for the invisible man to make. Unwittingly--as Tod Clifton eventually seems to realize he had done--the invisible man plays the role of the Sambo doll to the Brotherhood, dancing on command, smiling for all to see, as he responds to the movement of the white and the black threads. Brother Jack makes no compunction about his willingness to sacrifice the Brotherhood's black membership and all of Harlem, for that matter, for the sake of an idea. Jack also sees to it with his anonymous letter of warning that the invisible man must always remember to stay in his place, and, with his careful placement of watchdogs such as Wrestrum, Jack may ensure the black man's continued impotence by keeping the blacks fighting amongst themselves as in the battle royal.

The invisible man's speechmaking history in the Brotherhood further indicates why he is unable to foster a identity that is self-made regardless of what name he goes by. After the eviction speech, he goes to speak at the Chthonian. The great irony of the speech at the Chthonian, this great underworld speech from a man unaware as yet of the hole he is in, lies not only in the mirror images of the battle royal--particularly in his being blinded by the light

on the platform and in his speech coming last--but in the content of the speech.

As he steps on to the platform, he is temporarily blinded by the light--obviously not the first occasion in which illumination obscured rather than enhanced his vision. When he moves toward the microphone, he finds "the light was so strong that I could no longer see the audience, the bowl of human faces. It was as though a semi-transparent curtain had dropped between us" (332). Like the slave kneeling at the founder's feet, the invisible man has his vision obscured as he steps forward and begins his lecture on blindness and dispossession to an audience which is ostensibly invisible to him. His choice of topic is appropriately ironic as he says, "'[T]hey've dispossessed us each of one eye from the day we're born. So now we can only see in straight white lines'" (335). He briefly questions the sort of blind willingness to follow the white line which he demonstrated so well in his college days as he drove Norton about the campus, but he is about to substitute the Brotherhood line which he will follow with the same blind acceptance.

Just as his decision to leave the college and make his way in the world (carrying the seven letters, the contents of which are kept from his vision) was based on monocular vision, the invisible man now determines--unwittingly as usual--to bet all of his (and Harlem's) chips on the one-eyed Jack of the Brotherhood. Again, the invisible man

trades one form of blindness for another as he trades one identity for another. His stumbling "as in a game of blindman's bluff" at the conclusion of his speech echoes blind Barbee's earlier tumble at the conclusion of his own; both speeches offer evidence of faulty vision.

He begins his speech tentatively with a populist, an "I'm-sick-and-tired-of-the-way-they've-been-treating-us approach" (334), but soon moves from such a strategic technique into a more natural, heartfelt method, one seemingly beyond his control. Suddenly, he "felt quite naked, sensing that the words were returning and that something was about to be said that I shouldn't reveal" (336). As the words wield their power over him--"ripped from my solar plexus"--Brother Jack (as the white men at the battle royal felt they must do) cautions the invisible man to stay on track, to stick to the Brotherhood line, as it were. By this time it is perhaps too late to rein in the invisible man as he "could feel the words forming themselves, slowly falling into place" (337). This experience of nearly automatic speaking is accompanied by that feeling of epiphany the invisible man underwent at the eviction, and he is startled to find that "I feel suddenly that I have become <u>more human</u>" (337). Unfortunately, such humanness, such unbridled and passionate language, such power in speech is not to be tolerated by the Brotherhood.

In order to quash the potency of his language, the invisible man is sent to Hambro for training in the

scientific method espoused by the Brotherhood, a virtual emasculation of his potent demonstration of oratorical skill. The brothers recognize that such power in the mind and mouth of a black man is a very dangerous thing. The invisible man's behavior is considered inappropriate and out of line; he must learn to control himself in the future. However, simultaneous with the brothers' planning an effectual castration of the invisible man's speech, he is pondering the power as well as the content of the speech just delivered. He wonders to himself what he meant by being more human. "It was a mystery once more, as at the eviction I had uttered words that had possessed me" (346). Unfortunately, the invisible man surrenders himself to his forthcoming indoctrination (instead of to the language itself) which will help remove the potency of his speech. Such a surrender makes his own dispossession complete. Prior to delivering his speech, he "felt the hard, mechanical isolation of the hospital machine" (333), and now he seems as helpless as he was for his electro-shock treatments in the hospital--the convulsive (and castrating) therapy that left him with a new identity. The Brotherhood sets out to emasculate the invisible man's voice.

Once more the invisible man supposes that he can "see the possibility of achieving something greater and more important than I'd ever dreamed" (346). In keeping with his unawareness of his invisibility and of the hole he inhabits, he further believes that

> [h]ere was a way that didn't lead through a back door, a way not limited by black and white, but a way which, if one lived long enough, and worked hard enough, could lead to the highest possible rewards. . . . Lying there in the dark, I could glimpse the possibility of being more than a member of a race. It was no dream, the possibility existed. I had only to work and learn and survive in order to go to the top. (349)

In his blindness, the invisible man not only supposes this Brotherhood world is different just as he is about to undergo a virtual gutting of his verbal and mental skills, but his ambition begins to grow as he falsely perceives--this man incapable of casting off that false and self-mocking image--that he can be more human in a Brotherhood where he thinks black and white are unimportant distinctions.

The invisible man has again jumped to false conclusions. The possibilities before him are limited, but from his blind and dispossessed perspective, they seem broadly and richly beckoning. Later, in his Rinehart "disguise," he will again suppose a field before him of immense potential possibilities. However, until he "discovers" his hole and sets ablaze the tokens of his many identities--his false "possibilities"--he will be unable to forge a self and set of limitless possibilities--which is precisely what he does when he tells his tale. As Ellison has elsewhere observed:

> Each section begins with a sheet of paper; each piece of paper is exchanged and contains a definition of his identity, or the social role he is to play as defined for him by others. But all say essentially the same thing, "Keep this nigger boy running." Before he could have some voice in

> his own destiny he had to discard these old identities and illusions; his enlightenment couldn't come until then. Once he recognizes the hole of darkness into which these papers put him, he has to burn them. (Shadow and Act 177)

In repeatedly denying the invisible man access to his own language, in continually censoring and adjusting the invisible man's speech to fit some socially acceptable norm, the members of American culture make it increasingly difficult for the invisible man to determine his own identity and to fashion his own destiny. When a slip of the tongue brings him to say "social equality" instead of "social responsibility" at the battle royal speech, his white audience immediately sees that the text is corrected to its acceptable state. Later, at the Chthonian, his newly found "brothers" criticize him for appealing effectively to his listeners emotions--their shared dispossession--instead of using scientific rationalism and promptly send him to Brother Hambro for indoctrination. And after he speaks at Tod Clifton's funeral on his own "personal responsibility," Brother Jack makes it quite clear that the invisible man has responsibility only to the Brotherhood and that personal responsibility does not exist for individual members, particularly if they are black. Hence, Jack's sacrifice of Harlem, members and non-members of the Brotherhood alike.

In denying the invisible man a name of his own, his namers have cost him his identity as well.[5] Ellison, in an essay titled "Hidden Name and Complex Fate," stresses the importance of owning one's name.

> Once while listening to the play of a two-year-old girl who did not know she was under observation, I heard her saying over and over again, at first with questioning and then with sounds of growing satisfaction, "I am Mimi Livisay? . . . I am Mimi Livisay. I am Mimi Livisay . . . I am Mimi Li-vi-say! I am Mimi . . ."
>
> And in deed and in fact she was--or became so soon thereafter by working playfully to establish the unity between herself and her name.
>
> For many of us this is far from easy. We must learn to wear our names within all the noise and confusion of the environment in which we find ourselves; make them the center of all our associations with the world, with man and with nature. We must charge them with all our emotions, our hopes, hates, loves, aspirations. They must become our masks and our shields and the containers of all those values and traditions which we learn and/or imagine as being the meaning of our familial past. (Shadow and Act 148)

Ellison's observation of this connection between names and finding one's place in the world also implies a connection between language and finding identity. His example of the two-year-old offers confirmation of James Britton's discovery that "we use language as a means of organizing a representation of the world" (Language and Learning 7) and illustrates the way this child must first use the power of language to identify herself before being able to relate her world experience to her own knowledge and experience. The invisible man, unfortunately lacking any name he can call his own, fails in his many attempts to construct a viable representation of his world. If, as Britton states, "with the aid of language as an organizing principle, we construct each for himself a world representation" (31), the imposition on the invisible man of the speech of others as noted in the censored speeches above

cripples his ability to fashion a world and a world view. It's no wonder, then, that the power of language frightens him; his capability has languished for so long.

Ellison, in words which echo Britton's comments about language, has remarked that "[o]ne uses the language which helps to preserve one's life, which helps to make one feel at peace in the world, and which screens out the greatest amount of chaos" (Going to the Territory 67). Unable to use language as an organizing principle, held back from forming his own conception of his world, and forced to fend for himself in a world that fails to recognize or even see his strengths and abilities, the invisible man lacks that ability to "screen out" the chaos he discovers in the course of his "adventures." His blindness, imposed from both within and without, keeps him from constructing a vision which may justly serve him. Just as his speeches are criticized and censored, so too are his activities in the world manipulated by others. Tossed from college to Liberty Paints to the Brotherhood and eventually into his hole, the invisible man falsely patterns his concept of the world on the images presented for him to become and aspire to. Without a name and identity of his own, he is ill-equipped to take on the individual challenges of the world.

In an interview in which he was asked if the search for identity was "primarily an American theme," Ellison responded, "It is the American theme. The nature of our society is such that we are prevented from knowing who we

are" (Shadow and Act 177). Elsewhere, Ellison has commented that democratic societies place a larger burden on the members of the citizenry, observing that

> [p]rimitive societies are much more efficient and consistent: they are much more concerned with guiding the young through each stage of their social development, while we leave much of this to chance, perhaps as part of the responsibility of freedom. (Going to the Territory 51)

Joseph Church makes a similar observation in comparing primitive and Western societies:

> Self-verbalization is closely linked to what is called the "search for identity." In primitive, closed societies the individual's identity is defined from birth by the social role he occupies. In Western societies, by contrast, each member must find his own place in the scheme of things, his own goals and meanings and values, his own functions and roles--in sum, his own unique identity. (100)

The invisible man flounders in his innocence due to the lack of clear guidance his society provides for him. Of course, much of the difficulty he faces stems from his rather obvious placement due to his race outside the primary society, a society that fails to either see or hear him and which denies him the self-verbalization required to bring order to the chaos around him.

Church goes on to address the necessity of the school age child to develop a skill "in the duplicity that is so important a part of adult functioning, the ability to adapt oneself to the changing demands of different situations and to mask one's feelings when these conflict with the standards of one's surroundings" (103). This ability to mask one's feelings is another that the invisible man lacks.

regardless of the many masks he has worn. His naivete, his innocence, leads him to simple solutions to complex problems. When he comes upon a new experience outside the realm of his understanding, he is unable to adapt himself or his world view to this experience. He continues on the same path--of emulating the Founder, of hoping to become Bledsoe's assistant, of thinking himself a "brother" to Jack and his cronies--even when the evidence obviously demonstrates how impossible a dream his hopes have created for him. It took him "much painful boomeranging of my expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with: That I am nobody but myself" (15).

More than 35 years have passed since the initial publication of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man; more than 40 following the appearance of the essential episode of the battle royal. During those years, numerous critics and reviewers have explored the passage of the invisible man from innocence to experience in his quest for identity.[6] Much has also been made of the recurring paired images of blindness and sight, invisibility and visibility, black and white, and darkness and illumination. There are even those who have seen the struggle for voice on the part of the narrator as an essential element in this search for self and meaning in an alien world, and acknowledged that the very fact and act of the writing of the invisible man's tale of naivete ending in maturity serves as the evidence of his attainment of

understanding and acquisition of a self-articulated, self-authenticated self.

Thomas A. Vogler, for instance, sees the importance of the narrator's creative act of writing and states "that the writing of the book is itself part of the experience, and of the discovery of identity, which is the subject of the book," but unfortunately, he, like Eleanor R. Wilner and Ihab Hassan, credits the novel's series of events and speeches with bringing illumination to the narrator's eyes (69).[7] However, the process that brings the invisible man to self-awareness is <u>not</u> the progression of events as portrayed in the narrative itself; those do not depict a movement toward awareness, but rather present a recursive rendering of the same experience repeated again and again, with each repetition followed by the invisible man's assuming that he has gained something of himself, when in reality his gain has also meant a loss of something intrinsic. The actual experience that mediates the poles between innocence and maturity is invisible for it grows from the unseen act of writing, not the experiences as they occur. While the invisible man is caught up in the events, he remains naive and blind. Each insight brings blindness, each illumination brings a darkening. Each step "forward" on the part of the invisible man entails an equal movement "backward." As he tells us in the opening paragraph of Chapter 1:

> All my life I had been looking for something, and everywhere I turned someone tried to tell me what

> it was. I accepted their answers too, though they were often in contradiction and even self-contradictory. I was naive. I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer. It took me a long time and much painful boomeranging of my expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with; That I am nobody but myself. But first I had to discover that I am an invisible man! (15)

He is naive throughout, despite his attempts to see how they have him running.[9] The motives of those who send him spinning in motion are as invisible to him as he is invisible to them. Each ostensible lifting of the veil from the invisible man's eyes is in actuality a lowering, perhaps more accurately a securing, of the veil before his eyes. Because he thinks in terms of black and white, dark and light, every choice is a rejection, each gain a loss. For him, these absolutes remain polarized values throughout the novel until he realizes the hole he is in and begins, through the painful process of writing his experience, to reconcile these opposites. Once he can see the negative of the positive, the visibility within the invisibility, and so forth and conversely, for the first time he sees his own blindness with clarity and accuracy.

Thwarted in his attempts to find his own identity, named (and therefore owned) by others, impeded in his efforts to express himself verbally, censured for straying from the "proper" or "scientific" script for his speeches, the invisible man is kept running, kept apart from himself with his needs unfulfilled:

> I was pulled this way and that for longer than I

> can remember. And my problem was that I always tried to go in everyone's way but my own. I have also been called one thing and then another while no one really wished to hear what I called myself. (560)

(This observation occurs in the Epilogue, after the invisible man has written the bulk of his adventures in the world above.) Often feeling split into two personalities and lacking the resources to join these conflicting elements effectively within himself, he arrives at the discovery of his hole without much insight into who he is. Destroying the contents of his briefcase--the file he has kept on himself--briefly illuminates for him all the characters he has tried to be at the behest of others. But without the telling of the tale, without the attempt to make meaning through the act of writing, he would not have become the sighted and full voiced person we take him for in the Prologue and Epilogue.

As the narrator observes in the Prologue, "Without light I am not only invisible, but formless as well." He might well have added that without language--lacking autonomous command over the words he speaks and writes--he is invisible, and it is through the creation of the book, the telling of the story, that he attains voice and illuminates his form. The novel becomes a visible form of his being, the delineation of his substance. As Thorpe Butler observes, "In an act of creative memory he tells his own story in his own way, discovering thereby patterns and a paradoxical meaning that he had never before perceived in

his own experience. In so doing he creates an ordered world out of the chaos of his experience, a world in which he has an authentic identity (323).[10] The writing process has brought him new insight as to the cause and nature of his invisible state. "The fact is that you carry part of your sickness within you, at least I do as an invisible man. I carried my sickness and though for a long time I tried to place it in the outside world, the attempt to write it down shows me that at least half of it lay within me" (562). He realizes now that he had been a full partner to his blindness and running, an accomplice to his being invisible and voiceless.

But writing the book--exercising a voice long neglected--has also been a very painful experience: "So why do I write, torturing myself to put it down? Because in spite of myself I've learned some things" (566). While he began his writing in anger, now he wonders if he has failed: "The very act of trying to put it all down has confused me and negated some of the anger and some of the bitterness." But while he doubts his success it becomes clear that he understands much better what led him to his hole and the possibilities that now await him should he decide to return to the world. He has difficulty confining himself to polarities and abstract absolutes. Even attempting honesty in his Epilogue becomes a problem:

> When one is invisible he finds such problems as good and evil, honesty and dishonesty, of such shifting shapes that he confuses one with the other, depending upon who happens to be looking

> through him at the time. Well, now I've been trying to look through myself, and there's a risk in it. I was never more hated than when I tried to be honest. Or when, even as just now I've tried to articulate exactly what I felt to be the truth. No one was satisfied--not even I. (559)

He found that in order to be liked it was necessary to stifle his honesty. Through writing his story, he has learned the painful, yet important lesson of duplicity which Church says is "so important to adult functioning" (103). Hence his discovery that his "world has become one of infinite possibilities" (563). No longer hampered by the definition and identification at the hands of others, no more dependent upon others for the right words for the right occasion, the narrator has finally seen that the world is not split down the middle into two polar parts at war with each other. He sees the possibilities in the world--and the potency in the word.

Ellison, in a discussion of the richness of language ability which black children often lose when they come north, perceives that such loss--something the invisible man also undergoes when he moves north--is "a reflection of their sense of being dispossessed of the reality to which their vocabulary referred. Where they once possessed the keys to a traditional environment--the South--they now confront an environment that appears strange and hostile" (Going to the Territory 67).

Until the invisible man falls into his hole, sees the hole he has been in all along, he lacks the language skill to bring order to his chaos. Much of his dispossession was

of his own making as he filtered from his speech and mannerisms much of his Southern (i.e., "cotton patch") ways. With the exception of the yam eating scene and the delivery of his speech at the eviction which followed, the invisible man denies himself the pleasure and the peace of his own heritage and his own language. Once in his hole, separated from the forces which compel him to adapt and adjust himself to the chaos around him (or, in Hurston's terms, once out of his tight-fitting garment of experience), he begins his narrative.

Alan Nadel correctly asserts that

> [w]e need to remember that the invisible man is not the narrator but a person whom the narrator has renounced or distanced himself from. The crucial difference is that the invisible man did not know how to interpret signs, did not know that in limiting his possibilities to other people's versions of reality, he was yielding up his identity. (72)

It should be noted that the invisible man is not the narrator only in the sense that he is unable to see what the narrator can. For all the pain it causes him, the invisible man in this newly acquired role of narrator must relish the telling of the tale, for he moves from what Britton calls the speech of the participant (the language of the invisible man as he experiences the events of the novel) to the speech of the spectator (the language of the narrator and the character we meet in the Prologue and Epilogue).

Britton's explanation of the distinctions between these two modes of language use illustrates the important role the writing of the book--that act which although invisible to

the reader gives form and substance to the invisible man--has on the narrator's ability to understand and cope with his (the invisible man's) experience.

> As participants we generate expectations from past experience, put them to the test of actuality, and modify our representation of the world (our predictive apparatus, the basis of all our expectations) in the light of what happens. As we go back over the same experience, now in the role of spectator, we may make further and probably more far-reaching adjustments--for . . . we are likely to refer to a more extensive set of values than we are free to do as participants. But occasionally, what happens is so unlike our expectations that we are not able to achieve even an initial adjustment 'in our stride,' as we participate. Events do not wait for us, so we participate as best we can, but when the experience is over we are left with a positive need to take up the role of spectator and work upon it further--in order, as we say, 'to come to terms with it.' (Language and Learning 118; emphases are the author's.)

In his participant role, the character of the invisible man has been unable to make the adjustments necessary to generate adequate expectations. His expectations, boomeranged again and again, are based on faulty assumptions. However, as spectator, the narrator can finally come to some understanding of his "boomeranging" experiences. He, for the first time, can more clearly see himself--even should Monopolated Light and Power suffer a blackout--because he has finally formed himself and his world through the writing of his tale. Denied an identity and denied a personal voice, the narrator finds both through his writing experience. He announces that he is now ready to come out of his hole. However frightening such a re-emergence may seem to him, the narrator knows that the time

is right; he is at last prepared to heed the exhortation of the fat vet to "[c]ome out of the fog" (151).

D. W. Harding distinguishes between the unfocused vision of the participant and the clarity of the spectator's perception, and his comment helps identify the source of the invisible man's fog: "Detached and distanced evaluation is sometimes sharper for avoiding the blurrings and bufferings that participant action brings, and the spectator often sees the event in a broader context than the participant can tolerate" ("Psychological Processes" 136). The narrator's separation from the world has given him the opportunity to sharpen his focus and fashion himself through language, but he realizes that however belatedly that has occurred, it is not the final step--merely an initial one on his way to the possibilities which await him. Britton says it simply: "As participants we have only one life to live; as spectators, an infinite number is open to us" (Language and Learning 116).

In a descriptive depiction of Hurston the narrative artist, Karla Holloway observes that "Hurston, I feel, understood that she celebrated herself through her word, crafted herself, affirmed herself, and perhaps most important and primal, named herself" (151). Ellison's remark on his discovery that "[f]or all his conscious concern with technique, a writer did not so much create the novel as he was created by the novel" (Shadow and Act 162) seems to echo

that sentiment. Obviously, these notions of creating and naming oneself through the act of writing appropriately apply to these writers' narrative protagonists, Janie and the invisible man.

NOTES

[1] Other critics have noted the recursive nature of the battle royal. Tony Tanner says, "The whole experience is an early paradigm of the treatment he is to receive all through his adult life" (51). Similarly, Marcus Klein observes that "the same chaos of appetites and guilt that is the hidden nature of Negro and white relations is exploded at the hero in each of his subsequent accidents" (118), and Thomas A. Vogler suggests that a careful analysis of the battle royal would reveal "a prefiguration of almost everything else in the novel" (76).

[2] Interestingly, the narrator alludes to his foolishness and the hole he has yet to discover is his own when he is "saved" by Mary Rambo and falls asleep "thinking in echo of her words, <u>If I don't think I'm sinking, look what a hole I'm in</u>" (247; emphasis is the author's). Ellison cleverly includes this paraphrase of the folk-blues song "Stealin'," apparently sung by Mary as she tends to the invisible man and left echoing in his mind as he drifts off to sleep. The verse runs "If you don't believe I love you,/Look what a fool I've been,/If you don't believe I'm sinkin',/Look at the hole I'm in." Ostensibly recovering from his treatment in the factory hospital, the invisible man, Ellison hints, is once more about to retreat to his previous boomeranging habits: "stealin' back to my same old used to be."

Vogler's observation concerning the various meaningful images that seem intended solely for the reader's benefit but remain beyond the invisible man's grasp accurately applies to this song allusion as well. Vogler says, "Although they [the images] are registered through the eyes [in this case, ears] and consciousness of the invisible man, they are not noted by him as containing any special significance" (77).

[3] Selke points out that in light of Ellison's negative attitude toward Booker T. Washington, Jack's suggestion that the invisible man become another Washington figure is absurd. "The very choice of Washington is an indictment of the Brotherhood and a further indication that the hero is

indeed to be used again. A further indication that the hero is again deluded is the fact that he obtains his first Brotherhood assignment on April first, All Fools' Day" (198).

[4] The invisible man's brief "conscious and ritual acceptance of Negro food," according to Selke, "amounts to a communion which confirms him in his folk identity. Whereas earlier he had referred to his race as 'they,' he now uses the inclusive 'we' when talking about his ethnic group" (190).

[5] This issue of naming and identity arises as well in Their Eyes Were Watching God, although to a lesser extent. In the beginning of Janie's first person story to Phoeby, she recalls when as a six year old child she first discovered she "'wuzn't white'" and says, "'Dey all useter call me Alphabet 'cause so many people had done named me different names'" (21). Wolff comments on these two revelations: "She becomes intrinsically aware that there are two possible perceptions of her: the intrinsic, natural image she has of herself, and the image held by the rest of the world. . . . The outside world has also attached its perceptions to her as names, although with no consistency. . . . She is what she has been called" (29). There is, for Janie, the self she feels herself to be, which appears to be in conflict with the image others superimpose upon her due to her race. Up until this point, she considered herself just another little girl. Suddenly, she finds herself redefined as some alien other. Like her grandmother, who is called "'nothin' but Nanny, 'cause dat's what everybody . . . called her'" (20), she receives the name Alphabet--the summary of numerous names--from the white Washburn family.

Where, in fact, her last name of Crawford originated is unknown to the reader--perhaps coming from Nanny's employers, perhaps not. The fatherless daughter of a fatherless daughter, Janie becomes a Killicks, a Starks, and a Woods during the course of the novel, acquiring a new name for each of her new positions in relation to the men in her life.

Hurston further plays this naming game, selecting the cold and lifeless sounding names "Killicks" and "Starks" for Janie's first two husbands and the more natural sounding "Woods" for her third. These names help indicate Janie's early plight with Logan and Jody--who keep her from realizing her vision of the budding pear tree--and her eventual development through intimacy with Tea Cake Woods. The latter helps her return to that "natural image" of herself which Wolff discusses, an image in keeping with the name of Janie's natural mother, Leafy.

[6] In 1971, Tony Tanner called the Invisible Man "quite simply the most profound novel about American Identity written since the war" (51). Jonathan Baumbach stresses the invisible man's acquisition of a variety of false identities or masks in lieu of one of his own (75). Robert Bone, "Ralph Ellison and the Uses of Imagination," also discusses

masks and dual identity as well as "the question of individual and group identity" as illustrated in jazz as a tension between the musical ensemble and the individual soloist (86-111). Ellin Horowitz summarizes the book as "a search for [the invisible man's] identity, denied both by society and himself" (331). See also Thorpe Butler, Harold Kugelmass (especially, 157-208), Steven Marcus, and Eleanor R. Wilner for further considerations of the search for identity in the novel.

Selke devotes his dissertation to the theme of identity in Invisible Man and other works of Ellison's. See especially his study of Invisible Man (177-233). Additionally, Selke provides an interesting summary and appraisal of critical response to the novel before 1975 in light of this and other themes (96-104).

[7] See Wilner 242 and Ihab Hassan 170. In addition, Wilner argues that the invisible man never attains authenticity as an individual (256-57).

[8] Margolies, while admitting that the writing of the book becomes "an affirmation, a celebration of life" (131) shares Klein's skepticism that the hibernating invisible man of the Epilogue will ever emerge from underground. Ellison, however, sees that emergence as the inevitable next step for his narrator: "I assumed that by finally taking the initial step of trying to sum up the meaning of his experience, he had moved to another stage of his development" (Going to the Territory 59). And Ellison elsewhere states that "[t]he hero comes up from underground because the act of writing and thinking necessitated it. He could not stay down there" (Shadow and Act 179).

