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Original Article

Invisible Histories: A New Historicist Reading of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

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Abstract

This article investigates Ralph Ellison's popular novel *Invisible Man* (1952) through New Historicism approach, depending initially on the theoretical concept of Stephen Greenblatt and Michel Foucault. The novel is highly regarded for its artistry and cultural depth. However, researchers have rarely applied a sustained New Historicist reading to discuss its message as a literary replica of Black American lives. The study explores the novel's fictional world- its characters, events and symbols- as textualized history, relating that the unnamed narrator's journey from Jim Crow South to Industrial Harlem represents the lived realities of African Americans in mid-twentieth century America. Characters such as the narrator's grandfather, Dr. Bledsoe, Tod Clifton, Lucius Brockway, and Mary Rambo are analyzed not just as fictional characters, but as social and historical types rooted in the power structure of their time. The article advocates that *Invisible Man* do not separate literature from history. The book shows exactly how society keeps black people in a lower status, but at the same time, Ellison's great writing style finds ways to challenge and break those racist rules. In doing so, the novel embodies New Historicism's central idea that literature and history create each other. Power lives within the stories we tell, and when we read a novel, we are actually learning about the real-life history and politics of that time. The study contributes a new dimension by showing how the novel is actually a deep look at the real history and power of the contemporary time.

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Introduction

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) has made a significant impact on the American literary life during a time when the country was still struggling to match its belief in equality with the way it actually treated people of different races. On the surface, the book tells the story of one unnamed young black man making his way through an adverse world. But while reading historically and critically, the novel becomes something different: a proof of what African Americans went through. They were not ignored because they lacked value, but because the society deliberately chose not to accept their existence.

This paper examines *Invisible Man* through the perspective of New Historicism, a critical approach coined by Stephen Greenblatt and deeply illustrated by Michel Foucault's theories of power and discourse. New Historicism suggests that a book should not be treated like a museum piece that exists in its own little world. In fact, we should view it as a piece of the culture it came from- something that was both created by the events of its time and actually helped influence those events (Bist & Kandel, 2024). While applying to Ellison's novel, this point of view illuminates how fiction and lived history constantly reflect and influence each other. Even though one is imagined and other is real, they are not completely separate. The main argument of this study is that *Invisible Man* functions as a replica- a literary and historical mirror- of black American lives during the postwar periods of the twentieth century. Through characters, events and symbolic representations of socio-political reality, Ellison constructed a text that is at the same time fiction and historical document. The novel's narrator does not merely represent one man's search for identity, but he carries the experience of generations of Black Americans handling a society structured against them.

Literature Review

Since its publication, *Invisible Man* has been studied and interpreted constantly by many different literary experts and critics. Bellow (1952) writing shortly after the novel was published, observed that Ellison had engaged with the complexity of American experience with bravely, raising the voice of whole Black community against Powerful white community. Howe (1952) similarly argued that the novel was so deeply rooted in the experience of Black life that no white writer could have produced it. He called it a work saturated in Black music, speech and feeling. From the perspective of racial identity,

critics such as Mohammad (2018) and Muhammad (2017) have read the novel as a continuous exploration of the narrator's psychological and social journey toward self-realization. In Muhammad's (2017) formulation, the novel traces a movement from blind ignorance to enlightened awareness, a journey shaped at every stage by the dominating force of white supremacy and social invisibility. High (1997) has emphasized the paradox at the heart of this invisibility: the narrator is not actually invisible, but is made invisible by the refusal of others to see him as full human being.

Several scholars have focused on the formal and stylistic dimensions of the novel. Kosasih (2023) sees new aspect of narratology termed as focalization used by Ellison in novel and argues that the use of multiple focalizations has provided the readers with clear viewpoint by representing the perspective of Black and White people and has also supported the author to highlight racial issues. Larson (2023) has explored the role of humor as a critical tool, suggesting that Ellison has used satire and irony to expose the contradictions of liberalism, Communism and Black Nationalism as they intersect with the lived experience of Black Americans. From the angle of identity and invisibility, Ruland and Bradbury (1992) read the novel as an existential absurdist work arguing that the narrator's invisibility makes him morally invisible to society.

Similarly, Vanspanckeren (1994) sees invisibility in the novel as a product of other's prejudices rather than a personal flaw. Al-Nuaimi and Mustafa (2022) describe the novel as a story of how African Americans have lost their identity and how they might regain it through struggle. Hersey (1974) shifts the focus to power politics. He argues that white society used its absolute power to dominate Black people and deny their humanity, compelling them to develop a sense of human values to survive. Taoutaou (2016) investigates the hidden injuries of racism in the novel, explaining the difficulties that African Americans tolerated because of white stereotypes. All these critics agree on the novel's engagement with identity, invisibility and racial oppression while their reading remains largely philosophical, social or psychological. Scholars working closer to a cultural and historical approach such as Houmat and Mansouri (2017) and Melia and Labeled (2023) have examined the novel's rich use of Black folklore, symbolism and metaphor as means for representing the cultural and psychological realities of African Americans. Bhurtel (2010) has introduced the concept of internalized racism arguing that the narrator has subconsciously started to believe the negative ideas and prejudices that his oppressors hold against him. These readings all agree toward the novel's capacity to reflect history, but few have pursued that argument through the proper theoretical lens of New Historicism.