[9] Ellison refers to his naive protagonist as "a young man who has an infinite capacity for making mistakes (and being a fool, I think)" (Going to the Territory 49). He is enough of a fool to keep repeating the same mistakes.

[10] In addition, Todd Lieber terms the narrator's writing an act of celebration and notes that "[i]n the creative act of writing the invisible man succeeds in giving form to the pattern of his own reality and in the process defines himself" (98). Similarly, Tony Tanner writes of "the patterning power" of the invisible man's mind: "This is not the artist as hero so much as the hero out of dire necessity having to become an artist. For it is only in the 'symbolic' freedom of lexical space that he can both find and be himself" (59). In the same vein, Kimberly W. Bentson mentions the importance of the narrator's "[w]riting himself into being" (163), while Stepto argues that the invisible man, through his "acts of written articulateness and literary form-making," replaces the tokens of his false identities which he carried in his briefcase with "the self authored 'protection' [in the sense of a pass or identification card] that constitutes the completed narrative" (174).

Chapter Three

"It's the truth even if it didn't happen": Chief Bromden's Therapeutic Art

Most of the discussion of Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest over the past 25 years or so has entailed careful analysis of Kesey's larger-than-life protagonist, Randle Patrick McMurphy, and his life and death struggle with Nurse Ratched and the dehumanizing, mechanistic forces which she represents, identified by Chief Bromden as the Combine. The brawling, lusting, gambling McMurphy captures the interest of readers in the same way he seems to seize the attention of the other inmates on the ward, especially Bromden. McMurphy has been called hero, anti-hero, Christ, comic Christ, king, fool, comic book caricature, and male chauvinist, to name but a few of his descriptive labels.[1] Whether characterizing the novel as a picaresque in the tradition of Mark Twain,[2] the "first truly successful novel of the absurd since World War II,"[3] or as a modern tragedy, the critics usually devote much of their attention to this mesmerizing character.

For example, Michael M. Boardman, who opts for the tragic reading of McMurphy's adventures just noted, contends that "[t]here should be no confusion over just who this

story is 'about.' For all of the Chief's importance and vividness as a narrator, he is still part of the 'telling' and not the 'essence'" (175). The fact that Kesey's falling out with the filmmakers who brought his novel to the movie screen was due in part to the reduction of Bromden to a minor "buddy" character receives cursory attention in Boardman's essay. While he admits it is "tempting to accept" Kesey's comment that "[i]t is the Indian's story--not McMurphy's or Jack Nicholson's," Boardman determines that Bromden's role is to tell "McMurphy's story as powerfully as possible" (180).[4] But telling the story in itself makes Bromden essential, and understanding Bromden's situation and attitudes is crucial to any appraisal of the work.

While John C. Pratt, in his introduction to the Viking Critical Edition of Cuckoo's Nest, suggests that "one should approach this novel by paying close attention to point of view. . . . After all the narrator . . . is insane by anyone's standards" (again citing Kesey's own comments about the importance of observing the narrator's consciousness), Pratt turns his attention instead to Kesey's consciousness, and the peyote that led to Kesey's discovery of his narrator (viii).[5] If, as Pratt asserts, "Kesey's Chief Broom is obviously deforming the events that figure in the early part of the novel" (xi), the reader must at least entertain the possibility that all the novel's events are likewise "deformed." After all, who is to say where Bromden's

insanity begins and ends.

However, Bromden is neither "deforming" (misrepresenting) the events nor reforming them (in the way that Janie or the invisible man attempted to write their life experiences as autobiography). Rather, Bromden is forming them, simply making them up, and, as is the case with many novelists, he uses experiences from his own life to form the foundation for the story as it unfolds in his creative consciousness. He, too, forms himself through the process of writing, "even if it didn't happen," and Kesey's invisible and mute character shares numerous similarities with Ellison's invisible man.

Upon first encountering Chief Bromden, the half-white, half-Indian narrator, in his hospital environment, the reader learns that Bromden is "cagey enough to fool" the ward personnel into thinking he is deaf and dumb (10). Aware that it's best not to be seen by the attendants, Bromden "creep[s] along the wall quiet as dust" (9). Later, at the revelation that Bromden is six foot eight inches tall, the irony of his attempts to render himself invisible to others' eyes becomes apparent. When Big Nurse arrives on the ward in the morning, this big man pathetically endeavors to hide his huge frame behind the handle of the mop he carries (11). One page later, already hidden from view in the mop closet, Bromden undertakes a similar disappearing act, trying to conceal himself in memories of the past. Due to his fear of

Big Nurse and the attendants, Bromden feigns invisibility, muteness, and deafness, but the reader discovers later in the book that these defensive weapons were learnt long ago in reaction to his invisibility in the eyes of others.

Bromden recalls, in words that echo the invisible man's opening comments in his Prologue, that his invisible state was initially contingent upon the failure of others to see him. "[I]t wasn't me that started acting deaf; it was people that first started acting like I was too dumb to hear or see or say anything at all" (178). "[P]eople first took to acting like I couldn't hear or talk a long time before" he entered the hospital. Whether in the Army or in grade school, Bromden found that people would assume that he wasn't listening, "so they quit listening to the things I was saying" (178).

His first and most vivid memory of this occurring was when he was ten years old. Two white men and one white woman arrive at the Indian village where Bromden lives and at first they seem to see this young boy, although Bromden notes their obvious displeasure with the sight. One of the men "bends toward me and squints and lifts his mustache up to his nose again like it's me stinking instead of the fish" (180). But they speak as if he isn't really there, making disparaging remarks about "little Hiawatha" and the "squalor" these Indians live in, and, when the young Bromden addresses them directly in his "very best schoolbook language," he is surprised to discover that "[n]ot one of

the three acts like they heard a thing I said; in fact they're all looking off from me like they'd as soon I wasn't there at all" (181). Suddenly the confused Bromden is confronted with the fact that in their eyes he doesn't even exist and to their ears he might as well be mute, but he learns one of the few values of invisibility--the ease of eavesdropping--as they discuss their plans to forgo speaking to his father, the Chief, and instead decide to talk to his white mother. That this "little Hiawatha" overhears their scheme is of little concern to the whites; as they drive away Bromden is left "standing there wondering if they ever even saw me" (182).

Thus originated Bromden's lessons as to the value of what he had to say and the obvious unimportance in the minds of white people as to whether he was within earshot or not. These experiences continued through grade school, college, and his Army experiences, until he began to wear the cloak of his invisibility and determined to hide behind his deaf and dumb act. In stark contrast to the invisible man, Bromden is not naive or slow to learn; he is well acquainted with the source of his invisibility. Indeed, like the invisible man, it took some painful boomeranging of his expectations for him to achieve the knowledge that his half Indian heritage renders him invisible to others, but Bromden, as he begins the novel, is securely in his "hole" and not as yet ready to venture out. He is not illuminating his hole in order to give substance to his form; rather, he

is content to stay fogged in on the ward. It's safer that way.

Bromden claims to understand the generation of the fog because of his Army experiences and recalls the feeling being in the fog produced in him. "You felt like you were out on that airfield all by yourself. You were safe from the enemy, but you were awfully alone" (116). That's precisely the predicament Bromden finds himself in on the ward. His acceptance and virtual embrace of his invisibility allow him to feel safe and secure, but the fog also keeps him in isolation--awfully alone. And, in this meager attempt to overcome them with yeses, he has fallen into the entanglement the invisible man eventually discovered; his surrender to others' notion of his negligible value to the community has only made him more alone. As Jack De Bellis observes, Bromden's "withdrawal . . . only continued to justify those who treated him as invisible. Like a good Indian, he had accepted the whites' vision of him and carried it to its bitter conclusion" ("Alone No More" 72). Similarly, Don R. Kunz mentions Bromden's acceptance of "a false mechanical self supplied by his therapists" (67), and Leeds notes that "[b]y accepting society's evaluation of him, Bromden has abdicated the frightening responsibility of defining himself" (Ken Kesey 32), observations equally applicable to the invisible man.

Bromden also shares the invisible man's belief in the rightness of whiteness, and from his unwitting complicity in

his oppression comes his many self-deprecating remarks concerning his Indian heritage. In fact, he even doubts he's adequate to be an Indian. For example, on first encountering McMurphy, Bromden thought "that he was laughing because of how funny it looked, an Indian's face and black, oily Indian's hair on somebody like me" (26). Later, when he looks at his reflection in the mirror wondering how McMurphy can so easily be himself, Bromden sees

> my face in the mirror, dark and hard with big, high cheekbones like the cheek underneath them had been hacked out with a hatchet, eyes all black and hard and mean-looking, just like Papa's eyes or the eyes of all those tough mean-looking Indians you see on TV, and I'd think, That ain't me, that ain't my face. It wasn't even me when I was trying to be that face. I wasn't even really me then; I was just being the way I looked, the way people wanted. It don't seem like I ever been me. (140)

He has adjusted himself to the image others expect him to be and is estranged from his Indian heritage. It might even be fair to say that others' imposed view of him coerced him into this embrace of invisibility and feigned deafness and muteness. In much the same way, McMurphy will, in the course of the novel, seem to be coerced into behavior which is in stark contrast to his selfish nature.

In order to understand that the security the fog affords is a false one, Bromden needs a catalyst to shake the foundation of others' notion of him. Only then can he provide his own form to his identity and fly from this cuckoo's nest. Bromden does, at least, feel some ambivalence about the fog. Once fogged in he sometimes

fears the isolation--"I'd never see another thing"--or the frequent inevitable end--"I'd get lost and turn up at the Shock Shop door" (117). At one time he "had figured that anything was better'n being lost for good, even the Shock Shop," but after McMurphy's arrival on the ward, he has his doubts: "Being lost isn't so bad" (118).

It took the invisible man a long time to discover the virtual fog he was in, whereas, for Bromden, the fog is a tangible thing. Bromden finds the risks of visibility too frightening, whereas maintaining his invisible state demands little effort or risk at all. Certainly a six foot eight inch man who can hide behind a mop handle or slide unseen into a painting on a wall and who neither speaks nor hears will not be summoned to dangerous participation. Usually he'll be left alone or required only to accomplish some mindless menial task such as sweeping and mopping the halls. Accepting his role on the ward further reduces his visibility: "I been at it so long, sponging and dusting and mopping . . . that the staff usually don't even notice me; I move around in my chores, and they see right through me like I wasn't there" (131). Even if the fog-bound Bromden does arrive at the Shock Shop door, assuming Harding's account of Bromden's previous 200 EST treatments is at all accurate, one more may not be particularly difficult to endure for this veteran.

There are many other similarities between Ellison's novel and <u>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</u>. For instance,

keeping the inmates fighting among themselves helps render them powerless. The one o'clock group meeting resembles the battle royal as what is theoretically a democratic session "run completely by the patients and their votes" (48) becomes under Nurse Ratched's guidance what McMurphy calls a "peckin' party" (55). McMurphy's colorful description depicts the way the patients are kept battling each other: "'The flock gets sight of a spot of blood on some chicken and they all go to peckin' at it, see, till they rip the chicken to shreds. . . . Oh, a peckin' party can wipe out the whole flock in a manner of a few hours'" (55). One way Ratched is able to ensure a "successful" group session is to use the log book where patients betray each other, under the guise of friendship and for the benefit of the "Therapeutic Community," as Wrestrum effectively "squealed" on the invisible man for the sake of the Brotherhood.

In response to McMurphy's criticism of the group therapy session where Harding was the victim of the others' pecking, Harding offers a rigorous defense of Ratched's methods. In a speech which begins in earnest Harding's tone gradually changes to ironic overstatement, and he concludes with the bitter acrimony of the tensely whispered "'Oh the bitch, the bitch, the bitch'" (58-59). Like Barbee's loaded rhetoric in depicting the mythic Bledsoe, the slop dispensing college president, Harding's speech addressing the unselfish beneficence of this "veritable angel of mercy" defines Ratched, the altruistic and legendary, pill

dispensing nurse. As Bledsoe was unwilling to tolerate dissent or controversy in his smoothly run school and Brother Jack would sacrifice individual members for the successful control of the Brotherhood, so, too, Ratched "tends to get real put out if something keeps her outfit from running like a smooth, accurate, precision-made machine" (30). For the good of the "Therapeutic Community," the patients are "adjusted to surroundings" (30) through intimidation, suspension of privileges, shock treatments, and the threat (sometimes carried out) of lobotomy.

Furthermore, the mechanical imagery of both novels is striking. The fat vet's comments about the invisible man's being an automaton are matched in Cuckoo's Nest by Bromden's observations of the fate of Ruckly--"another robot for the Combine" (21)--and his ubiquitous comments about the dehumanizing influences of the Combine itself. Ratched's power over the patients is nowhere more apparent than in her coercion of Billy Bibbit after finding him with Candy. For the first time, Billy's stutter is gone, but Ratched knows precisely the strings to pull--guilt, fear of Ratched's disapproval, fear of his mother--to manipulate her puppet-like Billy toward powerlessness and his eventual betrayal of McMurphy. Billy's needless sacrificial death seems quite reminiscent of the senseless death of Tod Clifton, who it seems had begun to understand the maddening plight of blacks at the control of white and black puppeteers.[6]

The struggle for power between Ratched and McMurphy can

reasonably be described as one between puppeteers, each seeking to gain control of the ward and its inhabitants. McMurphy's power manifests itself in this fashion when he commandeers the men to vote, by a show of hands, to watch the World Series on television. Bromden has some difficulty arriving at just the right descriptive metaphor for McMurphy's effectiveness:

> It's like . . . that big red hand of McMurphy's is reaching into the fog and dropping down and dragging the men up by their hands, dragging them blinking into the open. First one, then another, then the next. (124)

When McMurphy needs one more hand raised to break the tie, Bromden feels the power exerted directly on his own hand.

> McMurphy did something to it that first day, put some kind of hex on it with his hand so it won't act like I order it. . . . I wouldn't do it on my own. . . . I can't stop it. McMurphy's got hidden wires hooked to it, lifting it slow just to get me out of the fog and into the open where I'm fair game. (126)

Even though Bromden admits that he lifted his own hand, this portrayal of the hidden wires, which both McMurphy and Ratched seem able to control, accurately depicts the plight of both of these invisible men.

Both novels also use electro-shock treatments for crucial scenes and effects; Pratt's edition even includes the factory hospital episode from Invisible Man, which is particularly appropriate in light of Bromden's characterization of the ward as "the factory for the combine" (40). But more importantly, both works discuss castration and other forms of emasculation; rendering the

black man and the Indian impotent is considered effectual manipulation. Moreover, Harding calls a lobotomy "'[f]rontal lobe castration. I guess if she [Ratched] can't cut below the belt she'll do it above the eyes'" (165). Lobotomy serves Ratched as an excision of the dangerous potency of the mind.[7]

To McMurphy, this ward of patients seems comparable to a warren of rabbits--sexually inadequate rabbits, Harding adds, who have lost their "whambam" (62)--who are content to remain in their holes. McMurphy, following his short stint of playing it safe after discovering Ratched's power over the length of his hospitalization and just prior to his return to the battle with Ratched when he puts his fist through the Nurses' Station window, is characterized by Bromden as worried "like a dog worries at a hole he don't know what's down" (169). Bromden "wanted to tell him not to fret about it" and "was just about to come out" of his own hole of muteness and tell him (169), but that first step from his hole comes later in a "Thank you" for some Juicy Fruit chewing gum (185). Eventually, Bromden will emerge from his hole of invisibility and muteness, exemplified by his incarceration in this hospital, but first he must attend, like the invisible man, to writing his way to wholeness.

Offered $10,000 by the producers to write the screenplay, "Kesey wrote it--as he had the book--from the viewpoint of

the schizophrenic Indian chief Bromden" (Riley 25).[8] But his screenplay was rejected and the film, instead, utilized a third person perspective, greatly reducing the role of Bromden to that of a strong yet mild-mannered Indian whom McMurphy befriends and helps to independence. But such a transfer of point of view ignores the central issue of the book, that of the workings of Bromden's mind. As Kesey puts it, "The emphasis should not be on the battle between McMurphy and Nurse Ratched but on the battle going on in the Indian's mind between this man and the Combine that is loose in America which is trying to inhibit any kind of freedom of expression" (qtd. in Grunwald 10). For it is within Bromden's mind that this battle ensues, not on the ward itself.

Gerald Schwaberger, in his masters thesis, concurs with Kesey's insistence that this mental landscape serves as the locus for the events of the novel and shares my dismay at the readers who have "largely neglected" the narrating Bromden (3). Unfortunately, most of the critical respondents have overlooked Schwaberger's contributions.

Only a handful of critics have given Bromden the attention he deserves. As I have already observed, most have focused on McMurphy, his struggle with Ratched, and the eventual sacrifice of his life for the good of the other patients on the ward. Bromden figures in this sort of scenario as a character similar to that found in the film version; he is the pupil who learns from McMurphy's example,

rendering his escape a mere side-effect of the main action which centers on McMurphy's experiences. Or, worse, Bromden is the disciple set on the task of telling the gospel of McMurphy. Bromden's growth, taken in such a context, stems solely from his careful observance of McMurphy's example.

However, John W. Hunt and Ellen Herrenkohl both see a double storyline, one focusing on the actions of McMurphy, the other following the development and transformation of the narrating Bromden.[9] In one of the most thoughtfully developed considerations of Bromden as the central consciousness of the novel, Barry H. Leeds argues that Bromden "learns and develops through the tutelary example of the protagonist's life and ultimate death" (Ken Kesey 15), a statement that still concedes the role of protagonist to McMurphy. Fortunately, Leeds at least acknowledges the importance of the act of writing in enhancing Bromden's growth: "[I]n recounting the story of his friend's life, [Bromden] clarifies his own development to the point where he takes on both the strengths of the protagonist and an awareness of how to avoid a similar downfall and death" (15). Others have also credited the writing process with adding to Bromden's return to full stature as an individual.[10] But most refreshing about Leeds' work is his focus on Bromden's development and his own turning point in the novel.

Those who have limited their attention to McMurphy's progress (and decline)--almost to the exclusion of

considering Bromden--struggle to understand McMurphy's turning point. Seen from this perspective, McMurphy's transformation from the self-centered wolf who aims to fleece the lambs of the ward to the altruistic mentor set on helping the patients recover their human dignity seems to occur too suddenly to be believed. Interestingly, Tony Tanner, in this regard, comes quite close to uncovering the reason for McMurphy to exist in the first place. Tanner remarks that if the inmates "could dream collectively they would dream McMurphy. From one point of view that is exactly what they do" (375). Unfortunately, Tanner doesn't choose to read the novel from that perspective, nor does Pratt elect to carry forth his observation that the narrator is "insane by anyone's standards" (viii). Certainly, a narrator who believes that pills contain transistors, that whole floors of the hospital behave like elevators and can descend in the night to a slaughterhouse-like basement, and that he can enter a picture on the wall, among other things, cannot be expected to render an indisputable eyewitness account. The reader has no reason to assume that the portrayal of McMurphy is any more factual than are Bromden's other hallucinatory accounts. Klinkowitz even acknowledges that "McMurphy is made larger than life, too large even to be believable" (25), yet critics, Klinkowitz included, selectively dispense with their qualms about reliability and believability and accept Bromden's story as if it were an authentic depiction of actual events.[11]

The narrator, Bromden, who introduces himself to the reader through his narration and this alleged narrative of "actual" events is wildly confused and emotionally and mentally handicapped. He actually believes in his invisibility, in the fog, and in the Combine. His writing may be easier to understand if we approach the subjects of his ramblings as metaphoric constructs, but to him they are tangible, very real things. How then, we need to ask, is one to come to grips with the narrative? The answer lies in understanding that just as the invisibility and fog are to be taken by the reader as metaphoric, so, too, are McMurphy and Nurse Ratched and the battle between them. If understanding Broom's childhood makes his "invisibility" coherent, then understanding his childhood and other events of the past may uncover the reason for his creating this novel and the two much larger than life characters who inhabit it.

Ronald Wallace, in The Last Laugh: Form and Affirmation in the Contemporary Comic Novel, is the only critic who accords Bromden's novel writing the attention it deserves. Wallace correctly observes that Bromden is not merely a chronicler of McMurphy's ward experiences. In addition to identifying Broom as the central character whose development is the focal point of the novel, Wallace understands that McMurphy is Bromden's own creation.

> Thus it is Bromden, and not necessarily Kesey, who is ultimately responsible for the creation of McMurphy. McMurphy is Bromden's romantic vision of what a hero should be like, his action and

> motives existing only insofar as Bromden imagines them. McMurphy becomes in part a metaphor for Bromden's own development and the central focus of the novel is on Bromden's growth toward health and a comic understanding of himself and his society. (107)

While I agree with Wallace that Bromden "must regain his laugh before he can regain his speech" and that the life-affirming power of laughter is essential to Bromden's reassertion of self, I have some difficulty accepting Wallace's assertion that Bromden is "exposing his own comedy" in this novel (109). Wallace's comments that Bromden develops "the kind of comic perspective that enables him to write such a novel. When he can turn the Combine into comedy, he has defeated it" (109) are provocative and invite the reader to perceive Bromden's character and narrative role in a unique way. Certainly, there is humor in the mere pathos of a huge Indian who believes in his own invisibility, and Bromden does learn to laugh at himself when seen through the eyes of his created hero. But the Combine, the metaphor for the forces that have whittled him down to size and pushed him out of society and into a fog of withdrawal because of his racial characteristics, is not comic. Indeed, laughter becomes a potent tool against the power of the Combine; Bromden demonstrates the strength of his protagonist by having him refuse to take his EST seriously and laugh at his own predicament. "[Y]ou have to laugh at the things that hurt you just to keep yourself in balance, just to keep the world from running you plumb crazy" (212). But humor, in these desperate situations, is

of a brutal darkness, born of adversity and pain.

While Wallace's portrayal of Bromden's novel as a comedy may serve his inclusion of it in his critical appraisal of other humorous works, I fear it may obscure the sober seriousness of Cuckoo's Nest. For all its humor, Cuckoo's Nest is no more a comic novel than is Invisible Man. In that book, when the invisible man fails to part with the shattered bank image, the scene verges on Chaplinesque slapstick, but the tragic aspect of that scene depicts his inability to form an identity separate from that forced on him by the society that mocks and ridicules him. While the narrative strategies of both narrators may well indicate their awareness of the humor within their functional paralysis, neither novel fits a narrow concept of a comic novel. However, Wallace's central point--that McMurphy and Ratched are fictional and metaphoric creations of Bromden's--is vitally important.

In short, it seems plausible that Bromden invented McMurphy--a father figure modeled on the recently dismissed Taber and on traits he wished his father had possessed--to replace his father. He set his created character the task of challenging the very tangible (yet equally "deformed," to use Pratt's term) Ratched--the mother figure--and the Combine in order to effect his own therapeutic experience and no longer play it safe as his father had. As a mental construct, McMurphy assumes Bromden's burden, helps to clear the fog, and short-circuits the electricity (and power) of

the ward. Through the process of imagining and writing these exploits, Broom gains enough confidence and autonomy to necessitate his manipulation of his novel's "hero" to silence Ratched, at which point the hero, too, is silenced. Their voices disappear as Bromden's voice returns. The crucial next step, psychologically, is to kill McMurphy, an effectual means of at once killing the father and cutting the umbilical cord, so to speak, in order to attain a true autonomous identity. Finally, he writes his own escape from his hole, accomplished by heaving the control panel--a final image of the Combine, now impotent with severed wires dangling and inert--through the window and hurdling "after the panel, into the moonlight" (272).[12]

Like Ellison's narrator, Bromden considers the pain in overcoming one's invisibility and muteness through writing. He remarks,

> It's gonna burn me . . . finally telling about all this, about the hospital, and her, and the guys--and about McMurphy. I been silent so long now it's gonna roar out of me like floodwaters and you think the guy telling this is ranting and raving my <u>God</u>; you think this is too horrible to have really happened, this is too awful to be the truth! But, please. It's still hard for me to have a clear mind thinking on it. But it's the truth even if it didn't happen. (13)

The novel Bromden is writing is born of pain and anguish. Like the invisible man in his occasional surrenderings to the potency of language in his speeches, Bromden fears the overwhelming power of the word and that he may lose control. And, finally, he suggests the "truth" of what his novel will portray "even if it didn't happen," or, in other words, even

if the events and occurrences are not factual themselves.

As Hunt observes,

> Bromden's purgative act . . . significantly comes in the shape of a story, that is, it comes in a form which requires that the events alluded to be ordered with a coherence sufficient to explain or yield their meanings to the narrator himself. Thus the story told is given its structure by the need of the narrator to find the truth in it. (27)

Bromden's story, then, is not ordered for the reader's understanding but for Bromden's benefit. From the reader's perspective, the narration may become confused, the events may seem too bizarre to be believable. According to Kunz, Bromden "seems unable to control the confused free association of memory, fantasy, and present sensory experience" (66). However, as the creator of this fictional representation of truth, Bromden requires the license to move through time and space as he grapples with ordering the occurrences of the novel and utilizing his personal experiences to do so. Britton et al. explain the importance of going back over our experiences, "in mind, in talk, or (if we are young enough) in make-believe play. Our re-enactments are likely in some degree to distort the experience in the direction of what is acceptable to us, or what is intelligible to us" (79). The extent to which Bromden imposes a sense of order and control over the lives of his character is crucial; his successful movement to an autonomous self requires that he wrest command over his life from others who have sought to rule and falsely identify him.

This story is too horrible to be believed: McMurphy is much too large for life; Ratched is too simplistically evil and cruel to be human. But as characters populating an imagined environment, an altered version of Bromden's place of "real" habitation, they become puppets who are able to engage in conflict on a battle field on which the narrator is, as yet, not prepared to venture. He needs a McMurphy to lead the way for him, to cut a path for Bromden's recovery and escape.

One of the ways in which Bromden's narration is most confusing is his manipulation of time. Ironically, this facility to control time's passage is a power he attests belongs to Ratched:

> The Big Nurse is able to set the wall clock at whatever speed she wants by just turning one of those dials in the steel door; she takes a notion to hurry things up, she turns the speed up, and those hands whip around that disk like spokes in a wheel. . . .
>
> But generally it's the other way, the slow way. She'll turn that dial to a dead stop and freeze the sun there on the screen so it don't move a scant hair for weeks. (70-71)

However, Bromden demonstrates his own ability to manipulate time and thus manipulate the reader by slipping in and out of the alleged present time of the ward. He often retreats to past events, particularly of his childhood, without warning. For example, before creating McMurphy's entrance onto the ward, Broom twice retreats in memory to his childhood hunting experience with his father.

Then, when McMurphy enters the ward, Bromden observes the similarities and the differences between McMurphy and

his father.

> He talks a little the way Papa used to, voice loud and full of hell, but he doesn't look like Papa; Papa was a full-blood Columbia Indian--a chief--and hard and shiny as a gunstock. This guy is redheaded with long red sideburns and a tangle of curls out from under his cap . . . and he's broad as Papa was tall, broad across the jaw and shoulders and chest, a broad white devilish grin, and he's hard in a different kind of way from Papa. (16)

While McMurphy is reminiscent in voice and size of Bromden's father, he is significantly broader, and, oddly, redder. For Bromden, the characteristics which distinguish McMurphy from his father are nearly as important as their similarities.

When McMurphy violates the rules by brushing his teeth at the improper time, Bromden recalls his father's outmaneuvering the white government men and the power of laughter. "I feel good, seeing McMurphy get that black boy's goat like not many men could. Papa used to be able to do it--spraddle-legged, dead-panned, squinting up at the sky that first time the government men showed up to negotiate about buying off the treaty" (86). Bromden's father speaks of Canadian geese flying overhead in July, pulling the legs of these authoritarian whites. "By the time it dawned on the government men that they were being poked fun at, all the council who'd been sitting on the porch of our shack . . . had all busted up laughing fit to kill" (86). Bromden takes pleasure as well in creating a good humored man in his father's image.

Another side of Bromden's invisibility is his believed

lack of size and stature, a trait he shares with his father who diminished in size as his potency as chief of his tribe was spent. During the course of the novel, Bromden worries that McMurphy will suffer the same fate as his father. He tells McMurphy, "'Everybody worked on him because he was big, and wouldn't give in, and did like he pleased. Everybody worked on him just the way they're working on you'" (187). Based on Bromden's experience, he believes that once those in the Combine see a person's size and strength, "'they got to bust you'" (187). Bromden anticipates the inevitable end for McMurphy, as he had witnessed his father's eventual demise: "'The Combine had whipped him. It beats everybody. It'll beat you too. They can't have somebody as big as Papa running around unless he's one of them'" (187).

The safest way to forestall the inevitable is to do the "smart thing," which Bromden learned from his father and sees McMurphy start to do when McMurphy discovers that Ratched alone determines the length of his stay in the hospital.

> [McMurphy]'s finally getting cagey, is all. The way Papa finally did when he came to realize that he couldn't beat that group from town who wanted the government to put in the dam because of the money and the work it would bring, and because it would get rid of the village. . . . Papa had done the smart thing signing the papers. . . . McMurphy was doing the smart thing. I could see that. He was giving in because it was the smartest thing to do. . . . He didn't say so, but I knew and I told myself it was the smart thing to do. I told myself over and over: It's safe. Like hiding. (150-51)

When McMurphy silences himself and begins to limit his visibility on the ward, Bromden clearly comprehends the rationale involved. He doesn't like it, but he understands. It's the method he's employed for many years. At this midway point in Bromden's novel, his "hero" has fallen into the same hole Bromden has. But Bromden as novelist intends to extricate them both.

As mentioned above, Wallace recognizes the importance of considering Bromden as a fiction writer, and he also explores the influences of Bromden's childhood experiences upon the novel as Bromden forms it.

> Just as the Chief's mother worked on his father to make him small, so the Big Nurse works on the Chief and McMurphy. Just as the government officials failed to hear or see Bromden, so the medical staff labels him deaf and dumb. In some ways the Chief's novel is a fictionalized account of his childhood experience. This McMurphy and the Big Nurse are not "real" characters at all, but rather the Chief's metaphors for his own real experience. (108)

However, Wallace overlooks another motivator for Bromden's fictionalization of his experiences and model for the fictional McMurphy. Bromden witnessed the "adjustment" of Maxwell Wilson Taber, an earlier victim of the therapeutic experience on the ward, and endeavors, through the formation of the McMurphy character, to resurrect this previous questioning patient.

The novel's narration occurs in three distinct times. The bulk of it takes place in the ostensible ongoing present, beginning with McMurphy's entrance on the ward and ending with Bromden's mercy-killing of him. In addition,

there are flashbacks to the distant past of his father and mother, the tribe, and even his army experiences. However, when Bromden tries to establish the day to day routine of the ward and hospital, he utilizes a narrative that involves a present tense that actually depicts a more recent past, of a time on the ward before he began to write about McMurphy.

Dismissed from the ward "some years back" (29), Maxwell Wilson Taber figures prominently in the chapter in which Broom addresses Ratched's reaction to any disruption of the smooth workings of the ward routine. Taber's name is mentioned some sixteen times in this chapter (29-41) because Taber serves Bromden as an example of the costs of questioning and opposing Nurse Ratched and as a model for the character of McMurphy. This section begins with Ratched explaining to one of the "little nurses" how a manipulator like McMurphy operates, and she seems to wax nostalgic in the telling. She recalls Taber as "'an <u>intolerable</u> Ward Manipulator" and then "[h]er eyes get far-off and pleased with the memory. 'Mistur Tay-bur,' she says" (29). Broom's ensuing discussion of the ward routine provides, in the examples of Taber's experiences there, a capsule summary of the sorts of things that can be expected to occur during McMurphy's stay there, particularly if he should prove to be the ward manipulator Ratched predicts he will be.[13]

Taber, too, had some difficulty following the rules and his first offense is in questioning his prescribed medication.

> "Miss, I don't like to create trouble. But I don't like to swallow something without knowing what it is, neither. How do I know this isn't one of those funny pills that makes me something I'm not?" (35)

Compared to McMurphy's strident antagonism and heavy irony, Taber seems mild-mannered in his alleged role as manipulator. When McMurphy questions the rules, such as the proper time for brushing his teeth or the appropriate volume for playing the radio, he's not just asking why; he's also working on an angle, trying to figure out how to get things running his way.

In Bromden's further outline of the "usual" morning events, he mentions the prompt eight-thirty arrival of two technicians, one of whom says they've come "'to install an Indwelling Curiosity Cutout in some nosy booger'" (36). The recipient of their advanced technology is the curious Taber; his objectionable questioning must be curtailed. In the struggle which ensues, Taber is forcibly restrained by two of the orderlies. "He gets in one good kick in the shins. He's yelling bloody murder. I'm surprised how helpless he looks when they hold him, like he was wrapped with bands of black iron" (36). They hold Taber prostrate on the mattress, his "peach-colored rear . . . framed by the ragged lettuce-green" of his ripped pants, while the Nurse smears "Vaseline on a long needle," and following the injection, leaves the jar of Vaseline in the room (36). The orderlies stay in the room with the defenseless Taber "a long time before the door opens up again and they come out, carrying

him across the hall to the lab. His greens are ripped clear off now and he's wrapped up in a damp sheet" (37).

Bromden implies what he supposes happened behind those closed doors; he suspects the orderlies of forcibly sodomizing Taber. In creating McMurphy's entrance a few pages earlier, Bromden took a certain pleasure in having McMurphy out-maneuver the orderlies, as they chased him about the ward with their thermometer and the jar of Vaseline. Bromden has effectively rewritten this incident by giving his "hero" the upper hand. Later, when Bromden will have McMurphy intercede on George's behalf by taking on Washington while Bromden battles, in his mind, with one of the other orderlies, it will serve as sweet revenge for the way they treated the defenseless Taber. During the course of the novel, McMurphy will deliver, to Ratched and the Combine, more than "one good kick in the shins."

At nine-fifty, continuing Bromden's portrayal of an ordinary day of extraordinary circumstances, "Taber is wheeled out of the lab on a Gurney bed" and, since the technicians had to give him a second shot, they suggest to the nurse that "'we take him right on over to Building One and buzz him with EST while we're at it--that way not waste the extra Seconal'" (37). Ratched agrees and further suggests that they "'take him to the electroencephalograph and check his head--we may find evidence of a need for brain work" (37). As the technicians wheel Taber off, Bromden mentions that they seem "like puppets, mechanical puppets in

one of those Punch and Judy acts where it's supposed to be funny to see the puppet beat up by the Devil and swallowed headfirst by a smiling alligator" (37). The automaton-like nature of the Combine's technicians serves as another reason for Bromden to instill McMurphy with the powers of a puppeteer, particularly if Bromden expects him to grapple with the ace "Ward Manipulator," Nurse Ratched.

And yet, Bromden surely has his doubts about the strength his McMurphy will be able to exert against the Combine, particularly considering the fate of Taber. As a result of his implanted "Indwelling Curiosity Cutout" (which we can safely assume is actually a lobotomy) and in light of his successful re-introduction to his family and community, the Combine considers Taber to be a technological achievement:

> When a completed product goes back out into society, all fixed up good as new, <u>better</u> than new sometimes, it brings joy to the Big Nurse's heart; something that came in all twisted different is now a functioning, adjusted component, a credit to the whole outfit and a marvel to behold. (40)

Bromden further envisions the reactions in the neighborhood to Taber's return: "'Why, I've never seen anything to beat the change in Maxwell Taber since he's got back from the hospital; a little black and blue around the eyes, a little weight lost, and you know what? he's a <u>new man</u>'" (40). (Taber's rebirth sounds strikingly similar to the invisible man's after his hospital stay.) Bromden sees the futility of such "adjustment"; he won't let that happen to his created free spirit, McMurphy. Not if he has any say in the

matter. But Bromden will need to take great care that he does not relinquish control of his creation to the forces of the Combine and Nurse Ratched.

The only other mention of Taber occurs when Doctor Spivey introduces (as a result of McMurphy's manipulation of him) the notion of a carnival on the ward. "Nobody's jumping up and down at the idea. [As yet the patients do not respond in puppet fashion to anyone but Ratched.] Some of us can remember Taber trying to engineer a carnival a few years back, and what happened to it" (97). Since McMurphy's predecessor suffered greatly for his suggestion, Bromden steers his hero in other directions and the carnival never materializes.

Created by Bromden in the image of Bromden's father and the "adjusted" Taber, McMurphy is set in motion against the one force which epitomizes the Combine, Nurse Ratched. Ratched, the mechanical, ball-busting matriarch of the ward is no more flesh-and-blood real than McMurphy is. Just as McMurphy is fashioned out of these remembered incidents from Bromden's past, so, too, Ratched grows out of Bromden's memories of his mother and her role in reducing his father to a cipher. Just as McMurphy's size and color mirrors traits of Bromden's father, so, too, Ratched reflects similar characteristics of Mrs. Bromden. As Fiedler observes, "Not only is Mother II big, . . . she is even more essentially <u>white</u>" (180; emphasis is the author's). The starched whiteness of her uniform contrasts starkly with

McMurphy's unkempt red hair and sideburns.

One of Ratched's methods of exerting power over the patients is through the use or misuse of names. Bromden, the son of Chief Tee Ah Millatoona, has the name of his white mother. His father changed his own name when he married outside the tribe. On the ward, his name of "Chief Broom" stems from his usual activity at the behest of the ward orderlies. As Leeds notes, "Defined by his menial function, Bromden is no more than an object to the staff, a tool. But even his legal name, 'Bromden,' represents a false identity that is imposed upon him by others" (Ken Kesey 16). Like the invisible man's, Bromden's acceptance of the given name interferes with the discovery of the authentic self. Both characters tend to become (and to remain) what they are named.

Ratched uses her strategy of keeping a patient in a weakened state by manipulating the name of that patient when she calls McMurphy "Mr. McMurry" (27-28, 44-45, 47). At the first occurrence, it might be construed as an error of pronunciation, but when she continues to call him McMurry during the group session her misnaming is an obvious method of exerting control. After all, she's sitting with his file open on her lap. At first, it works so well, in fact, that Doctor Spivey also addresses him as McMurry (45). Following McMurphy's correction of Spivey and after Spivey uses his name correctly four times, Ratched persists in her "mistake" as she suggests that Spivey "advise Mr. McMurry on the

protocol of these Group Meetings" (47). Ratched is purposely misnaming him in order to keep him off-balance and to render him as ineffectual and compliant as the other "pecking party" victims. Unfortunately for her, McMurphy is equally able to influence her balance with his sexual innuendo and his assertiveness. Her misnaming of him had followed his double entendre with her request that the others might want to "touch upon" the subject of Harding's wife: "'I thought you mean touch upon her--something else'" (44). One of the reasons for Bromden's creating this scene of misnaming is to have the father figure, McMurphy, reject the name imposed by the mother figure, Ratched. Bromden also gives his "hero" three strong names--Randle Patrick McMurphy--in honor and memory of his ward predecessor--Maxwell Wilson Taber.

Bromden's mother was instrumental in his father's reduction in size. As he tells McMurphy, "'He fought it [the Combine] a long time till my mother made him too little to fight any more and he gave up'" (187). In the novel, as Bromden writes it, the father figure of McMurphy is set in confrontational opposition with the antagonistic mother figure of Ratched. His novel, then, becomes an exercise in rewriting his past, in stage managing the interrelationships within his own family and between those who will control and adjust others and those who will be free. As Bromden observes, "you never can tell when just that <u>certain</u> one might come in who's free enough to foul things up right and

left, really make a hell of a mess and constitute a threat to the whole smoothness of the outfit" (41; emphasis is the author's).

Certainly, there is a "real" nurse somewhere within Ratched as Bromden portrays her. He has had experiences with authority that have made his lopsided view seem "real" to him. But this automaton of cruelty--the pecking party overseer, the catalyst for Billy Bibbit's suicide, the vindictive nurse practitioner who gains revenge through EST and lobotomy--is as unbelievable as McMurphy is, whom Bromden at one time imagines as "a giant come out of the sky to save us from the Combine" (224). Instead, McMurphy is the meek Taber and the shrunken Tee Ah Millatoona (Mr. Bromden) recast as an outspoken, forceful character set in conflict with the mother and authority figure of the cruel Ratched.[14]

The term "Big Nurse" is a misnaming of sorts on Bromden's part, an attempt to depict her as a role in contrast to his own believed smallness rather than as an authentic identifying name. And his selection of the name of Ratched typifies her as a functional element of the Combine machinery instead of a human being. As Leeds has noted, she "is conceived in mechanistic terms. Even her name, 'Ratched,' sounds like a kind of wrench or machine component, and the association with 'rat' makes its very sound unpleasant" (Ken Kesey 20). The reader cannot help but hear the near homonyms of her name--"wretched," "rat

shed," and "rat shit." Bromden practices the power of the namer in his selection of a fitting, dehumanizing and insulting name for his antagonist. He certainly knows what he is doing when he has McMurphy call her "Miss Rat-shed" (87) in echo of Ratched's earlier "Tay-bur" (29).

In fact, Kesey made an error in his novel when he allowed Bromden himself on one occasion to refer in his narration to the nurse as "Miss Ratched" (252). Interestingly, except for that lone exception, Bromden always refers to her as "Big Nurse" or "the nurse," more often relying on the less explicit pronouns "she" or "her" whenever possible. They mark Bromden's narrative and psychological strategy to reduce her in size and potency. Without Bromden's other characters' referring to her as Ratched--although he named her for this fiction--the reader would be as unaware of her name as Ellison's reader is of the invisible man's. Certainly, Kesey's lone oversight in this regard doesn't alter the fact that he, like Bromden, understands the power of naming.[15]

As the creator of this fiction, Bromden poses these two larger than life figures in direct opposition to one another. As they lock horns (and libidos and intellects), Bromden takes McMurphy from an initial outspoken and highly visible stage toward his father's, Taber's, and his own silence and shrunken invisible state. Moreover, he brings McMurphy to a new ascendancy as his "hero" rejects the safety of muteness and invisibility and finally scorns doing

"the smart thing." Oddly enough, just as the character of Broom, every bit as much a creation of the narrating Bromden as any other character in the book, feigns invisibility and muteness in order to be privy to the conversations and machinations of other, so, too, the narrator hides his own manipulations of his characters behind their manipulations of each other. The novel in this sense takes on those characteristics of the Punch and Judy show, or, more accurately, a Punch and Judy show put on by Punch and Judy. In this manner, Bromden can keep himself twice removed from the action and feign innocence and non-involvement. No wonder so many readers overlook Bromden's importance; he almost makes himself invisible to the reader as well.[16]

Curiously, within the text of the novel, Bromden hides himself at one point by entering a picture on the wall in the staff room: "There's a path running down through the aspen, and I push my broom down the path a ways and sit down on a rock and look back out through the frame at that visiting doctor talking with the residents" (112). Hidden safely within this artwork, he is free to observe and to act in ways not otherwise allowed within the hospital. Writing the novel affords him similar freedom.

Bromden has effectively populated his stage with these two enormous actors and various supporting players. The drama that ensues between them reenacts the crucial interactions of the family nexus that in part led him to see himself as a small, worthless being. McMurphy and Ratched

exchange challenges and McMurphy, for a time, believes in his ability to be victorious. After McMurphy is boomeranged in his expectations, much as Bromden had been throughout his childhood and adolescence, he resorts to the tact, undertaken by Bromden and his father before him, of playing it safe. The image of the victimized Taber still vivid in his memory, Bromden must fear the fate his creation may face. At first, McMurphy's caginess seems an adequate defensive strategy to both McMurphy and Bromden, until Bromden successfully boomerangs McMurphy out of his complacency with three successive mysteries.

The character of McMurphy, as Bromden has initially written him, is very simple--a man, for whom reality has a clearly defined, two-sided character. Winners win, losers lose. If he talks loud and long enough, he believes he can worm his way out of almost any situation. When the choice appears to be between acting up and remaining in the hospital indefinitely or behaving according to the dictates of Ratched and regaining his freedom in a short period of time, the decision comes easily to McMurphy. But three "facts" begin to work on McMurphy. First, his withdrawal from the challenge to Ratched leads to Cheswick's drowning himself rather than face the humiliation he felt at standing up for something on his own. Second, Sefelt's epileptic fit uncovers a choice that only puzzles McMurphy--between the horrors of the fit or the side-effects of Dilantin. And third, and most importantly, McMurphy discovers that most of

the other patients are there voluntarily. Their fear of the world and Ratched, their essential rabbit-ness which he had kidded about, has led them to make choices that McMurphy is at great pains to fathom. Scanlon ponders Sefelt's decision not to take Dilantin which led to his seizure and Fredrickson's decision to take his own and Sefelt's dosages which rots his gums, saying "'Damned if you do and damned if you don't. Puts a man in one confounded bind, I'd say'" (155). To which McMurphy thoughtfully, yet confusedly responds, "'Yeah, I see what you mean,' looking down into Sefelt's gathering face. His face has commenced to take on that same haggard, puzzled look of pressure that the face on the floor has" (155).

Bromden's McMurphy soon reasserts himself by putting his fist through the glass in the Nurses' Station and chooses a path that is equally puzzling in its complexity. No longer faced with simple solutions and forced to live with seemingly antithetical ideas, McMurphy finds his choices are a caginess which is a death in life or a potentially life-threatening confrontation with the nurse.

Leeds uncovers an interesting bit of foreshadowing which occurs in Bromden's story that throws light on this "choice" of McMurphy's. When Bromden comes out of the fog enough to actually see out of the window of the ward into the real world which lies just outside, he sees a dog "sniffing digger squirrel holes" and hears "Canadian honkers going south for the winter" (142). The dog also hears the

geese overhead and moves off in the direction of the sound and toward the highway. Leeds observes:

> A car comes out of a turn, and Bromden sees the "dog and the car making for the same spot of pavement"[143]. . . . [A]nd just before McMurphy announces his decision [to escalate the war with Ratched] by breaking the window of the nurses' station, Bromden hears a sound in his head "like tires screeching down a pavement" [172]. The implicit parallel is clear: McMurphy and the dog . . . move inexorably toward their head-on collisions with massive machines--the Combine and the car. (30)

As mentioned above, Bromden also portrays McMurphy as an ignorant dog sniffing "at a hole he don't know what's down" (169), indicating McMurphy's inability to see his own impending end. When Bromden writes his own escape, he follows that same "direction I remembered seeing the dog go" (272), but carries enough knowledge with him to circumvent the end that the dog and McMurphy faced.

Bromden's turning point comes when his own creation seems to take on a life of his own. Hampered by his self-imposed paralysis, Bromden is living the life of the "damned if you don't." His isolation, made tangible by the fog, has been an island of safety, but also of inaction. He empathizes with the suffering of patients such as Billy Bibbit and old Pete.

> I can see all that, and be hurt by it, the way I was hurt by seeing things in the Army, in the war. The way I was hurt by seeing what happened to Papa and the tribe. I thought I'd got over seeing those things and fretting over them. There's no sense in it. There's nothing to be done. (121).

The fog has helped him to avoid seeing the hurt around him and his deaf and dumb act has allowed him to abstain from

human contact. In his mind, "as soon as a man goes to help somebody, he leaves himself wide open. He has to be cagey" (121). He recalls that during the war, he had wanted to go to a "buddy of mine tied to a tree fifty yards from me, screaming for water, his face blistered in the sun" (121-22). Had he taken the chance and come out in the open, the enemy would have "cut me in half" (122). And recalling the last hunting trip he took with his father, when the old Chief was too drunk to sleep straight, he complains that "[t]here's nothing you can do about a happening out of the past like that" (122).

These two memories reinforce Bromden's commitment to staying in the fog "for good" as he protests that McMurphy is "still trying to pull people out of the fog. Why don't he leave me be?" (123). However, after the puppet-like machinations which McMurphy exerts on Bromden's arm (which Bromden admits he raised himself), McMurphy's return to the fray when he breaks the Nurses' Station window, and Bromden's recollection of the initial reasons for his feigned deaf and dumb act, the fog has dissipated completely, and Bromden laughs and thanks McMurphy for the chewing gum. Bromden speaks with McMurphy, trying to explain to himself by writing a dialogue with his created character about why he's been cagey for so long. Finally, with the conversation ended and McMurphy lying in bed with his back toward Bromden, Bromden feels the need to touch his creation and thereby reestablish contact. Even Bromden has

difficulty understanding why he feels this urge.

> I wanted to reach over and touch the place where he was tattooed, to see if he was still alive. He's layin' awful quiet, I told myself, I out to touch him to see if he's still alive. . . .
>
> That's a lie. I know he's still alive. That ain't the reason I want to touch him.
>
> I want to touch him because he's a man.
>
> That's a lie too. There's other men around. I could touch them.
>
> I want to touch him because I'm one of these queers!
>
> But that's a lie too. That's one fear hiding behind another. If I was one of these queers I'd want to do other things with him. I just want to touch him because he's who he is. (188)

McMurphy has taken on traits all his own, that seem separate from his creator, and exude a human quality noticeably tangible (like the fog once was) to Bromden. He nearly believes that he can touch his creation, that his hand could make an imprint on the flesh of his imagined production. But Bromden never gets to see whether or not his hand would fall through the ghost-like image of McMurphy, at least not until he wrestles the lobotomized and lifeless husk of McMurphy into death.

As McMurphy moves inexorably ahead toward his fateful end, the character of Broom as written by Bromden moves toward recovery of his self and respectful acceptance of his Indian blood. In the crucial scene of his coming out of the fog of his EST treatment when he and McMurphy are punished for fighting the orderlies, Bromden demonstrates his growing strength and endurance. For the first time he fights off the fog that usually follows the treatments: "How many hours have I been out? It's fogging a little, but I won't

slip off and hide in it. No . . . never again . . ." (241; ellipses are the author's) On this one occasion, instead of surrendering to the fog and his ambivalent feelings of safety/loneliness, Bromden makes a concerted effort to return to sensibility and visibility. He virtually wills himself out of the fog for once and for all. "I worked at it. I'd never worked at coming out of it before" (241). Part of his reason for struggling to consciousness resides in his interest as character and author in what will happen next. Moreover, his successful escape from the fog becomes a victory against the Combine, for he "knew this time I had them beat" (241).

Noteworthy as well in this scene is the memory of his grandmother's Indian burial. In order to bury her properly, Bromden, his father, and his Uncle Running-and-Jumping Wolf had first to dig her from her earthen grave and then set her "high in a pine tree bed" (241). Jack De Bellis' insights into the significance of this memory to Bromden's therapeutic healing are worth noting:

> The recollection appears to affect Bromden's actions, for his flight from the ward . . . symbolically liberates his stunted, imprisoned father [jailed for the unorthodox burial of the grandmother]. The recovery of the past had enabled Chief Bromden to recover the father dormant within him. ("Alone No More" 73)

As De Bellis (and Hunt 32) observes, this portrait of the traditional Indian grandmother is set in direct contrast with the stereotypical drunken Indian--Bromden's father--and the parody of a vanishing Native American--Bromden himself.

"The individual," Joseph Church says,

> in an environment alien or hostile to his style of life may find his behavior and his self-image shifting as he takes on the coloration of his surroundings. In trying to resist the process of adaptation [or as Bromden puts it, being "adjusted to surroundings" (40)], the individual may be driven to extremes, until he becomes a caricature of what he is trying to stand for. (106)

The recollection of his grandmother and her human dignity serves Bromden as a means of cultural empowerment and hastens his own recovery from confused caricature to authentic self. During the process of shaping his novel, Bromden has rewritten his past; through recovering the memories of his past, he also recovers from his racial self-loathing and seeming madness.

Contrary to the reading of McMurphy as Bromden's romanticized vision of what a hero should be, Bromden's creation should not be seen as epitomizing human qualities which Bromden admires or thinks he should acquire. In creating McMurphy--as a surrogate in the battle with the Combine--Bromden is not looking for the enduring qualities of a steadfast hero, but the deviousness, egotism, and raw energy (regardless of morality) necessary to defeat and silence the arch-enemy, Ratched. He purposely makes McMurphy stronger and more full of himself than either Taber or his father could ever be, not because these are qualities he desires for himself, but because they are essential if the battle is to be won. In terms of the "peckin' party" or a cock fight, if you want to win the bet, it's wisest to

place your money on the meanest, most single-minded, vicious hen or rooster of the bunch. McMurphy is the cock who fights hardest when first blood is drawn. The critics who suppose Bromden, or Kesey for that matter, wholly agrees with McMurphy's attitudes toward women, admires McMurphy's dishonesty, holds McMurphy's selective morality and violent tactics in esteem, or thereafter will follow the example of McMurphy in his dealings with other human beings ignore the fact that Bromden (and Kesey) merely equip McMurphy with the traits necessary to match the machinations of Ratched and the Combine.