Kattel (2009) and Haugen (2011) come closest to a historically grounded reading, but neither deploys New Historicist theory in detail. The present article intends to fill this gap, using the perspective of Greenblatt and Foucault to show how the novel's fictional world is inseparable from the socio- historical condition of its contemporary time . It also explains how the story's characters and events do not just copy the power dynamics of mid-twentieth century America, they also criticize them and, at the end, challenge and overturn them.

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the following research questions have been addressed:

- What socio-economic, political and cultural events in the novel reflect the historical realities of Black American life?
- In what ways do the characters of novel function as historically grounded social types rather than purely fictional constructs?
- How does the novel, as a literary text, both reproduce and challenge the power structures of its historical moment?

Methodology

This study has adopted a qualitative approach, employing deep textual analysis of *Invisible Man* through the lens of New Historicism. This method practices 'Parallel Reading, treating the novel and historical records as equal authorities in understanding the cultural climate of that time, as suggested by New historicists.

New Historicism, as developed by Greenblatt (1980) and shaped by thought of Foucault (1978), argues that a literary text cannot be read in isolation from the social, political and cultural forces that produce it. Unlike traditional historicism which treats history as a rigid background against which literature can be interpreted, New Historicism sees history as a form of text which is constructed, partial and always shaped by power relations. As Greenblatt (1980) argued in *Renaissance Self-fashioning*, literature is not a mere reflection of history, but is an active participant in the circulation of social energy, shaped by time and in turn reshaping the culture that reads it.

Foucault's contribution to New Historicism is his analysis of power. For Foucault (1978), power is not simply repressive or top to down. It is everywhere and dispersed through institutions, discourses and everyday practices. The novel, as an object created by culture, is a space where power is exercised and where we can imagine ways to resist that power. This study uses Greenblatt's (1980) idea of self-fashioning, which is how people create their identities by either following or fighting social rules or Foucault's (1978) study of power. It uses these ideas to look at the characters and events of *Invisible Man* as groups of people and events that are deeply shaped by the history and society around them.

The methodological approach first tries to identify selected moments, scenes, dialogues and characters from the text. After that, it relates them with the documented socio- historical conditions of Black American life in mid-twentieth

America. The aim is not to limit the novel to only historical representation, but to show how its literary form and historical content constructed through each other.

Findings of the Study

This section presents the findings of the study, arranged around the novel's central characters, symbols and critical events. Each subsection identifies a specific moment in the text and situates it within the documented socio- historical conditions of Black American life during mid-twentieth century.

Invisibility as Historical Condition

The novel starts with the narrator's significant declaration: "I am an *Invisible Man*. . . I am invisible; understand, simply because people refuse to see me" (Ellison, 1952, p. 3). This invisibility is not supposed to be taken as a metaphor. It is an in-depth picture of life for Black Americans. The society was built on white dominance. The racial discrimination during mid-twentieth century America was very much. Biased rules did not allow Black people to live respectfully as unique individuals. The social order did not give them their own social perspective or personal lives. The narrator is not invisible because of his own mistake. His condition is a continuation of a deep historical wound. The injury came from centuries of slavery and segregation. It was the result of being systematically kept out of society. The exclusion was a direct part of American history.

New Historicism insists that the meaning of a text is not contained within its words alone but is produced through the interaction between the text and the historical condition of its time. The narrator's invisibility gains its full force only when we look at history. We must look at the real lives of Black Americans after the Reconstruction era. During those years, they lost the right to vote and were kept out of economic activities. Their culture was also intentionally ignored. The novel makes the reader feel what it is like to be ignored. It places reader inside the experience of being unseen to the world.

The Grandfather's Deathbed Advice: History Speaking

One of the most charged moments in the novel occurs at the grandfather's deathbed. The old man, himself a product of the post Reconstruction era, whispers to the narrator: "Son, after I'm gone I want you to keep up the good fight. . . our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country" (Ellison, 1952, p. 13) . These words are not simply a narrative device. They compress within them an entire history of strategic survival under racial domination. The grandfather represents an older generation of Black Americans. These people learned through hard and painful experiences that open resistance will be punished. For survival, they had to pretend to follow the rules of a racist society. The grandfather advises the narrator to pretend to agree with the people in power while secretly working against them. This was a real strategy used by many Black American people in history to survive a dangerous world. Initially, the narrator does not fully understand his grandfather's words. He keeps the advice as a confusing secret. When he sees the death of his friend, Tod Clifton, only then he finally understands what his grandfather truly meant.