In his chapter on Cuckoo's Nest, Wallace wisely dispenses with this idea of Bromden's romantic hero and acknowledges that Bromden's passage to authenticity requires that he forgo following McMurphy's example:

> The Chief lives on as a distinct individual, not merely as a reincarnation of McMurphy as some critics have suggested. The Chief, for example, never adopts McMurphy's attitude toward violence and sex, nor does he reflect the machismo values of his hero. Bromden creates in McMurphy an extremity of total freedom as a balance to the nurse's extremity of total control, in an effort to locate the mean. (112)

Instead, these forces--under Bromden's careful guidance--in effect negate one another. McMurphy's attack on Ratched after Billy's suicide not only removes her desexed facade (the empress truly has no clothes) but renders her voiceless. Bromden discusses the power of McMurphy in his assault on the nurse not as the product of McMurphy alone, but of the collective consciousness of the ward inhabitants.

> We couldn't stop him because we were the ones making him do it. It wasn't the nurse that was forcing him, it was our need that was making him push himself slowly up from sitting, his big hands driving down on the leather chair arms, pushing him up, rising and standing like one of those motion picture zombies, obeying orders beamed at him from forty masters. (267)

In actuality, Bromden draws on the memory of his father and Taber and other victims of the controlling and destructive forces he identifies as the Combine as well as the collective strength of his fellow patients to assault and overthrow its emblem, Nurse Ratched. Bromden directs this energy to reveal finally Ratched's human femaleness hidden behind her mechanically precise exterior and to grasp her throat in order to stifle ultimately her controlling voice.

This final battle marks the last the reader sees of both Ratched and McMurphy as they have been drawn by Bromden during the course of the book. They are both permanently deflated and reduced. When Ratched returns to the ward, "in spite of its [her new uniform] being smaller and tighter and more starched than her old uniforms, it could no longer conceal the fact that she was a woman" (268). Like the Wizard after Dorothy pulled aside the curtain, Ratched can no longer hide behind her elaborate mechanism of humiliation and threat, no matter how foreboding it once seemed. More importantly, she is unable to speak, and, as she writes her responses to the inquiries about McMurphy, Bromden observes her reduction as "her more than ever white hand skittered on the pad like one of those arcade gypsies that scratch out fortunes for a penny" (268). Harding, no longer believing

in her, tears up the paper, throws the pieces at her, and "she flinched and raised her hand to protect the bruised side of her face" (268), further indicating that she is a weak and human creature like the rest on the ward. "She couldn't rule with her old power any more, not by writing things on pieces of paper" (269). Ironically, Ratched's loss of voice which indicates her loss of power both coincides with Bromden's return to speech on the ward and demonstrates itself in the very same way that Bromden, as author of this novel, illustrates his assumption of power--"by writing things on pieces of paper."

Harding was correct in refusing to believe her written prophecy of McMurphy's return to the ward, for the lobotomized "crummy sideshow fake" that subsequently arrives labeled "McMurphy" lacks the essence of Bromden's creation. Bromden cannot allow this bruised, lobotomized, and silenced "example of what can happen if you buck the system" (270) to continue in its dehumanized "adjusted" state as Taber had. Fiedler, like some other readers, describes Bromden's suffocation of McMurphy as "a caricature of the act of love" (182) as Bromden lies "full length on top of" McMurphy's body until "the thrashing stopped" (270). Similarly, one may see this struggle not merely as an image of the sex act but also of the birthing process. Bromden, in his written act of mercy killing, severs his umbilical cord to become an independent agent. Whether perceived as a birth or a sex scene, the intimacy of the "embrace" is important because it

fulfills Bromden's desire to touch McMurphy as well as indicating the fulfillment of his maturation process. "The experience of relationship brings," as Gilligan maintains, "an end to isolation . . . . [I]ntimacy is the transformative experience for men through which adolescent identity turns into the generativity of love and work" (163-64).

When Bromden writes the escape of his Broom character, he first has Broom grab McMurphy's emblematic cap and attempt to try it on. "It was too small, and I was ashamed of trying to wear it" (271). Leeds correctly explains the shame Bromden feels as stemming from his knowledge that "McMurphy has taught him that one must find one's own identity" (42).

Moreover, whether this scene of the mercy killing of McMurphy is perceived as the birth or the reproductive act (or both), although Bromden kills McMurphy, the act is life-affirming, and, perhaps more importantly, it completes the process upon which Bromden has embarked--severing his ties to his mother and father. He has rewritten the dysfunction of his childhood family, and, as Peter G. Beidler observes, "at the end Chief Broom does what every normal adolescent does: After rejecting the mother . . . and after murdering the father, he runs away from home" ("Ken Kesey's Indian Narrator" 19). Although Bromden writes his namesake character's escape as the finale to his orphaning himself from these surrogate parents, in actuality, he has written

himself to the point at which we find the invisible man at in his Prologue. Bromden, like the invisible man, is fully cognizant of the hole he is in and of his complicity in its formation. His creative process of rejecting the mother and killing the father renders him able, for the first time, to fly the cuckoo's nest. The writing process--telling "the truth even if it didn't happen" (13)--has cleared the fog, brought him acceptance and appreciation of his racial identity, and allowed him to form himself authentically.

As noted above, Bromden initially attempted, as illustrated in his alleged entry into the painting on the wall, not to reveal himself but to maintain his invisibility through his withdrawn, spectator role of writer. He must have thought of writing as just another way of being cagey. However, the effort of exerting control over his fictional characters pulls him from the fog into visibility. His created character of Broom is as much compelled to take an active, participant role in resolving the situations of the novel as is McMurphy. Writing itself becomes a life-affirming act as he directs the created alter ego, Broom, into the self-sustaining act of suffocating McMurphy. His newly formed self-assuredness, born of the sense of control he has exerted upon his characters and wrested from the Combine, has empowered him with the potential for a return to the world outside his hole. Writing himself into freedom from those mechanistic forces that once rendered him invisible and mute, forcefully demonstrated by his having

the character of Broom throw the control panel through the window, allows him to make the escape--not into a painting, not hiding behind a mop handle, not into hallucinations and fog, but into the world outside--which he has only imagined in his novel. Bromden's artistic therapy allows him to order his experience and achieve autonomous control over his own life as he rejects the total control of Ratched and the Combine and the anarchy of McMurphy.

De Bellis discusses in general terms the difficult dilemma which he believes all Americans face and the way that dilemma affects Bromden's choices in American society:

> Although it might not be impossible for a person or society to hold contradictory aims at the same time, to do so invites anxiety and confusion. Despite an implicit acceptance of materialistic values, America has insisted on professing spiritual attitudes. The effect of this has been to create a plethora of oppositions, of which the ones most relevant to Kesey's novel are technology vs. man, rational vs. irrational, intellect vs. feeling, society vs. nature, law vs. ritual, and the divided self vs. the integrated self. the first halves of the pairings represent values implicit in American life, while the second halves represent values only ostensibly believed in. . . . Only by coming to terms with these antitheses can he [Bromden] achieve freedom, wholeness, and love. ("Alone No More" 72)

Like the invisible man's need to reconcile seemingly incontrovertible and irreconcilable absolute values and truths, Bromden must harmonize the antithetical forces De Bellis mentions--embodied in his novel's protagonist and antagonist--in order to reintegrate himself into a whole, participating human being.

Britton et al. suggest that "[M]an constructs a

representation of the world as he has experienced it in order to operate in it, [hence] an alternative kind of behavior is open to him" (79; emphasis is the authors'). Like the invisible man and Janie, the process of ordering his experience affords Bromden a newly opened world of possibilities.

Donald M. Kartiganer, in his recent essay on the divided protagonist, writes of first person narrators, each ostensibly writing of the exploits of another central character, who "are like neuroses loose in time, discontent with their own determining traumas and searching for others through which to remember an identity. But the observers do not so much adopt the actors as recast them into the figures they need them to be" (153). Although in this brief essay his focus is on inactive narrators who chronicle the exploits of active, and quite essentially alien, characters (in such works as Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling, Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, Conrad's Heart of Darkness, and Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!), Kartiganer's observation that these storytellers write and in the process read the exploits of their observed characters seems particularly applicable to the fiction writing Bromden. The comment that "[r]eading repeats itself forward, as reader and text find themselves and their stories again, in each other, for the first time" (176) applies to this reading of the active McMurphy as a fictional creation of the inactive narrating

Bromden. As Hunt realizes, Bromden's novel

> comes in a form which requires that the events alluded to be ordered with a coherence sufficient to explain or yield their meanings to the narrator himself. Thus the story told is given its structure by the need of the narrator to find the truth in it. (27)

Bromden's reading of his story is equally important to the writing of it. "An essential part of the writing process" write Britton et al. "is explaining the matter to oneself (28; emphasis is the authors').

Like the invisible man and Janie, Bromden had first to remove himself from the scene in order to comment effectively upon it and upon himself. Hidden for a long time in both the fog and his own complicity, he empowers himself by writing himself to strength and cultural and self-authenticity. Church's comments about the spectator allowing one to see things "in a broader context than the participant can tolerate" appropriately applies to Bromden's narration as it does to the invisible man's. It may also explain somewhat how Bromden overcomes some of the pain of his storytelling. Bromden's method is different, though, in that his writing is fictitious. A hallucinating patient in a psychiatric hospital, Bromden's journey to wholeness follows an unusual path. D. W. Harding distinguishes between those who are able to move easily from reality to fantasy and back again and those who are unable to see such a division clearly. Harding says that we may allow our fantasies

> to develop very great vividness although we still

> remain only onlookers, never letting our real situation be far beyond the margins of attention and always being able at the least necessity to switch back to where we really are; or they may reach the extreme vividness, obliterating everything else, that the dream possesses, and then, whether as daydreamers or psychotics, we have abandoned the role of onlooker and given ourselves up to delusional and perhaps hallucinated participation. ("Psychological Processes" 137)

The writing process helps bring Bromden out of his delusional participation as he embraces the spectator role and in turn develops a more healthful participation. Once he unleashes the "floodwaters" of the truth that didn't happen, he affords himself the opportunity of utilizing language and the craft of storytelling as a therapeutic process. He takes possession of his life as he brings order to the chaos around him.

Thus far, we have seen three narrators attain self- and cultural identity through the act and process of writing their stories. Doubly oppressed for her sex and her race, Janie discovers her self as "her soul crawled out from its hiding place" and she assumes her rightful place in the community as she attained a personal voice. The invisible man and Chief Bromden discover first the racial roots of their invisibility, their complicity in the suppression of their voices and identities, and by the end of each story--one an autobiographical account, the other a fictional rendering of the "truth"--are ready, it seems, to emerge from their holes. All three then, in simple terms, by assuming authorship, also assume authority, over their

selves and their lives.

In the next chapter, we will observe Leslie Marmon Silko's character, Tayo. Like each of these characters, his racial identity has led to his alienation. Bromden and Tayo share a variety of similarities, most noticeable being their half-Indian blood and invisible state. But unlike the other narrator/characters, Tayo's story is told by a third person narrator, not Tayo himself. His path to authority and authenticity does not include authorship. However, within the framework of the third person narrative, Tayo, upon completing his ceremony, must tell the story of it to the elders of his tribe. Only then can he complete the process of his own healing and attain wholeness once again. His storytelling connects him with the orality of his Indian culture and, like the writings of Janie, the invisible man, and Bromden, allows him to give shape to his form as he superimposes order on a chaotic and alien world.

NOTES

[1] A sampling of the critics reveals a number of these striking appraisals of McMurphy. Tony Tanner suggests that McMurphy is both an authentic rebel hero and a "zombie" who is compelled to action by the fantasies of the other patients (374-75). Leslie A. Fiedler proposes a mythic reading of Cuckoo's Nest, portraying the novel as "the old, old fable of the White outcast and the noble Red Man joined together against home and mother, against the female world of civilization" in a new setting of a madhouse "located in the American West" (177). According to John Wilson Foster, McMurphy is transformed from hustler to "a true rebel, someone who implicitly and totally rejects the whole thrust

of the society that martyrs him" (116). In his discussion of McMurphy and Heller's Yossarian as politicians, Jerome Klinkowitz characterizes McMurphy as "the first fictional hero to practice the key strategy of sixties leadership: raising the consciousness of the people" (23; emphasis is the author's) and as a "larger than life" hero (25).

For William C. Baurecht, "[t]he tale is a resurrection myth" which leaves "St. Bromden" to take on the role of "a teacher of the gospel" (283), while James F. Knapp bluntly says that McMurphy "quite simply learns to be Christ" (409) and Bruce E. Wallis notes McMurphy's "acceptance of the inevitability and the necessity of his own crucifixion" (54). John Wilson Foster also discusses the Christ imagery, finding McMurphy a parody of Christ (124-26), and Richard B. Hauck sees McMurphy as a "comic Christ" (501-2). Stephen L. Tanner, "Salvation through Laughter," calls McMurphy a savior who brings salvation by teaching the other patients to laugh (128), and Nicolaus Mills similarly discusses McMurphy's model of laughter (82-90). Raymond M. Olderman identifies the waste land imagery of mechanization and sterility in the novel and concludes that McMurphy is the Grail Knight who cures the Fisher King by restoring his manhood (35-51), while Carol Pearson argues against Olderman's viewpoint, seeing the work as a romantic myth in which McMurphy is the Fool to Ratched's role as the Old King and Bromden eventually emerges as the Hero (91-98).

Terry G. Sherwood complains about the comic book portrayal of the book's hero (as well as other characters), as "[w]e are left with a somewhat sentimentalized over-simplification of moral problems" (395). Critical of the novel's demeaning portrayal of women, Leslie Horst condemns Cuckoo's Nest for justifying hatred toward women (17). Similarly faulting Kesey for a book "written from the point of view that man's problems are caused by woman who refuses to allow him to play the domineering role which nature intended him to play" (224), Robert Forrey claims that Kesey's novel portrays the "arrogantly masculine" traits "of drinking, whoring, hunting, and gambling" as idealized virtues (223). In part a response to Terence Martin, another critic who views McMurphy as growing into a hero, Forrey's essay is understandable in light of Martin's own sexist (and rather gleeful) characterization of McMurphy as "the advocate of our manhood" (54). Kingsley Widmer acknowledges the novel's "obsessional male chauvinism" and raises objections "to the compulsive and arbitrary sexual divisions of evil," but sees McMurphy as a "rebel-saint" in heroic resistance against totalitarian institutional order (130).

[2] Edward Stone 200.

[3] Joseph J. Waldmeir, in Pratt 418.

[4] See Beverly Grunwald 10 for the original context of Kesey's comment.

[5] In a similar vein, Foster admits that "an enduring irony of the novel is that we are forced to rely totally for

our information upon the hallucinations of a patient in a mental hospital" (128), but devotes the bulk of his essay to the demise of McMurphy in his struggle with the forces of the Combine, not to determining the validity and authenticity of Bromden's narration.

[6] Tony Tanner notes that McMurphy's outrage results from his understanding "how Big Nurse has reduced the men to puppets, mechanically obeying her rules" (373).

[7] In his dissertation on Ellison's writings, Hartmut K. Selke also notices this connection between Invisible Man and Cuckoo's Nest, pointing out the explicitness of Harding's statement in contrast with the implicit comments in Ellison's novel. Selke correctly contends that a lobotomy can "be described as a psychological castration" (155).

[8] See also Grunwald 10.

[9] See especially Hunt 27-32 and Herrenkohl 44.

[10] Mills admits that Bromden's "often confusing" narration "represents a breakthrough rather than a breakdown" (83), while Pearson consents that writing the novel serves as the next step for Bromden toward recovery (97).

[11] In a final footnote to his essay on the influence of the comic book on Kesey's novel and his "art," Sherwood takes Fiedler to task for suggesting that McMurphy is attracted to Bromden's madness and concludes that "Fiedler's argument could have been strengthened had he recognized the ambiguity of Bromden's whereabouts at the book's end and asserted that all events in the book are hallucinations" (396; emphasis is the author's). Unfortunately, Sherwood does not bother to follow his own advice.

[12] When restrained and treated with shock in the factory hospital, the invisible man also "fell to plotting ways of short-circuiting the machine" (237).

[13] Stephen L. Tanner, Ken Kesey, notes the foreshadowing found in this section: "The case of Ruckly is presented early to suggest what could happen to McMurphy. . . . And the case of Mr. Taber is referred to several times as a foreshadowing parallel to McMurphy" (34). However, Ruckly, considered a "failure" by the hospital, figures less prominently as a model for McMurphy than the technological "success"--Taber. The presence of Ruckly helps trigger Bromden's memory of the absent Taber which in turn serves as catalyst for Bromden's hopeful fantasy of McMurphy.

[14] Ironically, the film which Kesey refused to see may in part portray a ward which is closer to "reality" in its basis. Seen as it is objectively, and not through the fog of Bromden's necessity, the ward of the film is managed by a toned-down and humanized Ratched, whose misguided understanding of her patients leads to well-intentioned, not premeditated, cruelties. However, the Jack Nicholson/McMurphy of the film version is a more harsh, devilish figure than Bromden created to oppose his imagined evil nurse, instead of the meek Taber figure on whom the McMurphy of the novel was modeled.

[15] The film version further compromises Bromden's vision of Ratched as the mechanical instrument of the Combine in providing her with the rather innocuous first name of Mildred.

[16] Both Invisible Man and One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest hide a story within a story. The invisible man is the protagonist of the narrator's story, while, taken in the larger context, the narrator serves as the protagonist of Ellison's novel. So, too, even though McMurphy functions as the central character of Bromden's written fiction, the protagonist of Kesey's novel is Bromden.

Chapter Four

Tayo's Struggle for the Ending to His Story: "It Never Has Been Easy"

In her first novel, Ceremony, Leslie Marmon Silko introduces another invisible man--her protagonist Tayo--to American literature. Silko tells Tayo's story through a third-person, partially-omniscient narrator who presents events in a complex narrative, bound not by time, but by free association. Usually, the consciousness that influences the direction of the narrative is Tayo's. Occasionally, the narration reflects the thoughts of other characters, but Tayo's perspective predominates through the bulk of the novel. Events trigger memories, images elicit remembered images, and dreams move into his waking state. Although more complex than Kesey's book, Silko's similarly mixes times in her depiction of Tayo's confused and fragmentary consciousness. Charles R. Larson characterizes this narrative structure as "elliptical, developed through flashbacks and spatial juxtapositions, abrupt changes in time and point of view" (150). In addition, Silko's narrative is interspersed with fragments of Indian lore, songs, and chants which mirror and foreshadow events and images as they occur in the course of the narrative.

The present time of the story concerns Tayo, who, like Bromden, is half white and half American Indian,[1] a veteran of World War II who, upon his return to the States, is placed in the psychiatric ward of a Veterans Hospital. Here he realizes, in hindsight, that he has been hollow, invisible, and unable to speak for himself. Hollowness is a familiar feeling to Tayo. He experienced it when he broke his promise to his Uncle Josiah to help with the newly purchased Mexian cattle by allowing Rocky to persuade him to enlist in the Army with him. And that sensation triggered the memory of his feelings at the death of his mother.

> He remembered it from the nights after they had buried his mother, when he stuffed the bed covers around his stomach and close to his heart, hugging the blankets into the empty space of loss, regret for things which could not be changed. (73)

Unable now to alter recent occurrences, Tayo finds himself in a setting similar to that found in the invisible man's factory hospital; he is surrounded by whiteness. The reason for his invisibility, as Tayo sees it, is something he is unaware of until he leaves the hospital.

> For a long time he had been white smoke. He did not realize that until he left the hospital, because white smoke had no consciousness of itself. It faded into the white world of their bed sheets and wall; it was sucked away by the words of doctors who tried to talk to the invisible scattered smoke. . . . They saw his outline but they did not realize it was hollow inside. . . . He inhabited a gray winter fog on a distant elk mountain where hunters are lost indefinitely and their own bones mark the boundaries. (14-15)

A more recent hollowness has affected Tayo, thereby increasing his feeling of emptiness. This stems from the

death of his cousin Rocky--a casualty of war--and a hollow noise, not actually heard by Tayo but imagined--the sound of a rifle butt jabbed into the skull of the either dead or nearly dead Rocky by a Japanese soldier.

> Tayo never heard the sound, because he was screaming. Later on, he regretted that he had not listened, because it became an uncertainty, loose inside his head, wandering into his imagination, so that any hollow crushing sound he heard--children smashing gourds along the irrigation ditch or a tire truck running over a piece of dry wood--any of these sounds took him back to that moment. Screaming, with mud in his mouth and in his eyes, screaming until the others dragged him away before the Japs killed him too. (44)

He had promised Rocky's mother, Auntie, to see to it that Rocky returned safely from the war (73). He promptly made this promise to Auntie after breaking his vow to Uncle Josiah to stay home and help tend the cattle. While Tayo and Rocky were overseas, Josiah, searching for the cattle which had wandered off, was thrown from his horse and died. Tayo's sorrow over the deaths of these two people to whom he felt closest is compounded by his guilt for not keeping either of his two promises. With Rocky's death, Tayo loses his will to move forward without Rocky: "He had never planned to go any farther than Rocky went" and was willing to die in that instant (44). In fact, the hollow, invisible, fogged-in Tayo seems to have done just that; he remains determined to be dead, to move ahead no further now that Rocky has died.

In his invisibility, Tayo feels safe from painful memories of his lost loved ones and his failures. However,

Tayo's protective fog leaves him, like Bromden, feeling "awfully alone." A persistent, questioning doctor eventually manages to pull him from the fog. In a telling exchange with the doctor, Tayo hears a voice speak to the doctor about himself, a voice he fails to recognize as his own.

> The sun was dissolving the fog, and one day Tayo heard a voice answer the doctor. The voice was saying, "He can't talk to you. He is invisible. His words are formed with an invisible tongue, they have no sound."
>
> He reached into his mouth and felt his own tongue; it was dry and dead, the carcass of a tiny rodent.
>
> "It is easy to remain invisible here, isn't it, Tayo?"
>
> "It was until you came. It was all white, all the color of the smoke, the fog.
>
> "I am sending you home, Tayo. . . ."
>
> "He can't go. He cries all the time. Sometimes he vomits when he cries."
>
> "Why does he cry, Tayo?"
>
> "He cries because they are dead and everything is dying." (15-16)

Tayo does not play the deaf-mute game that Bromden does, yet he, too, experiences a brief loss of voice in that he seems dispossessed of his own. Although he speaks to the doctor, Tayo hears his voice as someone else's.

Discharged from the hospital, Tayo discovers that "his body had density again and the world was visible and he realized why he was there [outside the train station in Los Angeles, or perhaps just alive] and he remembered Rocky and he started to cry" (15). The fog and his invisibility allowed him, as white smoke, to protect himself from the painful memories of Rocky's death. His lack of a tangible shape and an audible voice have afforded him a certain

protective anonymity. But, suddenly, on the streets of Los Angeles, he rediscovers his name.

> There was a cardboard name tag on the handle of the suitcase he carried; he could feel it with the tips of his fingers. His name was on the tag and his serial number too. It had been a long time since he had thought about having a name. (16)

An invisible being has no need of a voice or a name; in order to re-enter the visible world he will need both. But, in a weakened state, he fears that the hollow, invisible feeling may return.

> [H]e was sweating, and sounds were becoming outlines again, vague and hollow in his ears, and he knew he was going to become invisible right there. It was too late to ask for help, and he waited to die the way smoke dies, drifting away in currents of air, twisting in thin swirls, fading until it exists no more. (16-17)

In actuality, Tayo has fainted on the street. As happened to the invisible man when he lay on the street after his release from the hospital, passers-by come to Tayo's aid. When he hears Japanese voices, he thinks for a moment he is back in the jungles again. In spite of his fear of the voices which haunt him, he wrestles his way out of the fog.

> He fought to come to the surface, and he expected a rifle barrel to be shoved into his face when he opened his eyes. It was all worse than he had ever dreamed: to have drifted all those months in white smoke, only to wake up again in the prison camp. But he did not want to be invisible when he died, so he pulled himself loose, one last time. (17)

Like Bromden's willful struggle to escape the EST fog that one last time, Tayo's determination to at least die as a visible being brings him back to the real world of the Los Angeles train depot. The voices he had heard are explained

when he is told that Japanese-Americans are no longer kept in interment camps and live in the city once again. After all, it's been six years since the war ended.

One might see Tayo as the just escaped (or released) Bromden or as the invisible man newly issued from his hole beneath the city; however, Tayo has not as yet had a story to tell, at least not one of healing. Although he wills himself to visibility, he has not yet given substance to his form as both the invisible man and Bromden had through their writing of their tales. Tayo's therapeutic tale is only beginning.

Having returned to the Laguna Reservation in New Mexico in a deep depression, Tayo suffers sleepless "humid dreams of black night" (5) and hears voices:

> Sometimes the Japanese voices came first, angry and loud . . . and then he could hear the shift in his dreaming . . . and the voices would become Laguna voices, and he could hear Uncle Josiah calling to him, Josiah bringing him the fever medicine when he had been sick a long time ago. But before Josiah could come, the fever voices would drift and whirl and emerge again--Japanese soldiers shouting orders to him, suffocating damp voices that drifted out in the jungle steam, and he heard the women's voices then; they faded in and out until he was frantic because he thought the Laguna words were his mother's, but when he was about to make out the meaning of the words, the voice suddenly broke into a language he could not understand; and it was then that all the voices were drowned by the music--loud, loud music from a big juke box, its flashing red and blue lights pulling the darkness closer. (6)

Unable to sleep, Tayo "could get no rest as long as the memories were tangled with the present" (6). Tayo's "ceremony" will entail untangling the memories, sensations,

and images of the past from the present.

> He could feel it inside his skull--the tension of little threads being pulled and how it was with tangled things, things tied together, and as he tried to pull them apart and rewind them into their places, they snagged and tangled even more. (7)

In order to cure himself of his confusion and despair--what he believes is his deserved madness--he must find the appropriate places for these tangled threads. The reader, too, must first work through the tangled strands of time in order to understand the novel and its complex narrative structure.

By following one of the strands back to its source, the reader learns that Tayo was an unwanted, abandoned child. The bastard offspring of a Pueblo Indian prostitute who abandoned him to her unsympathetic sister, Tayo lives with a constant sense of estrangement. His half-Indian, half-white heritage as well as his illegitimacy make him a continuing embarrassment to Auntie with whom Tayo comes to a tacit understanding concerning his place within this foster, although non-fostering, family. Auntie's sincere affection goes to her son, Rocky, alone; he is her hope for success in the white world. Tayo is to be kept at a distance, a perpetual outsider, never expected to quite measure up to Rocky.

In the presence of other members of the family, "the agreement was suspended, and she [Auntie] pretended to treat him the same as she treated Rocky, but they both knew it was only temporary" (67). Alone with the two boys, "she kept

Rocky close to her" and would give Rocky small playthings:

> She was careful that Rocky did not share these things with Tayo, but that they kept a distance between themselves and him. But she would not let Tayo go outside or play in another room alone. She wanted him close enough to feel excluded, to be aware of the distance between them. (67)

Auntie attempts to explain "the distance she kept between him and herself" (69) by telling Tayo, when he is a mere child, a scandalous story about his mother, Laura. Auntie once saw Tayo's mother walking down the trail toward home just before dawn "'completely naked except for her high-heel shoes'" (70). Auntie "swallowed hard" before beginning the story "to clear the pain from her throat, and his own throat hurt too, because without him there would have not been so much shame and disgrace for the family" (70). All through Tayo's childhood he is made painfully aware that Auntie considers him the primary source of her shame and a burdensome outcast to the family. Auntie had furthered Tayo's sense of abandonment and estrangement by taking from him his only photograph of his mother.

The source of Auntie's pride and hope is her son Rocky. The star high school football athlete, Rocky is expected to attend college and continue as an outstanding athlete. Rocky "understood what he had to do to win in the white outside world" (51) and begins to reject the Indian ways in deference to the desires of his white teachers and coach: "They told him, 'Nothing can stop you now except one thing: don't let the people at home hold you back'" (51). Auntie accepts this change:

> Auntie never scolded him. . . . She wanted him to be a success. She could see what white people wanted in an Indian, and she believed this way was his only chance. She saw it as her only chance too, after all the village gossip about her family. When Rocky was a success, no one would dare to say anything against them any more. (51)

Auntie hopes that Rocky's expected triumph in the white world will expiate her shame. However, Rocky's death means that Auntie will never realize her dreams of Rocky's anticipated achievement, and his death has even greater impact on Tayo, considering Rocky's privileged status in Auntie's eyes as a full blood Pueblo Indian.

Tayo is cognizant that his white blood makes him different from others on the Pueblo, whether demonstrated in his treatment by his Indian peers such as Emo or the way white men look at him, knowing he is the bastard of one of their fellows:

> Emo had hated him since the time they had been in grade school together, and the only reason for this hate what that Tayo was part white. . . . Since he could remember, he had known Auntie's shame for what his mother had done, and Auntie's shame for him. He remembered how the white men who were building the new highway through the Laguna had pointed at him. They had elbowed each other and winked. (57)

An outsider in his home and on the Reservation and unwanted in the white world (except in time of war), Tayo finds himself without a home or an identity in either culture.

In light of the guilt and isolation Tayo feels as a result of Auntie's cold rejection of him on account of his half-Indian, half-white heritage, Tayo's failure to keep his promise to Josiah of helping with the cattle seems

understandable. Rocky enlists because he realizes that the Army during war time offers the nearest equivalent of equality to an Indian; the Army recruiter tells the boys, "'Anyone can fight for America, . . . even you boys'" (64) The fact that Rocky told the recruiter that Tayo was his brother, instead of his cousin, helped Rocky persuade Tayo to join.

Tayo had never called him "brother" before; "Auntie had always been careful Rocky didn't call Tayo 'brother,' and when other people mistakenly called them brothers she was quick to correct the error" (65). Rocky's use of the word creates a rarely felt sense of kinship and belonging in Tayo, making him "light on his feet, happy that he would be with Rocky, traveling the world in the Army, together, as brothers" (72). But the elation doesn't last long, when, upon returning home from the recruiter, Tayo remembers that Rocky's legitimacy allows him certain privileges which Tayo's illegitimacy does not: "The understanding had always been that Rocky [not Tayo] would be the one to leave home, go to college or join the Army" (72). Josiah, however, doesn't seem to mind the broken promise and even intercedes with Auntie on Tayo's behalf in suggesting that she permit him to go. Unfortunately, Tayo's hastily made promise to Auntie that he will look after Rocky and bring him home safely from the war is another he is unable to keep.

While fighting in the Pacific, Tayo has other experiences which render his despair complete. Before

Rocky's death, Tayo was among those soldiers ordered to execute, by firing squad, a group of Japanese soldiers. Tayo was unable to pull the trigger, but as the Japanese soldiers fall, he sees Josiah among the victims. "[H]e watched his uncle fall, and he knew it was Josiah; and even after Rocky started shaking him by the shoulders and telling him to stop crying, it was still Josiah lying there" (8). Even after they take him to the body, roll it over so Tayo can see the hard evidence before him--the Japanese uniform, the unmistakable features so unlike Josiah's--"Tayo started screaming because it wasn't a Jap, it was Josiah, eyes shrinking back into the skull and all their shining black light glazed over by death" (8). The sergeant and the medic determine that Tayo suffers from battle fatigue and malarial fever, and Rocky continues to press his logic on Tayo, reiterating the facts that Josiah is miles away while they are in the jungle doing what they are supposed to do. Nevertheless, although "he could hear Rocky's words, and he could follow the logic of what Rocky said, . . . he could not feel anything except a swelling in his belly" (9).

When Tayo returns home, he discovers that Uncle Josiah has died while searching for the Mexican cattle, which are still lost. It's never made quite clear in the text whether or not Tayo's vision of Josiah coincided with Josiah's death. However, the close bond Tayo shared with Josiah would seem to indicate the possibility that Tayo had intuited Josiah's death. Regardless, Tayo suffers enormous

despair at the loss of Josiah and Rocky.

In his weakened state, Tayo frequently feels helpless in the face of the forces at work against him. In addition to his feeling of hollowness, he has grown "tired of fighting off the dreams and the voices; . . . tired of guarding himself against places and things which evoked the memories" (26). Josiah had once said "that only humans had to endure anything, because only humans resisted what they saw outside themselves," while animals "did not resist. But . . . became part of the wind" (27). He wishes Josiah were with him, if only just long enough to tell him how he felt, "how he'd almost been convinced he was brittle red clay, slipping away with the wind, a little more each day" (27). Unable to become the wind and unable, he thinks, to endure, he comes to the simple conclusion that "[i]t took a great deal of energy to be a human being" (25). Indeed, this image of the red clay eroding by the force of the wind may be taken as a metaphor for the plight of the Laguna people. Their race and their culture, too, are slowly slipping away with time. The loss of story--the oral tradition of passing myths and legends (and all their attendant truths) from generation to generation--makes it more and more difficult to be human beings.

Silko's novel portrays storytelling not only as a means of organizing experience--as Britton indicates is the function of language--but as a means of survival as well. As she has written,

> This novel is essentially about the powers inherent in the process of storytelling. . . . The chanting or telling of ancient stories to effect certain cures or protect from illness and harm have always been part of the Pueblo's curing ceremonies. I feel the power that the stories still have to bring us together, especially when there is loss and grief. My book tells the story of an Indian family, but it is also involved with the search for a ceremony to deal with despair, the most virulent of all diseases--the despair which accounts for the suicide, alcoholism, and the violence which occur in so many Indian communities today. (qtd. in Seyersted, Leslie Marmon Silko 26)[2]

Interspersed amidst the already complex narrative of Tayo's story are pieces of Indian lore, of oral tradition, which express the power and importance of storytelling in peoples' lives. As Silko has said, "the breaks [in the novel] would be the parts that ideally you would hear rather than read" ("A Leslie Marmon Silko Interview" 98). The second of the three "breaks" with which the novel begins characterizes stories as means of endurance, not "just entertainment":

> They are all we have, you see,
> all we have to fight off
> illness and death.
>
> You don't have anything
> if you don't have the stories (2).

Without stories, the people "would be defenseless"; therefore, their enemies "try to destroy the stories" (2).

Tayo understands the power of stories. During the attempt to carry the wounded Rocky on a makeshift blanket stretcher to the Japanese prison camp, Tayo used the storyteller's art to keep them moving ahead.

> He made a story for all of them, a story to give them strength. The words of the story poured out of his mouth as if they had substance, pebbles and

> stone extending to hold the corporal [who held the other end of the blanket] up, to keep his knees from buckling, to keep his hands from letting go of the blanket. (12)

But this power is something Tayo feels he has abused, for as he tried to bolster their strength with the story, so too he cursed the incessant rain which poured upon them.

> He damned the rain until the words were a chant . . . . He wanted the words to make a cloudless blue sky . . . . The words gathered inside him and gave him strength. (12)

Tayo's feelings of illegitimacy as an inhabitant of Auntie's home and the Reservation, his sorrow for the loss of Rocky and Josiah and his conviction that he is responsible for both deaths and the lost cattle are even further compounded by his belief that the six years of drought which have decimated the Laguna Pueblo are also his fault: "Wherever he looked, Tayo could see the consequences of his praying" (14).

Tayo also knows that such a notion of story is unacceptable in the white world which surrounds him. The teachers at the Indian school "taught him not to believe in that kind of 'nonsense'" (19). Rocky in particular was one who shunned the old ways and the stories as unscientific, superstitious nonsense. When Uncle Josiah scoffed at the information he read in a book on cattle and suggested that he and the boys write their own book, Rocky scornfully replied,

> "Those books are written by scientists. They know everything there is to know about beef cattle. That's the trouble with the way people around here have always done things--they never knew what they

were doing." (76)

Rocky believed in "books and scientific knowledge" (76) and was often embarrassed by the nonsensical foolishness of his own people.

However, for others in this family, storytelling makes one strong in the face of adversity. Grandma, for instance, unlike Auntie, doesn't care what others say about her or the family members, because she often knows a "better" story about the person spreading the rumors. "The story was all that counted. If she had a better one about them, then it didn't matter what they said" (89). And when Uncle Josiah discovers Tayo in the kitchen killing flies, proud of his accomplishment because his teacher said that flies "'are bad and carry sickness,'" Josiah reminds him of the old story in which

> "the mother of the people got angry at them for the way they were behaving. . . . The animals disappeared, the plants disappeared, and no rain came for a long time. It was the green-bottle fly who went to her, asking forgiveness for the people. Since that time the people have been grateful for what the fly did for us." (101)

Years later, as Tayo cursed the rain, he also cursed the flies that

> had crawled over [the deceased] Rocky; they had enraged him. He had cursed their sticky feet and wet mouths, and when he could reach them he had smashed them between his hands. (102)

This brief lapse of memory as to the importance of the fly has added, in Tayo's mind, to his culpability for the drought which has stricken the land.

Silko underscores the importance of this story of Fly's

saving the people and the procession of careful steps (ritual and ceremony) which led to the return of the rains, animals, and plants to the land by interspersing the tale in increments throughout Tayo's own process of recovery. Corn Mother, upset that the two attendants to her altar neglect it when they become infatuated with Ck'o'yo magic, takes away the rainclouds (and plants and animals) and says let them live off magic (46-49). The people need to ask Corn Mother for forgiveness and Hummingbird tells them where she has gone--three worlds below where everything is green and growing (53-54). Hummingbird tells them to send a messenger to the fourth world and instructs them to put corn flour and water in a covered jar (71-72). On the fourth day, a green fly comes from the jar, and Fly and Hummingbird travel to the fourth world (82). Once they arrive, Corn Mother stipulates that first old Buzzard must purify the town (105-106), and, when they find Buzzard, he wants tobacco from them--"(You see it wasn't easy)" (113). Fly and Hummingbird return to the people who have no tobacco, then return to the fourth world to inquire of Corn Mother where they can find it, and she, in turn, sends them to Caterpillar (151-52). So they fly to Caterpillar--"(See, these things were complicated. . . .)"--who gives them the tobacco they require (180). Finally, Hummingbird and Fly take the tobacco to old Buzzard--"'We got it but it/sure wasn't very easy'"--who agrees to purify the town. He goes East, South, West, and then North (255-56).

The storm clouds returned
the grass and plants started growing again.
There was food
and the people were happy again.

So she told them
"Stay out of trouble
from now on.

It isn't very easy
to fix up things again." (256)

Again and again, the reader is told that arriving at the end of the story has never been easy to achieve. Tayo's process of recovery, his ceremony, is similarly a complicated affair; it, too, is not easy. There is a comparable magic or witchery at work in the world which places impediments in the way of one's path toward finding the ending of the story. Tayo's weakened state, his hollowness, his sense of estrangement--growing naturally from his abandonment as a child to the alienating environment of this foster family and complicated by his awareness that he is an outsider in the white world as well--all lead him to doubt his ability to complete the ceremony and to disbelieve his importance to his people.

At home again, Tayo is poignantly aware that he, not Rocky, should have died. In fact, he believes that Rocky is still more alive than he:

> It didn't take Tayo long to see the accident of time and space: Rocky was the one who was alive, buying Grandma her heater with the round dial on the front [paid for with Rocky's life insurance]; Rocky was there in the college game scores on the sports page of the Albuquerque Journal. It was him, Tayo, who had died, but somehow there had been a mistake with the corpses, and somehow his was still unburied. (28)

When his family sends him to the Navajo and Mexican medicine man Betonie in Gallup, Tayo believes that his fears of abandonment have finally been realized: "They didn't want him around. They blamed him. And now they had sent him here, and this would be the end of him" (122)

Tayo often wishes he could return to the hospital and his invisibility, thinking that the hospital is the appropriate place for a corpse like himself instead of pretending to be an acceptable substitute for Rocky and Josiah. He tells Betonie,

> "I was invisible. But I wasn't afraid there. I didn't feel things sneaking up behind me. I didn't cry for Rocky or Josiah. There were no voices and no dreams. Maybe I belong back in that place." (123)

Betonie advises him that if he is set on giving up and dying, why not do it the way others of his tribe have:

> "But if you are going to do that, you might as well go down there [into the Indian ghetto in Gallup], with the rest of them, sleeping in the mud, vomiting cheap wine, rolling over women. Die that way and get it over with. . . . In that hospital they don't bury the dead, they keep them in rooms and talk to them." (123)

Tayo is tempted to give up, to surrender to his impotence as an individual struggling against madness and despair. The guilt which torments him stems from his presumed separation from the world that surrounds him. He believes fervently in his responsibility for Josiah's death, who he says "'died because there was no one to help him search for the cattle after they were stolen'" (124). Tayo complains that he didn't do anything, and Betonie tries to

explain that the story as yet remains unfinished: "'You've been doing something all along. All this time, and now you are at an important place in this story'" (124). All Betonie's talk of completing the story and his warning that others "'will try to stop you from completing the ceremony'" (125) enrages Tayo, who counters with "'I don't know anything about ceremonies or these things you talk about. . . . I just need help'" (125). That's the sort of thing the white doctors told him in the hospital--"that he had to think only of himself, and not about others, that he would never get well as long as he used words like 'we' and 'us'" (125). Although he mouths the words in his argument with Betonie, speaking of himself as an individual in need of a cure and disconnected from the world at large, Tayo knows, and realizes he has always known, that "medicine didn't work that way, because the world didn't work that way. His sickness was only part of something larger, and his cure would be found only in something great and inclusive of everything" (125-26). Betonie frightens Tayo with his insistence that Tayo take control of his own process of healing.

Unlike Ku'oosh, the first medicine man Tayo meets with, Betonie's methods and ideas are unorthodox. Betonie's (and Silko's) sense of ceremony is not one of static ritual, but one of continual change. Betonie feels it necessary to distinguish his sense of ceremony from the fixed set of rituals of something like the popular--to Indian and white

alike--Gallup Ceremonial.

> "At one time, the ceremonies as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals." (126)

Betonie realizes that "'things which don't shift and grow are dead things'" (126). In spite of Tayo's desperate clinging to stories and ceremonies remaining as they are and his desire to replace the truths which he <u>feels</u> with the schoolbook and hospital truths he thinks he <u>knows</u>, he understands that story, like ceremony, is ever changing: "Everywhere he looked, he saw a world made of stories, the long ago, time immemorial stories, as old Grandma called them. It was a world alive, always changing and moving" (95).

In speaking of the structure of the narrative and the content of the novel, Larson observes that

> in one sense <u>Ceremony</u> has no conventional beginning and end. It would be possible to begin reading the novel at almost any page and continue from there since the images are circular, related to one another by imaginative association. Like these interwoven images, the subject of <u>Ceremony</u> is the "continuing process," the interconnectedness of everything in our universe and our lives. The form of Silko's novel, then, replicates its meaning. (152)

Although the images are circular and recursive, and Larson is correct in pointing out how the process of the book mirrors the ongoing process of Tayo's ceremony and story, the novel begins, like Tayo's consciousness, as a tangled skein. Until Tayo begins to set the pattern aright, to

restore order to his chaotic world, Tayo (and Silko) will remain unable to bring the story to closure.

Virginia Randall offers a distinction between the "technique of mental fragmentation" used in the beginning of the novel to reflect "the brokenness of Tayo's spirit" and the later "'interweaving' of time past and time present" as Tayo works through his "healing ceremony" (qtd. in "A Discussion of Ceremony" 66). In a similar vein, Robert C. Bell notes that

> [t]he sense of fragmentation yields finally to the force of the connectedness of the past with the present and to the future. We need the narrative digressions and dislocations to see the larger pattern, to understand the story. Indeed they are the story. And they aren't really digressions or dislocations. (55)

Unfortunately, Tayo has for years accepted the schoolbook and white world notions of individualism and cause and effect which merely acknowledges the single skein of the individual. Otherwise, he would not mistake the drought as the effect of his cursing the rains instead of part of a larger process. But his sense of self and conception of the world straddles both the Indian and white cultures. Tayo is torn between the notion that the individual is of primary importance and that he is part of a much larger whole. When Ku'oosh earlier came to see Tayo, he spoke of the fragility of the world:

> The word he chose to express "fragile" was filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with a strength inherent in spider webs woven across paths through sand hills where early in the morning the sun becomes entangled in each filament of web. It took a long time to explain the

> fragility and intricacy because no word exists alone, and the reason for choosing each work had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way. That was the responsibility that went with being human, old Ku'oosh said, the story behind each word must be told so there could be no mistake in the meaning of what had been said; and this demanded great patience and love. (35-36)

This intricate pattern and continuing process is supported by many stories; behind each word lies a story. Tayo lacks the patience to hear "the meaning of what had been said" because he is certain that he is at fault for the disorder in the world.

Tayo had earlier participated in the Scalp Ceremony, a traditional healing ritual for those who have killed their enemies in battle or touched dead bodies, but in this "white people's war" a soldier might not even know whether or not he had taken another man's life. Tayo thinks that Ku'oosh could have no comprehension of the horrible war which he fought:

> In the old way of warfare, you couldn't kill another human being in battle without knowing it, without seeing the result. . . . But the old man would not have believed white warfare--killing across distances without knowing who or how many had died. It was all too alien to comprehend, the mortars and big guns; and even if he could have taken the old man to see the target areas, even if he could have led him through the fallen jungle trees and muddy craters of torn earth to show him the dead, the old man would not have believed anything so monstrous. Ku'oosh would have looked at the dismembered corpses and the atomic heat-flash outlines, where human bodies had evaporated, and the old man would have said something close and terrible had killed these people. Not even oldtime witches killed like that. (36-37)

Although Tayo doubts that he has himself killed anyone, he

believes "he had done things far worse, and the effects were everywhere in the cloudless sky, on the dry brown hills, shrinking skin and hide taught over sharp bone" (36). While Ku'oosh says that Tayo's recovery is important "'[n]ot only for your sake but for this fragile world'" (36), Tayo hears in this talk of fragility an indictment of his own complicity in the drought and deaths of his loved ones.

> The old man only made him certain of something he had feared all along, something in the old stories. It took only one person to tear away the delicate strands of the web, spilling the rays of the sun into the sand, and the fragile world would be injured. Once there had been a man who cursed the rain clouds, a man of monstrous dreams. Tayo screamed, and curled his body against the pain. (39)

The guilt and anguish that wrack Tayo are born of his clinging to his singular, though confused, identity, whereas Betonie and Ku'oosh attempt to get him to see his place within the overall design of things. He perceives the drought as a bad thing, something caused by his weakness and now bringing devastation to the Laguna. "'[D]on't be so quick,'" Betonie warns him, "'to call something good or bad. There are balances and harmonies always shifting, always necessary to maintain. . . . . It is a matter of transitions, you see; the changing, the becoming must be cared for closely'" (130). Instead of accepting the drought as part of a natural cycle, a continuing process, perhaps even a reflection of an imbalance or disharmony, Tayo's sense of himself as an abandoned, unwanted outsider leads him to believe he is a lone instrument rending the fragile

web of the world. And so, when the medicine men suggest that Tayo assist in restoring the balance, Tayo responds as if he has been accused of causing the problem in the first place. At the same time that he throws his hands up in anger at Betonie's suggestion that somehow he can help by completing a ceremony of some sort, he feels that he alone has caused the ruin his people face. Always self-effacing, he denies his place in the pattern but not in its destruction.

Tayo was supposed to help Josiah with the cattle, but he went off to war and now the cattle are lost and Josiah has died. Tayo was supposed to bring Rocky back safely, but Rocky died overseas and Tayo had the audacity to survive and return without enduring physical harm. He cursed the rain (and the flies), and the rain has ceased for six years. The responsibility Tayo has heaped upon his own mind and spirit render him paralyzed and feeling hollow. That's why when they send him to Betonie,

> [h]e wanted to fade until he was as flat as his own hand looked, flat like a drawing in the sand which did not speak or move, waiting for the wind to come swirling along the ground and blow the lines away. (106)

What has horrified Tayo most is his witnessing what Betonie terms "witchery." Tayo is not the only returning Indian for whom the Scalp Ceremony has been ineffectual. Others have seen "the dismembered corpses and the atomic heat-flash outlines, where human bodies had evaporated" (37).

> The Scalp Ceremony lay to rest the Japanese souls in the green humid jungles . . . . But there was something else now, as Betonie said: it was everything they had seen--the cities, the tall buildings, the noise and the lights, the power of their weapons and machines. They were never the same after that: they had seen what the white people had made from the stolen land. (169)

Like Bromden's Combine, the witchery which the novel refers to is a dehumanizing, mechanistic force which has been loosed upon the world. Silko has called the term "a sort of metaphor for the destroyers or the counter force, that force which counters vitality and birth" ("A Conversation with Leslie Marmon Silko" 32). For many of the reservation Indians, the war provided the first opportunity to see what happened to the land that had been stolen from them, and once in their army uniforms they experienced, if only briefly, the respect of the whites. Witchery is that which leads to the separation of the individual from the community and from the world and stands in opposition to the interconnected and interwoven pattern of all life.

In a long story from Betonie--another of Silko's oral breaks in the narrative--Tayo hears how "white people," created by Indians, "are only tools that the witchery manipulates" (132). These white skinned people are brought to life by a story of witchery, a chant which points them toward fearful isolation, destruction, and death:

Then they grow away from the earth
then they grow away from the sun
then they grow away from the plants and animals.
They see no life
When they look
they see only objects.
The world is a dead thing for them

the trees and rivers are not alive
the mountains and stones are not alive.
The deer and bear are objects
They see no life.

They fear
They fear the world.
They destroy what they fear.
They fear themselves. (135;
emphasis is the author's)

Such witchery of disassociation and fear resides in a medicine which treats the effects of what is termed battle fatigue, because "the cause of battle fatigue was a mystery, even to" the army doctors (31), instead of a holistic medicine which takes into account the whole person in relation to the world.[3] The failure of the treatment offered at the hospital and the Scalp Ceremony at home propels the Indians toward another "medicine" and product of witchery, alcohol.

The other surviving veterans who have returned to the reservation spend much of their time in drunken stupors. The Scalp Ceremony is unable to help Emo, Harley, Leroy, and Pinkie because "they had seen what the white people had made from the stolen land" (169).

> Every day they had to look at the land, from horizon to horizon, and everyday the loss was with them; it was the dead unburied, and the mourning of the lost going on forever. So they tried to sink the loss in booze, and silence their grief with war stories about their courage, defending the land they had already lost. (169)

The Indians who roam the riverbed in Gallup "were educated only enough to know they wanted to leave the reservation" (115). They soon discover that there aren't enough jobs and,

even if they do find jobs, are "the first ones to get laid off because white people in Gallup already knew they wouldn't ask any questions or get angry" (115). But these veterans who have returned to the Reservation, after having worn the uniform and fought for the country, experienced a freedom in the white world they will never be able to know again. Per Seyersted observes that "[w]orst off . . . are those who for a time had been . . . integrated into the main society, the veterans who had been praised as patriotic Americans, only to be demoted to their previous status" (Leslie Marmon Silko 26). So they sit in bars, spending their government checks on alcohol in an attempt to retrieve "the good times" (42).

Tayo spends some of his time with these childhood friends of his, but he angers them when he speaks of the reality they all came home to. He tries to get them to admit that the

> "[f]irst time you walked down the street in Gallup or Albuquerque, you knew. . . . The war was over, the uniform was gone. All of a sudden that man at the store waits on you last, makes you wait until all the white people bought what they wanted. And the white lady at the bus depot, she's real careful now not to touch your hand when she counts out your change" (42).

He realizes that

> they blamed themselves for losing the feeling just like they blamed themselves for losing the land the white people took. They never thought to blame white people for any of it. . . . They never saw that it was the white people who gave them that feeling and it was white people who took it away again when the war was over. (43)

Emo and the others try to hold on to their past spent

away from the Reservation by telling stories of the way the uniforms they wore earned them a place in white society. Silko even converts one of Emo's stories of "grabbin' white pussy" into the form of a witch chant:

> I sat down close to the blonde
> and told them my name.
> I used Mattuci's name that night--this Wop
> in our unit.
>
> The fat girl had a car.
> I sat in the middle, grabbing titties
> with both hands
> all the way to Long Beach. (58)

Just as Tayo used the power of the story to keep the stretcher aloft as they carried Rocky through the rain-drenched jungle, Emo tries to retain this lost feeling by manipulating his story into a powerful ceremony of its own.

The response of the others indicate their pleasure, but also some recognition of their loss. The description of Pinkie laughing and "holding his belly" at the end of this story is offered in contrast to the explanation of ceremony with which the novel begins: "And in the belly of this story/the rituals and the ceremony/are still growing" (2). In the case of Emo's story and the laughter with which it is met, the belly is hollow. As in a false pregnancy or a still birth, the belly which bears these stories is devoid of life. Earlier Tayo noticed the hollowness of Harley's laughter: "Somehow Harley didn't seem to feel anything at all, and he masked it with smart talk and laughter" (23). Filling the belly with alcohol creates a false fullness. "Liquor was medicine for the anger that made them hurt, for

the pain of the loss, medicine for tight bellies and choked-up throats" (40). But this medicine provides no cure for these displaced Indians. Like the medicine offered at the Veterans Hospital, alcohol only affords a temporary forgetfulness, not a cure.

When Tayo fights Emo and nearly kills him, he directs his rage toward Emo's tight belly. He watches Emo's "belly quiver" and lunges toward this target with a broken beer bottle. "He should have hated Emo; he should have hated the Jap soldiers who killed Rocky. The space to carry hate was located deep inside, below his lungs and behind his belly; but it was empty" (63). Tayo's hollowness is a space to be filled, not with the false medicine of liquor, but with an understanding of the pattern of interconnectedness which joins all things. The drought and the barrenness of the land stems not from Tayo's curse but from this barrenness of the bellies of Indians and whites alike.

In addition to being a response to Emo's continually voiced hatred of Tayo because he is half white, an important catalyst for Tayo's assault on Emo comes from the memories triggered by the sound made by Emo's Bull Durham sack of souvenir Japanese teeth.[4] When Emo rattles the teeth in the sack they make a hollow sound, like that imagined sound of the rifle crushing Rocky's skull. Tayo "was sweating, trying to fight off the nausea that surged at him whenever he heard the rattle in the little bag" (55). Their continued empty boasting, telling tales of their exploits as

Indians in uniform, increases Tayo's hollowness and rage until it spills out. For a moment he believes that killing Emo would cure him of the voices and images that plague his skull.

Eventually, Tayo comes to realize that this hollowness grows out of a disconnection from others. When he finds the Mexican cattle fenced in on Floyd Lee's land, he hesitates to suppose them stolen because Lee is white. "He had a crazy desire to believe that there had been some mistake, that Floyd Lee had gotten them innocently, maybe buying them from the real thieves" (190-91). Like the invisible man, Tayo believes in the rightness of whiteness, but in this instance he begins to see that "he had learned the lie by heart . . . [that] only brown-skinned people were thieves; white people didn't steal, because they always had the money to buy whatever they wanted" (191). He recognizes that this lie works as much against the whites as it does the Indians, that the lie is the product of witchery:

> If the white people never looked beyond the lie, to see that theirs was a nation built on stolen land, they would never be able to understand how they had been used by the witchery; they would never know that they were still being manipulated by those who knew how to stir the ingredients together: white thievery and injustice boiling up the anger and hatred that would finally destroy the world: the starving against the fat, the colored against the white. The destroyers had only to set it into motion, and sit back to count the casualties. But it was more than a body count; the lies devoured white hearts, and for more than two hundred years white people had worked to fill their emptiness; they tried to glut the hollowness with patriotic wars and with great technology and the wealth it brought. (191)

Living the ceremony of retrieving the lost cattle begins to effect its cure as Tayo's concentration on the task at hand temporary obliterates his memory of "the events of the past days and past years" (192). The cure commences as he realizes that the "cattle wouldn't be lost any more, scattered through his dreams, driven by his hesitation to admit they had been stolen, that the land . . . had been stolen from them. The anticipation of what he might find was strung tight in his belly; suddenly the tension snapped" (192). A peaceful silence fills his belly as Tayo comes to understand his place within a timeless and harmonious present.

> The silence was inside, in his belly; there was no longer any hurry. The ride into the mountain had branched into all directions of time. He knew then why the oldtimers could only speak of yesterday and tomorrow in terms of the present moment: the only certainty; and this present sense of being was qualified with bare hints of yesterday or tomorrow, by saying, "I go up to the mountain yesterday or I go up to the mountain tomorrow." (192)

In spite of this feeling of a cure taking place through the process of retrieving the cattle, Tayo still has his doubts and, after cutting through the fence, thinks perhaps he should repair the wire strands and beat a hasty retreat before he is discovered. But he feels the tension loosen within him as the disordered design of the witchery begins to yield: "It was changing, unraveling like the yarn of a dark heavy blanket wrapped around a corpse, the dusty rotted strands of darkness unwinding, giving way to the air; its smothering pressure was lifting from the bones of his skull"

(198). Even when the two ranch hands come upon him, thrown from his horse and prone on his back, he becomes "aware of the center beneath him. . . . It was pulling him back close to the earth, where the core was cool and silent as mountain stone, and even with the noise and pain in his head he knew how it would be: a returning rather than a separation" (201). This magnetic pull of what we might properly call the belly of earth "felt more familiar to him than any embrace he could remember" (201). For the abandoned, unwanted, unloved Tayo, this warm embrace from mother earth marks an important union.

The pattern of the world begins to emerge in Tayo's mind and understanding. After all, the novel begins with the story of Thought-Woman, also known as the spider, who, with her sisters, created the world. Hence the fragile web which holds all life together. There are even suggestions in the text that T'seh, the woman who helps Tayo in his quest for the cattle and for understanding, may in fact be A'moo'ooh, the She-Elk of the old stories, or perhaps Thought-Woman herself, interceding on Tayo's behalf in order to reestablish the harmonies set awry by the witchery. Although, uncomfortable as I am with the notion of timeless spirits made flesh, I tend to agree with Jarold Ramsey's suspicion that T'seh is actually Betonie's granddaughter (193).

As the pattern becomes increasingly visible and real to Tayo, so too does the presence of those who, as Betonie and

T'seh warned him, seek to destroy him and keep him from finishing his story. He comes to a uranium mine shaft, 300 miles northeast of Trinity Site where the first atomic bomb was detonated and 100 miles southwest of Los Alamos where it was created. The site of this mine shaft is a mountain which, as Seyersted notes, "is sacred to the Pueblo and Navajo people" (Leslie Marmon Silko 11). In this sacred, and now devastated place, Tayo feels connectedness with all who find themselves victim of the horrific witchery which can destroy with such awesome power.

> From the jungles of his dreaming he recognized why the Japanese voices had merged with the Laguna voices, with Josiah's voice and Rocky's voice; the lines of cultures and worlds were drawn in flat dark lines on fine light sand, converging in the middle of witchery's final ceremonial sand painting. From that time on, human beings were one clan again, united by the fate the destroyers planned for all of them, for all living things; united by a circle of death that devoured people in cities twelve thousand miles away, victims who had never known these mesas, who had never seen the delicate colors of the rocks which boiled up their slaughter. (246)

He feels in this place that the ceremony is completed. "He cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together--the old stories, the war stories, their stories--to become the story that was still being told" (246). The reason he has heard all these converging voices and seemed to shift through fragments of experiences and times, was not that he was insane, but that he was perceiving rightly the interconnectedness which others had denied was present in the world. Within the timeless, fragile web of life, threatened by mechanistic

witchery, the face of Josiah is understandably interchangeable with the face of a Japanese soldier. Although there are many miles between these sites of uranium mining and the atomic bomb's initial detonation and the location of the bomb's first use as it was intended, the events themselves are intricately interrelated. "He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distance and time" (246).[5]

In this place where times converge and the pattern seems clear, Tayo comes to understand not merely his singular identity as an "I," but more importantly his place and position in relation to the larger pattern in which he is inextricably interwoven. Tayo had always felt himself to be an outsider--an unwanted spectator--to his family and the Laguna community. The time spent in the Army, away from the Laguna, only reinforced his sense of estrangement, as did his other separations--the time spent in the hospital as white smoke and his "abandonment" into Betonie's care in Gallup. But his living of the story in order to heal himself has required an immersion--a participation begun unwillingly--in his home and culture. His struggle to participate fully in his culture and in society is met with the possibility of a much broader participation. But still he must face his toughest challenge--Emo and the destroyers.

Like Brother Jack and Ras--two other destroyers--Emo and his cronies are set on keeping the witchery of self

destruction and alienation alive in the world:

> [T]he witchery would work so that the people would be fooled into blaming only the whites and not the witchery. It would work to make the people forget the stories of the creation and continuation of the five worlds; the old priests would be afraid too, and cling to ritual without making new ceremonies as they always had before. (249)

These characters, as had Tayo, tend to see things in simplistic terms. Silko has observed that too often people fall "into the habit of talking about black and white and good and bad." The complaint that "[i]t's all Whitey's fault" she terms

> too simplistic, mind-less. In fact Tayo is warned in the novel that <u>they</u> try to encourage people to blame just certain groups, to focus in on just certain people and blame them for everything. Then you cant' see what the counter people or the counter forces are really doing. ("A Conversation with Leslie Marmon Silko" 32).

As was the case in <u>Invisible Man</u> and <u>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</u>, self-loathing and posing one group in opposition to another becomes an effective means of rendering that group impotent. As Kenneth Lincoln suggests, "The Indians' hatred of themselves and their oppressors fuels 'witchery.'. . . It generates from an ominous sense of <u>un</u>reality and cultural dissociation that divides oppressed peoples among themselves" (249). This belief in simplistic oppositions of good or bad increases the isolation a person experiences. It happened this way to the invisible man and to Bromden. Silko has elsewhere addressed this self-inflicted reinforcement of one's isolation, noting

> it's especially easy to blame oneself and say, "It's only me, this evil, this bad is within me."

> That's too easy, to simple. And so is the opposite, which is just to blame others--to say, "It's white people," or, "It's those people, it's not me," and thereby withdraw in the same way. Either way isolates us from other human beings. ("A Conversation with Leslie Marmon Silko 32)

At this point in the novel, Tayo has begun to move away from this simple-minded view of the world and his self, but Emo and the other, trapped in the ceremony of the witchery, wear their hatred of the whites and themselves like they once wore their military uniforms--as a false method of feeling more human. Their own self-loathing carried to a violent extreme, Emo, Pinkie, and Leroy torture and eventually kill Harley--their "friend"--in an attempt to get Tayo to surrender to them. The reader expects Tayo to jump out of the hills and assault these three paradoxically self- and white-hating Indians, finally putting an end to their story, but Tayo remains hidden in the darkness. Had he moved into their story, his own would have remained unfinished.

> It had been a close call. The witchery had almost ended the story according to its plan; Tayo had almost jammed the screwdriver into Emo's skull the way the witchery had wanted. . . . Their deadly ritual for the autumn solstice would have been completed by him. He would have been another victim, a drunk Indian war veteran settling an old feud; and the Army doctors would say that the indications of this end had been there all along . . . . The white people would shake their heads, more proud than sad that it took a white man to survive in their world and that these Indians couldn't seem to make it. At home the people would blame liquor, the Army, and the war, but the blame on the whites would never match the vehemence the people would keep in their own bellies, reserving the greatest bitterness and blame for themselves, for one of themselves they could not save. (253)

This choice Tayo has to make--intercede on Harley's behalf by killing Emo and ending the story, or hold himself back from entering the witchery and seeing his friend die--is a difficult one; "it has never been easy" (254). Had he concluded their story, he would have just been another drunken Indian, unable to cope in the world, reinforcing what the witchery has caused many to believe about Indians and half-breeds. Carol Mitchell notes the importance of Tayo's being "able to watch the witches' ritual without being drawn into it and destroyed" (30). And the location for this final witnessing of the witchery occurs, St. Andrews notes, "in a highly symbolic place: where the ancient creation myths . . . intersect with the nuclear age" (92).

On two earlier occasions, prior to this final tempting of Tayo by the destroyers to abandon his ceremony for their own, Grandma and Robert had each told Tayo that Ku'oosh and the other elders of the tribe had been expecting Tayo to have something to tell them. Now that the ceremony is complete--the cattle, the pattern, the rains are all restored, and the witchery has returned to its belly--Tayo travels to the kiva to bring his ceremony to closure by telling the story of it to these tribal elders.

> It took a long time to tell them the story; they stopped him frequently with questions about the location and the time of day; they asked about the direction she [T'seh or A'moo'ooh] had come from and the color of her eyes. (257)

The elders are pleased with this completion of the ceremony

which is really a continuation of a story that has long been told and retold. Like the tale of Corn Mother, it continues to live as long as it is shaped anew to fit a changing world. As old Grandma says when Auntie tells them the details of Pinkie's death and Emo's escape to California, "'I guess I must be getting old . . . because these goings-on around Laguna don't get me excited any more. . . . It seems like I already heard these stories before . . . only thing is, the names sound different'" (260)

Ultimately, Tayo's process focuses much attention on the retrieval of the lost or stolen cattle. Josiah had purchased them for their ability to survive the harsh Laguna droughts and to eat dried up thistle and cactus instead of soft grasses. He told Tayo, "See, I'm not going to make the mistake other guys made, buying those Hereford, white-face cattle" (75). Although sired by a Hereford, the Mexican strain makes them hardy and strong and able to adapt to extraordinary conditions. The narrator suggests that the same is true of the novel's human half-breeds: Tayo, Betonie, and T'seh.[6]

Josiah spoke of the cattle and their attachment to the land in much that same way that others might speak of the Indian people or people of all races:

> "Cattle are like any living thing. If you separate them from the land for too long, keep them in barns and corrals, they lose something. Their stomachs get to where they can only eat rolled oats and dry alfalfa. When you turn them loose again, they go running all over. They are scared because the land is unfamiliar, and they are lost. They don't stop being scared either,

> even when they look quiet and they quit running. Scared off animals die off easily." (74)

The fate of these displaced cattle is similar to the Indians displaced by the white world or any racial, ethnic, religious, or social group estranged into isolation and disconnection. They've lost that association with the land; turned loose (as soldiers in a war perhaps) they go running in all directions; they tend to give up and die quite easily. The Mexican cattle, however, are willful. They always move toward the south, toward their original home. That's why Tayo is surprised to find them north of the Laguna (forgetting that stolen cattle can be taken anywhere) and why they are easy to retrieve; he merely cuts a hole in the south fence and waits for their nature to do the rest.

Once the cattle are back in Tayo's custody, and Tayo begins himself to settle down into a sense of belonging his ceremony begins to create for him, they stop moving south. "They had finally worked the direction out of their systems and had settled into the place" (225). This satisfaction with place on the part of the cattle mirrors Tayo's new connection with his land and his people. Tayo has felt the embrace of the earth and the touch of T'seh. Even Auntie begins to treat him differently. Where previously she seemed to take all her trials as embarrassments, now she finds that she can wear them as emblems as her fortitude and pride. "[N]ow the women at Church came to her privately . . . to ask how she had managed all those years to face the troubles . . . . 'I tell them, "It isn't easy. It has never

been easy," I say'" (259).

As Silko has said, Tayo not only works through his story to become an integrated being and a part of his family and community but realizes and remembers his intimate connection with humanity: "[O]nce he is reminded of this and can find it again within himself, then the other things he does are acts which reiterate this closeness" (Two Interviews with Leslie Marmon Silko" 32). No longer abandoned and alone, Tayo will always have his story and the stories of the Laguna Pueblo which "help the individual feel constantly a part of the group" (32).

Janie, the invisible man, and Chief Bromden arrived at their sense of wholeness, cultural place, and possibilities through the act of writing. For Janie and the invisible man, their accounts are autobiographical in nature; for Bromden, the resulting narrative takes the form of a fiction grounded in experience, but altered to effect a process of healing. Tayo, on the other hand, does not write his story, but works his own therapeutic healing and returns to a sense of wholeness, first by living through his own ceremony/story, and finally reiterating the process by telling the story to the tribal elders in a final ritual. Silko's narrative stresses the potency of the oral tradition of Native American peoples.

Spoken language figures prominently in all four of these works. Janie, kept silent and prohibited from

participating in the talk of the community, grows into autonomy by first joining in the storytelling in Belle Glade. Without that initial experimentation with the power of language, it's doubtful she could ever have achieved the distance necessary to write her narrative and authentically record the voices of her community. Their Eyes Were Watching God is in part an anthropological showcase of oral folktales.

One of the invisible man's primary motivations in his often blind and bumbling quest for selfhood is his desire to be a speech-maker. Often within a speech, the language exerts its own power over him. He too is denied an oral voice of his own, often censored and forced to speak in a language which is acceptable to the various puppeteers who manipulate his strings. Later, in his hole beneath the city, he fashions a narrative of his exploits--the many ways in which others kept him running. Through his writing process, invisible to the reader, the invisible man discovers the self-creating power of written language as well.

Bromden determines early on in his childhood that what he says is rarely, if ever, heeded. Even when he speaks the language he believes will make him understood--his very best schoolbook English--he is ignored. Determined to use his invisibility as a defensive weapon, Bromden decides to cease the pretense of even having a voice by remaining mute. Unaware that this offers substantial "proof" of his

incapacity to succeed in society, he even accepts incarceration for a deficiency which he wore only as a garment. Part of his therapeutic process of writing himself to wholeness entails first creating an environment for the fictionalized character of himself (Broom) which necessitates his breaking his vow of silence and orally participating in the struggle against the Combine.

Tayo similarly has accepted the value of schoolbook language, believing English a more potent tool than his ancestral language. Prior to Ku'oosh speaking the word for "fragile" with its many attendant "intricacies of a continuing process"--a clear demonstration of Ku'oosh's facility with language and meaning--Tayo is at first ashamed to hear Ku'oosh speak: "His language was childish, interspersed with English words, and he could feel shame tightening in his throat" (34). In addition, Tayo scoffs at the old stories, accepting, at least logically, his teachers' preference for science over superstitious stories and ceremonies. However, Tayo also recognizes that the English language has created a wedge between the Indian people and their heritage. As the narrator puts it, once more in terms of entanglement, "the feelings where twisted, tangled roots, and all the names for the source of this growth were buried under English words, out of reach. And there would be no peace until the entanglement had been unwound to the source" (69).

Tayo's ceremony/story is in itself a process of

becoming, a living of the story. As Silko has stated,

> When I say 'storytelling,' I don't just mean sitting down and telling a once-upon-a-time kind of story. I mean a whole way of seeing yourself, the people around you, your life, the place of your life in the bigger context, not just in terms of nature and location, but in terms of what has gone on before, what's happened to other people. ("A Leslie Marmon Silko Interview with Kim Barnes" 86)

Moreover, the closure comes in telling the tale to the elders of the tribe. In this regard, Tayo returns the story to his people, and though this, like all the others, is a story heard before, it has undergone many changes.[7]

It's worth noting that Silko, in presenting the spoken stories and chants which she interweaves into the fabric of her narrative, draws not on the written versions--recorded by the likes of Hurston's anthropology teacher and mentor Franz Boas and Elsie Clews Parsons--but rather on the oral tales she learned as a child and adult.[8] Interestingly, Silko's narrator, in reconstructing Tayo's struggle for the ending to his story, creates a written artifact of the living ceremony and forces the reader to participate in it as well.[9] Kenneth Lincoln terms the novel "a word ceremony" (237). In effect, Tayo's story ends, but the reader's continues. The reader is called upon to fathom the interconnections demonstrated in the world, so that the ending of the novel becomes a beginning. "The last page of the novel," writes James Ruppert, "is not the finish of the fused story/reality. The ceremony continues and it is now the responsibility of the reader to act" (85).

As readers of Ceremony, we have a tendency to single out parts and measure their relationship to each other, to look for major threads to separate and cut away from the minor ones that snag them in order to talk about and analyze the book. Like Tayo in recalling the tangled threads "from old Grandma's wicker sewing basket when he was a child," the reader initially experiences these interwoven memories and images as fragmented and confusing and is tempted to try "to pull them apart and rewind them into their places" but this only makes them snag and tangle "even more" (7). As Marion W. Copeland says of Tayo's attempts to separate the strands of his tangled memories in order to "unknot them and rewind them on the appropriate spools. Such would be the neat linear solution of the white psychiatrists at the hospital" (160-61).

This is one of the reasons that Ceremony is difficult to teach or to analyze. It's much greater that the mere sum of its parts. The "breaks" in the novel aren't ancillary fragments that can be discarded or ignored. Just as the past is the present, Tayo's story and the story of Corn Mother and Hummingbird and all of the others are intricately interconnected. The web or fabric is all of one piece. If you dismantle or unweave it, if you pull out one single strand or thread, the entire unit will unravel and collapse. In the end, Ceremony is a ceremony not to be tampered with. Each telling or rereading will keep it new and alive and will reintroduce it to the present. But it can't be broken

into components without suffering some intrinsic loss. "Denying the world of neat plots," asserts Copeland, "defines the novel; Ceremony, as Silko's reader begins to sense, is not a novel at all. It is a healing process" (161). Silko's interweaving of the oral tradition of the Indian culture with the written tradition of the contemporary novelist, compels the reader to "hear" the lyricism of both forms--oral and written, poetry and prose.

Each of these novels offers the promise of possibilities and a sense of interconnectedness, not only for the narrators and/or characters, but for their readers as well. Each work follows a process that continues, if the reader so wishes, beyond the end of the final printed page. Janie offers the reader the concluding notion that "Love is lak de sea. It's a movin' thing, but still and all, it takes its shape from de shore it meets, and it's different with every shore" (284). She leaves it to the readers to find their own horizons. The invisible man supposes, in the last analysis, that "on the lower frequencies, I speak for you" (568), suggesting that his readers, too, share in his voiceless, formless predicament. Silko's narrator, the characters, and the spoken stories tell the reader that posing oneself as a visible being in a dehumanizing, mechanized world and grasping the connections which interpenetrate all matter have "never been easy" tasks, but each of us has the potential to strive against the witchery which keeps us

isolated from humankind. And Bromden similarly suggests that a reunion with one's past and one's people can be accomplished in his final hopeful line: "I been away a long time" (272).

On all frequencies, these writers speak to the reader with directness and candor. Each unfolds a process of discovery and understanding and leaves the reader with the task of taking up the challenge to integrate him- or herself with the community and the world at large. Each novel poses its central character in opposition to and in contrast with a mechanism--characterized as an intrusive force such as the Combine or wrongheaded witchery, epitomized in a bureaucratic dehumanized Brotherhood, or merely illustrated by a male-voiced domination and repression--which interferes with love and human connections. Whether in oral or written form, language is the means used by each of these characters to fashion selves capable of uncovering and reestablishing connections in the world. Moreover, these novels, as story is characterized in the opening pages of Ceremony, "aren't just entertainment" (2). Language and storytelling are potent means of creation and sustenance, or destruction and confusion. "Language, which creates matter, defines function, and specifies form," argues B. A. St. Andrews, "is a potent force for curing or for cursing" (86).

Underlying these hopeful endings of the novels is the threat of destruction and disorder to a world that fails to honor and respect diversity, that shuts off members of the

culture from full participation, and only marginally democratizes American institutions. In these works, the main characters are pushed to the margins of society and confined in narrowly prescribed roles, but they fortunately manage to use the powerful tool of language. Their language ability assists them in attaining cultural and self-awareness and persuades them that integration with the dominant society is possible.

I use the term "integration" here, not as a antonym of racial segregation or as another term for assimilation. The promise these characters bring with them to the dominant culture which formerly excluded them can only result from a fully realized, autonomous integrity. When education, society's means of informing and molding its citizenry, falls to the task of coercion rather than nurturing diversity of behavior and idea formation, it becomes a prison of conformity which robs society of its richness of voices and personalities.

NOTES

[1] Bromden is half Columbia Indian from the Pacific Northwest, while Tayo is of Pueblo Indian descent, from the New Mexico Laguna. I do not mean to infer that all Native Americans are alike any more than I would suggest that all Europeans, Asians, Africans, and so forth would be. In addition to the miles which separate their communities and traditions, there are the distinctions of climate and differing cultural histories. Moreover, Kesey makes no attempt to explore the cultural identity of Bromden's people, while Silko--of Laguna Pueblo, Mexican, and white

ancestry herself--shares an understanding of someone of Tayo's mixed blood and has lived a life steeped in the tradition of the Pueblo. However, Tayo and Bromden do share the position any Native American finds him-or herself in--that of being displaced by and isolated from the dominant white culture of the United States. And their mixed ancestry creates a crisis of identity for both. As Roberta Rubenstein has observed, "[i]n a land in which Indian ethnic groups have historically been so visibly segregated from the rest of American culture, to be accepted by neither one nor the other group is to be a victim of radically confused identity" (193).

[2] These comments are from the novel's original dust jacket.

[3] Susan J. Scarberry points out that the "Native American concept of 'medicine' has a resonance far beyond what any European definition of the term suggests. Since 'medicine' also universally refers to substances used to treat disease, several levels of meaning emerge when 'medicine' is mentioned in Ceremony" (22). For an analysis of the contrast between Western medicine--"stuck in the dualisms of Cartesian thought"--and the multidimensional process of healing in Amerindian culture as portrayed in novel, see B. A. St. Andrews, "Healing the Witchery: Medicine in Silko's Ceremony."

[4] Silko uses Emo's souvenir teeth to reinforce his role as a witch or a tool of the witchery. She has said elsewhere that "there are certain objects taken from dead bodies that the counter forces use as their whole stock and trade" ("A Conversation with Leslie Marmon Silko" 33).

[5] Kunz provides an observation concerning Bromden's arrival at a similar sense of timelessness and lack of boundaries and an evaluation of the contrasting "medicines" offered in Cuckoo's Nest which seem equally descriptive of Tayo's situational paradox as well. He writes, "east and west are the same direction, past and future are now, insane therapists reinforce madness with modern techniques while patients cure themselves with primitive word magic" (33).

[6] Peter G. Beidler, "Animals and Theme in Ceremony," suggests that "[i]t is not accident, incidentally, that the cattle are crossbreeds which, like Tayo, seem to combine the best features of two strains" (17-18).

[7] Although Tayo's struggle for identity seems to lack the search for a name as undergone by Janie, the invisible man, and Bromden, James Ruppert makes an observation concerning Tayo's need for an identifying role (and attendant name) in his culture: "When Tayo enters the story, . . . he is given an identity; he might be called the-one-who-brings-back-the-rain. He felt that after the war he had become white smoke, that he had no identity, but in the unified story that the reader comes to understand as containing the underlying pattern of significance, he did have an identity. He was the blasphemer, the-one-who-drove-the-rain-away" (82). I would add that the identity of

blasphemer is actually Tayo's mistaken, self-imposed, and believed deserved name reflecting his disconnection from the land and his people. The drought results from imbalance and disharmony, not Tayo's lone curse.

[8] In "A Conversation with Leslie Marmon Silko," she speaks of her use of Laguna stories in her writings, saying that "[t]here were some things that I heard and some things that I knew, and I thought, well, you know, you've just got to stick with it, with what you've heard, and with what you have. I figured that anybody could go to the anthropologists' reports and look at them. I have looked at them myself, but I've never sat down with them and said I'm going to make a poem or a story out of this" (30). In the same interview, Silko says she's "always been leery of the kinds of things that the ethnologists picked up," because she knows that some of the sources are only telling "outrageous lies" (30). Ramsey claims that "even a cursory survey in Boas's Keresan Texts of the origin-myth episodes as told by Laguna and other Keresan Pueblo people will reveal the skill and tact with which Silko establishes and maintains a mythic pre-text for the fictional story of Tayo" (192).

[9] Even though Tayo's therapeutic recovery relies on the oral use of language and story, Silko, in an interview with Dexter Fisher, admits that the process of writing the novel was itself a means of her own healing: "Writing the novel was a ceremony for me to stay sane. . . . [M]y character is very sick, and I was very sick when I was writing the novel. I was having migraine headaches all the time and horrible nausea that went on and on. I kept writing and all of a sudden it occurred to me that he was very sick and I was wondering if he was going to get well . . . and then I realized that the one thing that was keeping me going at all was writing. And as Tayo got better, I felt better" (20).

Chapter Five

Other Unseen Faces, Unheard Voices

Before concluding this study, I would like to explore several additional works in which the dual motif of invisibility and voicelessness and the struggle for identity through storytelling occur with some prominence. In fiction ranging from Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," to Margaret Atwood's futuristic vision of America written in 1985, The Handmaid's Tale, the major characters--many of whom are similarly the narrating voices which shape the stories--use language to overcome their isolation and disenfranchisement. The Handmaid's Tale, in particular, warrants careful consideration as a crucial 1980s text which, in addition to these elements already discussed, addresses the storyteller's loss of authorial control over the final stages of her storytelling and self-forming process. In effect, the "rescuers" of her narrative question her authority and the authenticity of her voice. Following this analysis of Atwood's text and brief descriptions of other works, I proffer some proposals for empowering students with language as a means of making meaning, ordering experience, and gaining identity.

In her dystopian vision of the future of North America,

Margaret Atwood addresses these same issues of invisibility, voicelessness, and the self-creating and self-sustaining power of narrative. Offred, the narrating character, living in the Republic of Gilead sometime in the near future, finds herself stripped of her familiar identity and social roles as a worker, wife, and mother, trained in the discipline of the Handmaid, and clad in the attire of that domestic and social function.

The Republic of Gilead was formed in the wake of a religious war which was waged in heated response to homosexuality ("Gender Treachery" [57]); rampant pornography ("Pornomarts," "Feels on Wheels," and "Bun-Dle Buggies" [225-26]); heretical religious sects (Roman Catholics, Jews, Baptists, and Quakers); the alleged immoral products of the feminist movement such as abortion, divorce, and female adultery; crimes of violence against women; and other "sinful" behavior such as sunbathing and rock 'n roll. As Aunt Lydia informs her charges--the Handmaids in training--"[i]n the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from" these aforementioned "evils" (33). But as happens in most "perfect" societies, the new freedoms have many costs.

"[E]xploding power plants, . . . the mutant strain of syphilis no mold could touch," (144) and environmental pollution--the air filled with "chemicals, rays, radiation, the water . . .with toxic molecules" (143)--have adversely affected the birth rate. Child bearing women are often

likely--"[t]he chances are one in four"--to give birth to "Unbabies," "with a pinhead or a snout like a dog's, or two bodies, or a hole in its heart or no arms, or webbed hands and feet" (143). Alarm about the "plummeting Caucasian birth rates" (385), particularly the dearth of newborn white males, leads the Republic to create a specialized class of Handmaids to act as surrogate reproduction machines.

Offred is typical of these Handmaids. Divorced and remarried, her second marriage is deemed immoral and, hence, illegal; her child from that illegal liaison is confiscated; and she is arrested and indoctrinated into the ritual of monthly sexual couplings with her Commander. Ironically, this legalized form of rape is termed the "Ceremony"; Gilead prides itself on the virtual elimination of rape on the streets but condones this method of coerced intercourse through biblical precedent.[1] The fact that Offred has borne offspring previously makes her an ideal candidate as a Handmaid; that she has a past as an independent woman of intelligence and substance creates a problem for the Aunts who are responsible for her indoctrination and for the society that wishes her to forget her past freedoms and her loves.

In this hierarchical society of clearly defined and prescribed roles, the Handmaids are only one of the castes which suffer under repressive governmental rule. Gilead demands conformity from both sexes; each social group from Commanders to Guardians has their functionary purposes

delineated and their behavior circumscribed, and they are attired accordingly. The black-clad Commanders of the Faith are white men of means whose homes are overseen by Commanders' Wives dressed in blue. When a Commander's Wife is unable to bear children (men are never to blame), the Commander may take into his household a Handmaid (Caucasian, of course) as a surrogate for the purposes of reproduction, not intimacy. A Handmaid's primary purpose is to be "a worthy vessel" for her Commander's seed: "What we prayed for was emptiness, so we would be worthy to be filled: with grace, with love, with self-denial, semen and babies" (251). Denial of self is crucial in order to concede to the requirements of a Handmaid's role in the society.

One means of obliterating a person's self and controlling his or her behavior, as we have already seen, is to take away that individual's name and substitute another identifying label. The narrator's name, Offred, is a patronymic which indicates that her Commander's surname is Fred and that she is assigned to his household for the purpose of bearing his child. The reader never discovers the narrator's "real" name, the name she possessed in the pre-Gileadean days, just as the invisible man withheld his name from his readers. We might just as easily call him Ofbledsoe or Ofjack, depending on which controlling authority figure he is serving at the time. Offred's identifying name can change as abruptly, because, if she fails to become pregnant, she will move on to another

Commander and become Of-somebody else. (Unless she fails three times, in which case she can expect to be shipped off to the Colonies as an "Unwoman" to clean up toxic waste or some such hazardous task deemed appropriate for the unnecessary elements of the social fabric.)

She elects to keep her own, forbidden name hidden; she thinks of it as something precious, one of the few things she owns:

> I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I'll come back to dig up, one day. . . . This name has an aura around it, like an amulet, some charm that's survived from an unimaginably distant past. (108)

This name recalls for her "what I once could do, how others saw me" (126) and she reveals it only to Nick, toward the end of the story, and feels by its revelation that "therefore I am known" (347).

The Handmaids' costume consists of a blood-red habit "which defines" them (11). In order to cover and obscure her female shape, "[t]he skirt is ankle-length, full, gathered to a flat yoke that extends over the breasts" (perhaps the sort of outfit Nurse Ratched would demand her nurses wear), and "[t]he white wings too are prescribed issue; they are to keep us from seeing but also from being seen" (11). This uniform renders them invisible as women and as individual faces. "Modesty is invisibility," Aunt Lydia told them. "To be seen . . . is to be penetrated. What you girls must be is impenetrable" (38). The Handmaids are taught that rape is solely the fault of the woman (92-

93); in Gilead, the step from visual penetration to sexual is considered a minor one.

Paradoxically, the high visibility of the bright red, white-winged garment virtually renders Handmaids invisible due to their number. With the uniform obscuring the individual within, they seem to all look alike. Even the Marthas, household servants, speak in Offred's presence as though she cannot hear them (64). And Offred realizes that while the offspring she and her fellow Handmaids may produce will appear in photographs in family albums and thereby exist in history, Handmaids will not: "From the point of view of future history . . . we'll be invisible" (295). This notion comes to her as she views a photograph of her own child, now the child of someone else, and Offred feels herself "obliterated for her. I am only a shadow now, far back behind the glib surface of this photograph. A shadow of a shadow" (296). Gilead, in robbing Offred of her identity, a livelihood, and a family, and in mandating that she wear this uniform of conformity, has rendered her invisible, without form or substance.

Atwood's imagined society oppresses these women further by denying them any right to language. When Handmaids go shopping, one of their other household tasks, performed always in pairs, they are forbidden to speak in other than prescribed phatic discourse. To the customary greeting, "'Blessed be the fruit," a Handmaid must respond accordingly, "May the Lord open" (25). If Offred and her

companion, Ofglen (regardless of who wears the uniform, the name will remain the same), speak beyond the accepted empty cordialities, they may be construed traitors and blasphemers. Handmaids travel in pairs because they serve as each other's spies: "If either of us slips through the net because of something that happens on one of our daily walks, the other will be accountable" (26). Gilead encourages its Handmaids to inform on another's transgressions.

Handmaids are similarly forbidden to read or write. Even the shop signs have been converted from graphemic to pictorial representation of the products sold there: "[T]he lettering was painted out, when they decided that even the names of shops were too much temptation for us. Now places are known by their signs alone" (33). The monthly Ceremony begins with the Commander unlocking the Bible from its locked box and reading to his Wife and Handmaid the passage on which Gilead bases this ritualized subrogation and rape. Though Offred refers to these lines scornfully as the "moldy old Rachel and Leah" story, she notes how hearing the written word affects both her and the Commander's Wife (also forbidden to read): "We lean towards him a little, iron filings to his magnet. He has something we don't have, he has the word" (114). Offred seems to feel her powerlessness most strongly in having language--spoken, written, read, and heard--forbidden to her. She hungers for communication and meaning in language.

Later in the novel, the Commander invites (actually coerces; a Handmaid is powerless to resist a Commander) to come to his room late at night. A surreptitious meeting of this sort violates the law, and Offred worries that he has something intimate and sexual in mind:

> It's forbidden for us to be alone with the Commanders. We are for breeding purposes: we aren't concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. . . . There is supposed to be nothing entertaining about us, no room is permitted for the flowering of secret lusts . . . . We are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices. (176)

Offred discovers that he does have something illicit in mind; he wants her to play Scrabble with him. Just being alone with him is quite illegal. To request that she engage in the illegal activity of a word game--something "forbidden," "dangerous," "indecent," which "he can't do with his Wife"--strikes her as equivalent to an offer of drugs (179).

Atwood must relish the dark humor of this seduction scene as the Commander overpowers Offred with ingenuous, forgotten words like the simple greeting "hello" and then compromises and tantalizes her with the spelling and reading of the Scrabble words.

> We play two games. Larynx, I spell. Valance. Quince. Zygote. I hold the glossy counters with their smooth edges, finger the letters. The feeling is voluptuous. This is freedom, an eyeblink of it. Limp, I spell. Gorge. What a luxury. The counters are like candies. (180; emphases are the author's)

The Scrabble games become a much more meaningful ceremony than the monthly ritual which passes by that name. She

cherishes each prohibited word she forms and reads.

Eventually, the Commander offers her old copies of forbidden women's magazines, which once "suggested an endless series of possibilities" to their readers (201), and finally compromises her by taking her to a legally sanctioned bordello, Jezebel's. What the reader may at first take for kindness on the part of the Commander, ultimately reveals that he is "truly ignorant of the real conditions under which" the Handmaids live (204). He puts Offred in situations of jeopardy with never a thought for her status as the one who would be blamed; the Commander's "illegal" acts would be allowed and forgiven him.

The tactile pleasure Offred takes in longingly caressing the Scrabble letters has a similar counterpart earlier in the novel when she discovers the Latin words, "Nolite te bastardes carborundum" (69; emphasis is the author's), carved in tiny print on the bottom of the cupboard in her room. Offred relishes these unknown words and tries to envision the writer who she believes was her predecessor, the previous Offred:

> It pleases me to think I'm communing with this woman. . . . It pleases me to know that her taboo message made it through, to at least one other person, washed itself up on the wall of my cupboard, was opened and read by me. Sometimes I repeat the words to myself. They give me a small joy. . . .
>
> I wonder who she was or is, and what's become of her. (69-70)

These foreign words (this is well before she learns from the Commander that they translate as the meaningful "Don't let

the bastards grind you down") become a sort of mantric chant for Offred. She clings to these words, again and again pausing to pass her fingers lingeringly over this remaining evidence of another woman's existence and defiance, and fashions an image of her as a role model.

Her pleasure at touching the forbidden letters of the word game and the carved message with her fingertips and the sensual satisfaction of shaping each word, whether discovered or created, with her mouth and tongue, explain, in part, the value of the shaping of her own narrative, another "taboo message" that--like her predecessor's--"made it through." Although it would probably gratify her to know that her narrative made it to a reader and allowed her the sort of communion with others which she craves, the fashioning of the tale was not itself an experience without regret and pain.

Like the invisible man and Bromden, she anguishes over this birthing process. Initially, her brooding pain stems from the fact that she wishes it were a fictional account, not the truth which <u>did</u> happen. When she speaks of story, she prefers a made-up form of entertainment.

> I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance.
>
> If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending, to the story, and real life will come after it. I can pick up where I left off.
>
> It isn't a story I'm telling.
>
> It's also a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along. (52)

She remembers how World War II, even after watching a documentary about the slaughter of the Jews in the ovens, once seemed "only a story" to her, because "[i]f it's only a story, it becomes less frightening" (187).

Her lack of control over both her life and the ending of the story often makes her wish she could leave off the task of telling it. "I am trying not to tell stories, or at any rate not this one" (66). Attempting to keep the narrative as authentic as possible requires that Offred relive the terrible memories of her life: the loss of her husband and child, the horrible beating the Aunts gave her friend Moira, the brutal hangings and the killings she witnessed at the Salvagings and Particicutions, and the guilt she feels over the pleasure she took on her midnight trysts with the Commander's chauffeur, Nick.

She apologizes to her reader for her brutal honesty: "I'm sorry there is so much pain in this story. I'm sorry it's in fragments, like a body caught in crossfire or pulled apart by force. But there is nothing I can do to change it" (344). Often she admits the necessary weakening of the story through its retelling:

> <u>This is a reconstruction</u>. <u>All of it is a reconstruction</u>. It's a reconstruction now, in my head, as I lay flat on my single bed rehearsing what I should or shouldn't have said, what I should or shouldn't have done, how I should have played it. (173; emphases are the author's)

She desires some distance between herself and the occurrences in her narrative.

Occasionally, because knowledge is kept from her, she

is forced to surmise parts of her story. For instance, she offers three versions of what happened to her husband, Luke, each of which she claims to believe in firmly. She believes that he was shot, that he was captured and confined to a prison somewhere, and that he was never caught and one day will be reunited with her and their child.

> The things I believe can't all be true, though one of them must be. But I believe in all of them, all three versions of Luke, at one and the same time. This contradictory way of believing seems to me, right now, the only way I can believe anything. Whatever the truth is, I will be ready for it. (135)

Merely telling the story of Luke is a means of keeping him alive.

Offred sometimes succumbs to the temptation to rewrite parts of the story, as when she offers "a different story, a better one. . . . the story of what happened to Moira" (166). This reconstruction comes from a variety of sources, partially from first hand knowledge, the rest "from Alma, who heard it from Dolores, who heard it from Janine. Janine heard it from Aunt Lydia" (166). Offred calls it a better story because it entails Moira's getting revenge against Aunt Lydia and escaping. But the story as told seems more a story the Handmaids desired to believe than the truth as it actually happened. However, when Offred meets Moira at Jezebel's, Moira's version accurately corresponds with the retold version.

In relating the next installment in Moira's tale, Offred again confesses to a reconstruction:

> This is what she says, whispers, more or less. I can't remember exactly, because I had no way of writing it down. I've filled it out for her as much as I can: we didn't have much time so she just gave the outlines. (316)

Offred would like to fashion a conclusion to Moira's story indicating what happened to her thereafter: "I'd like to tell a story about how Moira escaped, for good this time. . . . I'd like her to end with something daring and spectacular, some outrage, something that would befit her (325). Offred desires endings for her own and others' stories rather than facing the harsh reality of their situations. Unlike Tayo, her struggle is often <u>against</u> the ending of the story, an attempt to stave off the anticipated displeasing conclusion.

In furnishing her final installment of Moira's story, she "tries to make it sound as much like her as I can" as a means "of keeping her alive" (316). This is the most important strength of Offred's storytelling. While she is unable to form herself through telling the story, she can give substance to herself and others and keep them alive this way. Just as Janie's story keeps Tea Cake alive in Janie's heart and Tayo's ceremony (the process of living the story) restores Josiah and Rocky (and the traditional story) to life, Offred's narrative renders those people whom she misses breathing and acting and living on in her memory and in the artifact of her storytelling.

As a means of sustaining herself, Offred's storytelling requires a listener, because "if it's a story, even in my

head, I must be telling it to someone. You don't tell a story only to yourself. There's always someone else" (52). Even though she doubts she will ever have a listener or that her story will survive, she fashions someone to direct her story to. She'll "pretend you can hear me" even if she believes "you can't" (53). A listener is fundamental to the story; without someone to hear her tale, she remains invisible and mute, a space "between parentheses" (295). In this sense, the telling of the story creates and sustains the listener's presence as much as it does her own. She addresses the listener directly:

> By telling you anything at all I'm at least believing in you, I believe you're there, I believe you into being. Because I'm telling you this story I will your existence. I tell therefore you are. (344)

And therefore she exists as well.

Forbidden to write, Offred's legacy is another oral tale, this time recorded on audio cassettes. Told by the Aunts that "Pen Is Envy" (a clever rewrite of Freudian theory which equally depicts women's status as Other in a male-dominated social structure), the Handmaids are prohibited from contact with any writing utensils. Her series of cassettes form a story told, not written. The artifact which the reader is able to hold in his or her hand and to trace the words with a finger if desired is actually a transcript of her words as spoken. A further reconstruction, the arrangement of "the blocks of speech in the order in which they appeared to go" was "based on some

guesswork" by Professors Wade and Pieixoto (383). This revelation occurs in the "Historical Notes" which conclude the novel.

Offred realizes that even if she could escape and finally set her narrative down in written form, it would still be a reconstruction "at yet another remove."

> It's impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was, because what you say can never be exact, you always have to leave something out, there are two many parts, sides, crosscurrents, nuances. (173)

The narrative would be inexact, would in fact be a fiction of sorts, but the reader would at least prefer her inaccuracies to those of her usurping male editors. Although they've rescued her from invisibility and voicelessness to a certain extent, they criticize her narrative for what it lacks and complain about the ways in which a male-formed document would have provided more precise answers to their many questions.

Professor Pieixoto's comments indicate that although the Republic of Gilead no longer exists, some of the underlying attitudes toward women linger. For instance, the selection of the title for the narrative, while "partly in homage to the great Geoffrey Chaucer," was also made as a pun "having to do with the archaic vulgar signification of the word tail; that being, to some extent, the bone, as it were, of contention" (381). This admission and the laughter of the seminar participants which greets it indicate that women are still viewed in sexist terms--vessels for receipt of man's seed. The Underground Femaleroad, the means of

escape of some of the Handmaids, has been "dubbed by some of our historical wags 'The Underground Frailroad'" signifying this culture's persistence in believing woman to be the weaker of the sexes (381). This remark is met with a mixture of laughter and groans. Other attempts at "humor" abound in this discussion of a society of genocide, legitimized slavery of women, and totalitarian abuse of human rights. The tone of Pieixoto's talk is an odd mixture of amusement and admiration. One would imagine that the women in the audience must be squirming in their seats to hear this society's exploits discussed in such a gender-biased manner.

Applause greets his refusal to condemn the outrageous behavior of the Republic. He suggests "we must be cautious about passing judgment upon the Gileadeans. . . . Gileadean society was under a good deal of pressure, demographic and otherwise, and was subject to factors from which we ourselves are happily more free" (383). Should someone present such a rationale for the atrocities of Nazi Germany, from which Gilead borrowed certain tactics, the listeners would be appalled. Pieixoto continues by praising Gilead for "its genius" of synthesizing repressive means from other historical governmental bodies (389). He cites Judd's opinion "that the best and most cost-effective way to control women for reproductive purposes was through women themselves" and Waterford's notion "that the Aunts should take names derived from commercial products available too

women in the immediate pre-Gilead period," and then concludes with admiration in his voice: "It was a brilliant stroke, and confirms us in our opinion that Waterford [who they suspect was Offred's Commander] was, in his prime, a man of considerable ingenuity. So, in his own way, was Judd" (391). This is like speaking of the ingenuity of Goebbels or the brilliance of Goering. But the listeners tolerate it from this man.

Pieixoto reserves his criticism not for this totalitarian regime, but rather for flaws in the form of Offred's narrative. He sneeringly mentions the "whiff of emotion recollected" found in the story and complains about the gaps in historical knowledge which remain due to Offred's failure to report statistics and details.

> Some of them could have been filled by our anonymous author, had she had a different turn of mind. She could have told us much about the workings of the Gileadean empire had she the instincts fo a reporter or a spy. What we would not give, now, for even twenty pages or so of print-out from Waterford's private computer! However, we must be grateful for any crumbs the Goddess of History has designed to vouchsafe us. (393)

Pieixoto and, it seems, the bulk of the seminar participants have very little sympathy for what the narrator went through in order to fashion a narrative of any kind. They are interested in <u>his</u>tory, not <u>her</u> story. Her attempts to sustain herself through telling her story are of inconsequential notice to these "readers." They wish that her artifact had rather sustained <u>Gilead</u> through carefully preserved documents and news accounts.

Unfortunately, and this is the greatest irony of Atwood's tapestry of irony, these are not the listeners Offred had hoped to reach. Her suffering falls on unsympathetic ears. Pieixoto's reaction to her narrative is similar to the way Richard Wright and other reviewers responded to the text of Their Eyes Were Watching God in 1937, forcing it to remain invisible to reader's eyes until rescued by Hemenway and Alice Walker in the 1970s. Atwood's "Historical Notes" serve as a coda of criticism against an academic establishment whose consistent posture is to denigrate a woman's personal narrative as inferior. A narrative depicting woman's attempts to survive in a hostile and alien environment is deemed self-indulgent and insufficiently intellectual. (A critical stance of this sort similarly faults Anne Frank's narrative for a failure to faithfully render history.) Perhaps Atwood, at least, reaches a more receptive readership for her tale about the self-creation imminent in personal narrative than these critics who attempt to usurp her voice (as the Brotherhood supplanted the invisible man's). Atwood crafted Pieixoto's comments in order that the reader would read between the lines and see the hidden agenda.

Three other women's works which address the sustaining power of telling the story are Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye, and Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior. Gilman's short

work and Morrison's first novel, like Atwood's tale, conclude pessimistically. Both Pecola, the central character of The Bluest Eye, and the unnamed narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper," end up, not with expressive voices and realized identities, but in madness and silence. Kingston's work, an autobiographical narrative rather than fiction, concludes on a more hopeful note, as the Asian-American narrator begins to fashion her own ending to the stories she has heard throughout her childhood and is finally able to bridge the two cultures of China and the United States through a facility in both of her languages.

Like Their Eyes Were Watching God and The Handmaid's Tale, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," comparably depicts the special position the writing process merits in a woman's attempts to overcome stereotypical behavioral roles. Gilman's nameless narrator has married a practical man, "a physician of high standing," who does not believe his wife is ill. Her brother, also a doctor, concurs with John's diagnosis that the narrator's affliction is nothing "but temporary nervous depression--a slight hysterical tendency" (10). They believe that what is best for her condition--something they are obviously unable to fathom or diagnose with any precision--are "tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise," but she is "absolutely forbidden to 'work'" (10). The work in which she wishes to engage is the activity of writing, which she believes would do her some good. Although she disagrees with their

proscription, she is powerless in the face of these authoritive men. Husband John's rationalism refutes her symptoms and negates her voice.

Her narrative is fragmented, as is her psyche, because, in order to write the story, she, like Offred, must do so covertly. As she admits at the outset, "I did write for a while in spite of them; but it <u>does</u> exhaust me a good deal--having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition" (10). Each furtive attempt to write is interrupted whenever she hears the sound of her husband's, brother's, sister's, or housekeeper's approaching footsteps on the stairs. Thwarted in her endeavor to form narrative, she is forced by the clandestine nature of her writing activity to conceal the written product, and hence her emerging self, from view. Her writing must remain hidden from all eyes in the same way that her real self must continue to be invisible to them.

Her husband distrusts her perceptions, feelings, ideas, and thoughts. When she surrenders to a feeling--something beyond the realm of intellect and reasoning--John demands that she exert "proper self-control" (11): John "says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. So I try" (15-16). Although she attempts to control--to repress, in other words--herself, the exertion, like writing on the sly, tires her.

Her feeling, thoughts, and ideas must remain confined if she is to win John's approval.

Like Offred's stealth in telling her story on cassette tapes, the narrator's necessary surreptitiousness hinders her efforts to pattern her disrupted narrative fragments into a cohesive unit. The furtive figure she gradually discovers in the yellow wallpaper, the pattern of which initially alluded her, begins to become more real to her than herself and the "real" world her husband lives in. In fact, the woman trapped in paper is the self, the written self, she suppresses and hides from view.[2] Not allowed to pattern her narrative, she becomes determined to "follow that pointless pattern" in the wallpaper "to some sort of conclusion" (19). Discerning two patterns in the wallpaper, a front and a back, she discovers that the foremost one moves because the "woman behind shakes it" (30).

She's uncertain whether or not the woman confined behind this pattern is alone: "Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind" (30). This indicates her suspicions that "a great many women" suffer confinement similar to her own. Of this much she is definite--the one she sees crawling about, shaking the pattern, is trying to escape, but she gets caught in the pattern's strangling shape (30). Finally rid of her husband--out of town for the evening--and the servants, the narrator continues her own creeping along the floor until her reflected self escapes the confines of the wallpaper. As indicated by the self in

the wall paper, her writing begins, in spite of its fragmentary nature and her own confinement, to betray the hint of an emerging pattern.

The inconclusive ending--the woman's creeping along the wall, even over the body of her fainted husband--suggests that this woman, engaged in this seemingly bizarre behavior, would likely be incarcerated as insane by her practical husband. As suppressed as Janie's self once was by Joe Starks controlling "big voice," the narrator's self, suddenly spilling out in this conceived split of herself into two identities, can only be construed by John as insanity. Her final statement--"'I've got out at last,' said I, 'in spite of you [her husband] and Jane'" (36)--suggests that the woman in the pattern is the "I" of this statement and Jane is the woman--the other self--who, although furtively writing these fragments, shares, like the invisible mutes Bromden and the invisible man, complicity in her own suppression.[3]

While this escape of the "other" Jane from the boundaries in which the male world confines her may indicate the liberating power of language, she is unable to elude that world itself which persists in its denial of both a woman's voice and her autonomous identity. Her husband, who in his stifling "love" would never allow her to "stir without special direction" (12), would likely respond to her uncondoned behavior--when he wakes from his faint--with the remedy that she must be controlled, since she is so

obviously unable to control herself. She has tried, by the only means at her disposal, to form a self and outwit her captors. Sadly, the society which honors her discarded self and falls in a faint at the sight of the emerging self-created woman will likely incarcerate and keep hidden this "madwoman."[4]

Pecola similarly splits into two fragmented personalities at the end of Morrison's The Bluest Eye and spends the rest of her days in withdrawn madness. A young black girl growing up in the 1940s, Pecola searches in vain for an adequate role model. Her family, the ironically named Breedloves, are "poor and black" and live in a storefront "because they believed they were ugly" (34). The narrator explains the way Pecola used this ugliness: "She hid behind hers. Concealed, veiled, eclipsed--peeping out from behind the shroud very seldom, and then only to yearn for the return of her mask" (31). An example of an invisibility beyond her powers occurs when she goes to the store for candy and the white man behind the counter "does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see" (42). She sees in his blue eyes the "total absence of human recognition" and know this is not an isolated incident:

> She has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her, her blackness . . . . And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes. (42).

She feels destined to exist and not be seen by others because of her blackness and believed ugliness. "As long as

she looked the way she did, as long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people," the Breedloves (39).

Like Bromden's decision to stay invisible and mute in response to his treatment by others, Pecola tries to make herself disappear, but her efforts are in vain: "Try as she might, she could never get her eyes to disappear" (39). In light of her failure, she longs to replace her dark eyes with Shirley Temple blue eyes, tokens she believes will earn love for her, something the Breedloves' brutal home sorely lacks. She thinks that "if those eyes of hers were different, . . . she herself would be different," and "[i]f she looked different, beautiful, maybe [her father] Cholly would be different, and [her mother] Mrs. Breedlove too" (40). So every night "she prayed for blue eyes" and held firm to "the binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her" (40).

Mrs. Breedlove shows more affection toward the blond, blue-eyed child of the white people for whom she works than toward her own daughter. Pecola's father demonstrates his twisted sense of love and anguish by raping Pecola twice. Indeed, the abuses heaped upon her coerce her to believe in a miracle of blue eyes, when Soaphead Church, the maladjusted, self-proclaimed spiritualist, confuses Pecola (and himself) into believing that her eyes have turned blue. This "miracle" occurs immediately after Cholly's rape and is itself followed by Pecola's split into two personalities. Her fervent belief in her ugliness and invisibility leads to

her desire for blue eyes and beauty for which she must suffer unbearable costs. She thought her different self would earn friends and love and respect. Instead, pregnant with her father's child, she wanders through town, muttering to herself, as if the brown-eyed Pecola remains the only friend of the blue-eyed. "The damage done was total. She spent her days . . . walking up and down, her head jerking to the beat of a drummer only she could hear" (158).

Pecola's story is told by her childhood friend, Claudia, who presents information about the Breedloves through a third-person narrative in fragments ironically juxtaposed with pieces of the Dick and Jane basal reader, these pieces also broken down into meaningless units. For example, the portion which reads

> HEREISHTHEFAMILYMOTHERFATHER
> DICKANDJANETHEYLIVEINTHEGREE
> NANDWHITEHOUSETHEYAREVERYH (34)

heads the chapter which reveals how unlike the false image of the Dick and Jane family the Breedloves are. Meanwhile, the sections which chronicle the life of Claudia's family, the MacTeers, are written in a more immediate first-person voice, which reflects both personal involvement and the distance of time, the language of both the participant and the spectator.

The act of writing and the artifact which results--Claudia's narrative--indicate Claudia's survival on this wasteland where neither the marigold seeds planted in the earth nor Cholly's seed planted in Pecola's womb endures.

Claudia's telling of the tale manages to sustain the memory of Pecola who was unable, in the end, to sustain herself. Moreover, Claudia's narrative indicates the survival of at least one black girl from Lorain, Ohio. Her writing allows her to make some sense of her past as she struggles to understand her own complicity in the destruction of Pecola's mind. She concludes the novel:

> I even think now that the land of the entire country was hostile to marigolds [and black girls] that year [1941]. This soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, an when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim has no right to live. We are wrong, of course, but it doesn't matter. It's too late. At least on my edge of town, among the garbage and the sunflowers of my town, it's much, much, much too late. (160)

Too late indeed for Pecola, but not for Claudia, who writes in order to understand why, "[b]ut since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how" (9; emphasis is the author's).

Maxine Hong Kingston's memoir of survival, The Woman Warrior, reveals similar difficulties which gender and race pose against a woman's attaining autonomy. Devalued in the Chinese culture solely because of her sex, the narrator grows up in a psychological environment shaped by repeated maxims from her ancestral homeland which depict the role of women from the Chinese point of view: "Girls are maggots in the rice" and "When you raise girls, you're raising children for strangers" (51, 54). A Chinese family yearns for male offspring. Males are honored, may own property, and take

wives and dowries, while females are a burden to their families, mere worthless mouths to feed. "There is a Chinese word for the female I--which is 'slave'" (56) To the narrator, it seems the only hope left for a Chinese girl is marriage or slavery. The latter is tantamount to the former.

Her mother told her she "would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan" (24). As her mother would "talk-story" each evening, Kingston would drift off to sleep, unaware "where the stories left off and the dreams began" (24). Rebellious even as a child, she transformed herself in her fantasy into Fa Mu Lan--"the girl who took her father's place in battle" (24). Trained as a warrior and swordswoman, the narrator pictures herself fighting for the honor of her family in ways closed to mere girls. In order to accomplish her many deeds, this swordswoman must disguise herself as a man and never reveal her true identity, for "Chinese executed women, who disguised themselves as soldiers or students, no matter how bravely they fought or how high they scored on the examinations" (46).

In the "White Tigers" chapter which presents the exploits of the narrating Fa Mu Lan, her parents, in preparation for her entry into battle, "carve revenge" in the form of "oaths and names" on her back (41). At the conclusion of this chapter, the narrator admits the similarity she shares with the warrior woman, for they both

have words on their backs. For the warrior, the words are unseen, hidden, yet potent. They may be used as tools of revenge. "The idioms," the narrator says,

> for revenge are 'report a crime" and "report to five families." The reporting is the vengeance--not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words. And I have so many words--"chink" words and "gook" words too--that they do not fit on my skin. (63)

Like the woman warrior, she too has an unknown or foreign language on her back--English. To survive and triumph, she needs to learn to use it. The writing of the memoir, in reporting the adventures of a young woman, makes her not a swordswoman, but a wordswoman. Armed with language, she becomes a potent force against those who would keep women silent, confined to traditional roles.

Her brief first chapter--"No Name Woman"--demonstrates this power of language. As a warning to her daughter who is menstruating for the first time, the narrator's mother told her of a disgraced aunt who, pregnant by a man other than her husband, jumped with her newborn baby into a well to certain death. The family pretends that this woman never existed, and Mother's warning is clear: "'Don't humiliate us. You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been born'" (5).

However, the narrator responds to this "lesson" in ways her mother never intended. She reads between the lines and wonders why the woman was a disgrace, while the male who seduced her was not. She feels that the woman's husband--who had been in America for two years while his wife stayed

in China with the family--should also have received some blame for this tragedy. The narrator's reading of this fable turns it into a feminist lesson for growing up female in a male-dominated world. Her chapter brings into view this woman ancestor whom her family had rendered invisible, erased from memory. Her writing, while unable to give the aunt a name, rescues her from invisibility and transforms her from a victim to a strong, sympathetic character, who sacrifices herself for love and thereby protects her male lover. Similarly, The Woman Warrior renders Kingston visible.

The narrator similarly misinterprets another action of her mother, but this time to her own disadvantage. When she was an infant, her mother cut the frenum of her tongue. The narrator has mixed feelings about this act:

> Sometimes I felt very proud that my mother committed such a powerful act upon me. At other times I was terrified--the first thing my mother did when she saw me was to cut my tongue. (190).

Her mother later informs her that the reason for the loosening of the tongue was to make it easier for her to speak English and "'to make you talk more, not less'" (235). But the narrator seems to see this act as a violence in keeping with the subjugation of women, tantamount to binding the feet of a seven year old daughter.

This belief coupled with the uncomfortableness of being Chinese in an American classroom led to her own loss of voice. "When I went to kindergarten and had to speak English for the first time, I became silent" (191). She

would speak Chinese at home, to her Chinese friends, and at Chinese school; in American school, she would read aloud in class "because we did not have to make up what to say" (193), but beyond that she remained silent. After she learned that "American-Chinese girls had to whisper to make ourselves American-feminine" (200), she "found some voice, however faltering" (200).

However, when a quiet friend of hers manages to remain silent for twelve years, the narrator, in an ironic and frightening reversal, verbally and physically assaults this girl in the school lavatory, screaming at her to talk and to quit playing dumb. She uses her language as a weapon, as a tool of vengeance, as if she's talking to her old silent self as well as making up for the violence her mother brought against her by cutting her frenum. She pulls the girl's hair, calls her stupid and dumb, tells the girl she's doing these things to her for her own good, pinches her face, and tries to reason with her. After the girl's sister interrupts them, the narrator continues to advise, "'Your family really ought to force her to speak'" (211). The narrator pays for her assault by spending "the next eighteen months sick in bed with a mysterious illness" (211). And when her mother finally sends her off to school, she must learn the "American-feminine" schoolgirl language all over again.[5]

Kingston's autobiography demonstrates the importance of storytelling both through her mother's talk-story--the

perpetual storytelling occurring in the home--and in Kingston's own efforts to shape and order the events of her life. Although the label of "autobiography" attached to the book indicates that Kingston is the "I" of the story, she remains nameless in the book, for there she is in the process of searching for an identity. She admits to her inability to know whether or not the stories her mother tells are truth, and her own book straddles the line between fiction and nonfiction as well. What matters most is that she manages to use the language in which she was formerly reticent to speak and concludes her book by fashioning her own ending to one of her mother's stories.

Jane, Offred, Claudia, and Maxine Hong Kingston struggle to shape and sustain themselves and others through their first-person narratives.[6] Jane is correct in fearing that her efforts will "be misconstrued" (35). Offred manages to reach a listener of sorts for her "telling" of her story, but unfortunately the ordering of her fragments remains in the hands of Professors Wade and Pieixoto and their unsympathetic "guesswork." Claudia survives, but Pecola, sadly, never gains either a voice or an identity. Claudia at least helps to sustain Pecola in memory, just as Kingston keeps her aunt's memory and some of the talk-story of her mother alive and Offred keeps Luke, her daughter, and Moira alive.

Another unnamed narrator suffers a loss of voice as Kingston

had in Jerzy Kosinski's The Painted Bird. This young boy's family, fearing for his fate in Nazi Germany, send him from the city to a distant small city where they feel he will be safe from harm. His caretaker dies soon thereafter and what follows is a series of horrifying episodes as the boy wanders Eastern Europe, tossed from one savage experience to another. Because he is olive-skinned, dark-haired, and black-eyed, he is shunned as a Gypsy, "whose place," in the eyes of the Nazis, like that of the Jews, "was in ghettos and extermination camps" (2).

His situation as a displaced and unwanted child--an invisible state--and his dehumanizing experience culminate in his losing of the ability to speak: "I tried to cry out, but my tongue flapped helplessly in my open mouth. I had no voice" (125). Perhaps his sheer terror at witnessing so many unspeakable acts--this is, indeed, a terrifying book--explains this sudden vocal impotence. His voicelessness is soon followed by his believing, like the invisible man, in his own worthlessness.

> I realized why God would not listen to my prayers, why I was hung from hooks, why Garbos beat me, why I lost my speech. I was black. My hair and eyes were as black as these Kalmuks'. [The Kalmuks openly rape the village women on horseback, passing them from horse to horse.] Evidently I belonged with them in another world. Their could be no mercy for such as me. Some dreadful Devil had sentenced me to have black hair and black eyes in common with this horde of savages. (160).

He believes himself irredeemably doomed to evilness because his appearance has more in common with these savage brutes than with the blond, blue-eyed villagers.

This young boy acquires an impressive insight into the way oppression works when he realizes that the power of those he calls "The Evil Ones" resides not merely in their "powerful passion for hatred, greed, revenge, or torture" but in their cleverness in channeling self-hatred to their own designs: "The Evil Ones surely picked only those who had already displayed a sufficient supply of inner hatred and maliciousness" (136). What makes their cruelty even more "ingenious" (to borrow a term from Professor Pieixoto) is their ability to force others to act maliciously among themselves: "[S]imply beating up an innocent man was worth less than inciting him to hate others. But hatreds of large groups of people must have been the most valuable of all" (136). Thus a seven-year-old boy comes to understand the power of Nazism.

In spite of the acuteness of his insights, he believes in his own evilness, eventually derailing a train for fun and defying death by lying on the railroad tracks while a train speeds over his inert body for entertainment. Eventually his voice--like Kosinski's--returns during a skiing accident years later. But the shaping of the novel, the utterance of his own experience, indicates, again, the self-creating power of narrative. The existence of the text suggests the narrator's ability to overcome the acceptance of the stereotype of the evil of those with dark skin and eyes.

Kosinski's exploration of the potency of stereotypical

image-making takes quite a different turn in his later novella, Being There. In this book, the well-dressed and white character of Chance projects an image which is well-received by others in spite of his illiteracy, inexperience, and lack of knowledge. His fortunate reception is, in large part, because of the power of the television industry to convert people into images completely divorced from their true identities.

Morrison and Ellison write, briefly, about the adverse power of the motion picture industry to influence self-identity. The invisible man attends movies where he identifies with the white cowboys instead of the Indians (167); Pecola desperately desires those Shirley Temple blue eyes; and Mrs. Breedlove, after she and Cholly had come north to Lorain, began attending movies, where "she succumbed to her earlier dreams" of "romantic love" and "physical beauty"--"[p]robably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought" (97).

While attending a movie featuring Jean Harlow and Clark Gable, with her hair fixed up like Harlow's, Mrs. Breedlove lost her tooth. Claudia's narrative commentary transforms this rotten tooth into a metaphor for the Breedlove marriage:

> But there must have been a speck, a brown speck easily mistaken for food but which did not leave, which sat on the enamel for months, and grew, until it cut into the surface and then to the brown putty underneath, finally eating away to the root, but avoiding the nerves, so its presence was not noticeable or uncomfortable. Then the weakened roots, having grown accustomed to the

> poison, responded one day to severe pressure,a nd the tooth fell free, leaving a ragged stump behind. But even before the little brown speck, there must have been the conditions, the setting that would allow it to exist in the first place. (92-93).

For all Mrs. Breedlove's notions of romantic love, her own marriage is like a festering sore, a tooth rotting from the inside out. The conditions that will lead to her and Cholly's relationship becoming a brutal battleground of insults and physical attacks and to his twice raping Pecola existed all along, even during these more pleasant times when she was pregnant and she and Cholly were getting along well.

The Breedloves might seem to be a healthy family at this time in the novel but are in fact breeding within the core of their relationship a festering wound which will swallow them in violence. Similarly the images Hollywood depicts of romantic love or of the simplistic notions of cowboys and Indians equalling good guys versus bad guys are unremittingly false surface images which mask the reality beneath them. Hollywood deals in extrinsic, not intrinsic, values which present a distorted view the world and people's possibilities. Pecola, Mrs. Breedlove, and the invisible man get swept up by these images of beauty and justice, but their belief in them indicates a sickness within them. The invisible man's identification with the cowboys, Pecola's desire to be Shirley Temple, and Mrs. Breedlove's selection of a Harlow-like hair style indicate their belief in the notion of white as right. Even Bromden sometimes wonders if

he should be like the Indians portrayed on television.

In fact, movies and television shows hold up pictures to most people of what they cannot be--white or male or included in the social structure--as models. This notion of the false surface quality of media images is explored in the last of the works I want to discuss here, Jerzy Kosinski's Being There. This novel addresses the ways in which American society overlooks the interior, intrinsic values of people, and instead settles for images and mere surfaces.

The mentally and socially deficient Chance, hidden from view and confined in the Old Man's home for many years, is suddenly thrust into the world of the living. His education consisted of training in gardening and watching the images on his television. He knows very little else. Fortunately, he is able to wear the Old Man's expensive wardrobe which luckily has come back in style. His physical appearance--and it is important to remember that he is a white male--along with the lessons he has learned from his many years of watching television--which include maintaining eye contact and repeating fragments of the statements of others in order to show interest--make him--quite by chance--acceptable, even admirable, in the very world that would be hostile to any of the other characters previously discussed.

The Old Man informed him many years before that

> [w]hile some could learn to read and write, Chance would never be able to manage this. Nor would he ever be able to understand much of what others were saying to him or around him. . . . Although his mother had been very pretty, her mind had been as damaged as his: the soft soil of his brain,

> the ground from which all his thoughts shot up, had been ruined forever. . . . Chance would do exactly what he was told or else he would be sent to a special home for the insane where, the Old Man said, he would be locked in a cell and forgotten (7).

Although this information is couched in the third person narrative, the omniscient narrator seems not to be merely stating the facts but restating the message of the Old Man. Whether Chance is really brain damaged remains in question, just as the Old Man's housing Chance but failing to keep records on him does. The narrator hints that the Old Man is actually Chance's father, who bore him by a mistress and who took over his upbringing, but determined to keep him hidden and submissive. The threat of incarceration in a mental institution and treating Chance as a mentally defective child--regardless of his true capabilities--serve as adequate means of rendering him a docile, unambitious, and agreeable character.

By a rapid series of chance events, Chance is thrust into the public eye, rumored to be a confidant of both the influential Benjamin Rand and the President of the United States. When Chance--newly christened Chauncey Gardiner through a mishearing of his name--appears on television, Kosinski offers one of his most virulent attacks on television and the American public.

> The people who watched him on their sets did not know who actually faced them; how could they, if they had never met him? Television reflected only people's surfaces; it also kept peeling their images from their bodies until they were sucked into the caverns of their viewers' eyes, forever beyond retrieval, to disappear. . . . Chance

> became only an image for millions of real people. They would never know how real he was, since his thinking could not be televised. (54)

In a culture in which images, like those projected on television screens across America and the world, take preeminence over substance; where the images disappear "into the caverns of their viewers' eyes," Chance becomes--because of his good looks, docile politeness, and amiable agreeability--all things to all people. From the Russian Ambassador, who believes Chance can read his native language, to the President of the United States, who hears in Chance's literal comments about gardens, metaphoric analyses of the economy, Chance's many viewers, whether on television or in person, invest him with the qualities they desire him to possess.

When the KGB officers determine that Chance is a "blank page" they don't realize how accurately this description fits him. They decide that his lack of a recorded past indicates his participation in some sort of political movement. This merely offers more proof that he is a blank page which everyone he encounters or who sees him is able to fill with what they imagine, need, desire, or hope him to be.

When the novel concludes, Chance is about to become a running mate of some important figure. The specific post he would be running for is unclear; it could be lieutenant governor or conceivably vice president. His greatest quality as a politician seems to be his lack of background.

In light of recent revelations of candidates' pasts which have cost them their political roles, Kosinski's cautionary fable continues to be pertinent nearly twenty years after its first publication.

Although the novel may seem markedly different from those previously examined, Chance's situation has similarities with those of the other invisibles in that his image and his name are not of his own creation. His words as well are not his own for they are misconstrued and appropriated. However, while the other characters have had their images and voices appropriated or denied them in ways that cost them entry into the predominant culture, the similar superimposition of meaning to Chance's words and the charismatic value of his image earn him acceptance--indeed enlistment--into the mainstream. In an ironic, mind-boggling twist, this uneducated, illiterate television viewer becomes an international hero, while these other intelligent, motivated characters are relegated to the fringes of the social structure.

However unsettling and disheartening the imposed invisibility and mutedness of these characters may be, the way out of these shared dilemmas is clearly delineated. As demonstrated in most of these works, the means of effectively creating autonomous, conscious, integrated selves rests in the process of discovery and reflection afforded through language, both spoken and written. As

Britton notes, "language is a highly organized, systematic means of representing experience, and as such it assists us to organize all other ways of representing" (21). When deprived of this method of creating (articulating) a self and a sense of the world, the likely result, as seen in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and in Pecola's experiences in The Bluest Eye, is the madness of a divided and confused self. Without language facility, human beings lack the communion with others, with their cultures, and their pasts which is necessary to survive and succeed in this world.

In presenting this study, I have meant to show, in part, the ways in which the lives and actions of these characters intersect with the thoughts of Britton, Church, Harding, and others on the vital importance of language in gaining identity and voice. Obviously, these various authors--of both fiction and theory--concur in their belief in the patterning power of language, and their conviction has importance for education as well as for literature.

In the classroom, whatever the subject being taught, students people need abundant practice in the ordering power of language in order to make meaning and to render the new information they receive meaningful. As C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon observe,

> Discourse enacts the world: its knowledge is not "about" the world but is rather constitutive of the world, the substance of experience, an explanation for the self. Discourse represents, not an accumulating of facts or even of arguments, though it encompasses these. Essentially, it represents the contexts of meaningfulness that human beings create for themselves and inhabit.

> Because discourse is manifold, the experiences it generates, the world it articulates, are manifold as well. And because it is a process, it represents growth of mind, the expanding of imagination and the maturing of intellect. (60)

Students who are denied full participation in the process of making meaning through discourse, who are allowed to remain mute ciphers or required to conform their discourse to acceptable formulaic exercises, may leave school with a distorted view of the world, ill-equipped to order their experiences into meaningful, mature lives. Hence, Ann Berthoff's call for "a method of teaching that recognizes human need and ability to shape, discriminate, select: the mind's power to form" (29).

Knoblauch and Brannon address further this issue of conformity when they complain that

> [w]riting is often taught as though it were a mechanical act of selecting prefabricated forms for preconceived content; as though it were nothing but a range of technical skills to be delivered by masters to apprentices through lecture, then memorized and practiced until proficiency is achieved; as though human beings lack verbal competence until teachers provide them with it; as though the surface decorum of texts were more valuable than quality of thought; indeed even as though decorum were equivalent to intellectual quality. (4)

On the one hand, this training of apprentices by masters sounds quite like the invisible man's training in the scientific rationalism of the Brotherhood. Although his eviction speech demonstrated his innate verbal skills, the brothers were concerned with the decorum of his discourse more than the content and power inherent in it. On the other hand, this concern with the surface qualities rather

than the intrinsic value of discourse seems quite similar to the stereotypical prejudgment each of these "indecorous" characters faced as a result of their racial and/or gender traits. Their substance overlooked, they struggled, at first, to form themselves in the images dictated by their "masters."

Fostering diversity--of individuals and their discourse--should be the goal of education. Forms devoid of substance, like images empty of meaningfulness, are purposeless. Education of <u>all</u> students requires the active encouragement of their developing facility with language, through assignments that allow them ample opportunity to fashion their world by

> writing about things that matter, writing to make sense out of experience, writing to discover new knowledge, writing to reach ethical judgments, writing to examine the problems and complexities of the world, writing in response to meaningful reading. (Knoblauch and Brannon 167)

Only by advocating such growth will teachers equip students with the tools necessary to overcome their invisibilities, find their voices, and shape their lives.

The examples of Janie, the invisible man, Bromden, Tayo, Offred, Claudia, Kingston, and Kosinski's narrator provide a literary model for the way extensive language experience empowers students with the materials required for forming authentic selves. Through much intense and fitful struggle with the making of meaning, students, too, may compose eloquent, meaningful, and self-sustaining discourse of their own design.

NOTES

[1] Other hypocritical stances taken by the Republic of Gilead include outlawing abortion while allowing the "shredding" of so-called Unbabies; espoused fundamentalist belief in every word in the Bible, yet amending passages (e.g., adding "Blessed are the silent" to the Sermon on the Mount) when is fits the social aims of the society; and ostensibly outlawing all forms of adultery, but allowing state sanctioned houses of prostitution for Commanders and others of the elite. Handmaids whose Commanders fail to impregnate them may turn to Doctors for illicit intercourse in hopes of bearing children and remaining in the household. In the scene in which the Handmaids discuss this possibility, Atwood portrays the clandestine nature of such activity in images and tones of secrecy reminiscent of obtaining a back-alley abortion.

[2] Annette Kolodny similarly asserts that depriving the narrator of the "linguistically-based interpretive strategies" of reading and writing leads her "to experience herself as a text which can neither get read nor recorded" (457).

[3] Elaine R. Hedges, in a footnote to her Afterword to Gilman's story suggests that this lone occurrence of the name "Jane" could "conceivably be a printer's error," or "it could be that Gilman is referring here to the narrator herself, to the narrator's sense that she has gotten free of both her husband and her "Jane" self: free, that is, of herself as defined by marriage and society" (63).

[4] Kolodny comments on the failure of male readers to properly read Gilman's text which in turn portrays a woman discovering (and reading) her own "text" in the pattern of the wallpaper (455-59). This misreading by men of a woman's text--often deemed hysterical rather than historical--explains the difficulties Gilman experienced trying to publish her story and the obstacles Offred's narrative faces in Atwood's "Historical Notes."

[5] A more thorough analysis of Kingston's novel and the issues of muteness and invisibility appears in Rubenstein. See especially 164-189.

[6] Although not discussed here, Alice Walker's epistolary novel, The Color Purple, also presents a female narrator who sustains herself and other through writing. Celie's process of writing her letters to God and to her sister gives order and meaning to her own life and keeps her sister, who she hasn't heard from in years, alive in her thoughts.

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WORKS CONSULTED

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