Power Structures: Dr. Bledsoe and Mr. Norton

Foucault argued that power is not something a person can own. In fact, it flows through the rules and systems of institutions. The power creates people who carry it out and are also limited by it. The characters of Dr. Bledsoe and Mr. Norton show this idea very clearly. Mr. Norton, the white trustee of the narrator's college, speaks warmly of his commitment to Black education. But his relationship with the narrator reveals the controlling system beneath white charity in early twentieth century America. He tells the narrator: "I am a new Englander, like Emerson. . . I had a feeling that your people were somehow connected with my destiny. That what happened to you was connected with what would happen to me" (Ellison, 1952, p. 31). In this statement, the Black student is not an individual, but just a tool for the white benefactor's own self-image. Mr. Norton says he is a New Englander "like Emerson." Ralph Waldo Emerson was a famous writer and thinker from New England who always advocated for social reformation and supported Black people in their cause. By saying this, Mr. Norton is trying to connect himself to Emerson's height for being wise, educated and morally good. He wants to sound like a thoughtful and progressive person. However, his actions still show a controlling attitude toward Black students. This pattern appears often in the history of black education in America.

Dr. Bledsoe is perhaps the most disturbing figure. As a Black president of the college, he occupies a position of apparent authority within the Black community. But his authority is entirely dependent on the grace of white power. He expresses this feeling when he tells the narrator: "Negroes don't control this school or much of anything else. . . This is a power set-up son, and I'm at the controls. You think about that. When you buck against me, you're bucking against power, rich white folk's power, the nation's power" (Ellison, 1952, p. 111). Bledsoe is a man who has rules of a racist system. He then has weaponised it for personal advancement. In New Historicist term, he is a place where power copies itself. It does so through people it claims it has lifted up.

Tod Clifton and Lucius Brockway: Expendability as Historical Fact

The deaths and erasures of Black men in position of aspiration are central to the novel's historical argument. Tod Clifton , a young and brilliant leader of the Brotherhood, is shot by a police officer in Harlem. The narrator tributes him simply: "His name was Clifton and he was black and they shot him. Isn't that enough to tell?" (Ellison, 1952, p. 352). This is not only grief. It is a historical criticism. The extra-judicial killing of Black men by agents of the white state was a defining feature of American racial life in the mid-twentieth century. Clifton's death is obviously fictional. But the way he died is something more meaningful than just fiction.

Lucius Brockway is an elderly Black worker at Liberty Paints. His character provides another dimension of the historical analysis. He is the man whose skill and knowledge keeps the paint factory running smoothly. Literally, he is the hidden backbone of white corporate success. But he receives no admiration. He is easily disposed of. His story mirrors the brief history of Black American labour. They are essential and skilled, however, always deprived of credit, compensation and dignity. They are always marginalized.

Mary Rambo and the Strength of Black Community

The world presented in the novel is full of exploitation and betrayal. But Mary Rambo stands as an extraordinary historical figure. After the narrator is injured in the paint factory explosion, Mary takes care of him. She feeds him and provides him a place to recover without any charge and even without any condition. She represents a communal ethic of care and unity. This ethic helped Black American community during long period of hardship. It is a tradition of people helping each other that Black history scholars have extensively written about. What makes Mary's character so important and worthy from a New Historicist angle is that the narrator ultimately betrays her despite her selfless service. He does this when he joins the Brotherhood and tries to move up in the world. This betrayal reflects a repeated historical problem within Black American community. It is the conflict between helping the group survive and getting ahead as an individual. It also shows how political groups and movements have often copied the very systems of power they said they were fighting against. This is true even for groups that claimed to work for Black liberation.

Migration, Memory and Cultural Continuity

The novel moves from the rural South to New York City and to Harlem. This movement matches on of the significant demographic events in American History. The event is what historians call the great migration. Ellison's narrator makes the same journey that millions of other Black Americans also made. They were all seeking freedom and a better life with more opportunity in the urban North. But the novel refuses to make this journey as sweet, simple and romantic. In Harlem, the narrator witnesses a dispossession and is overwhelmed by the many cultural objects that are scattered all across the street. These objects include old letters that people once wrote, free papers from the state of Georgia and knocking bones used at country dances. He experiences these fragments of Southern Black life as being both very precious and very painful at the same time. They feel to him like "a rotten tooth that one would rather suffer indefinitely than endure the short violent eruption of pain that would mark its removal" (Ellison, 1952, p. 211). The narrator is confused about how to feel about his past. Remembering it results in deep pain, but he needs to do it. These hard memories are part of who he actually is even if they remind him of how society took away his rights.

This moment is one of the most quietly devastating moments of the whole novel. It captures the experience of cultural displacement that came along with migration. That displacement is the sense of carrying a history with you. That history is both essential to who you are and impossible to hold onto in the new urban world. The cultural objects lying in the Harlem Street are not just objects for a scene. They are historical witnesses. They are scattered parts of a life that the economic and racial order of America has tried to destroy.

Discussion

Reading *Invisible Man* through New Historicism reveals that the text is packed with real history. Along with using imagination, it acts as a deliberate historical archive of mid-20th century Black American life. New Historicism, as articulated by Greenblatt (1980) and shaped by Foucault's (1978) theories of power and discourse, argues that literature and history shape each other. Ellison's novel shows this idea clearly. The narrator's journey from getting kicked out of a southern college to leaving a political group in Harlem is not just fictional drama. It directly mirrors real historical events and patterns. Early critics like Bellow (1952) and Howe (1952) praised the book for its accurate use of Black culture and life experience. However, New Historicism goes beyond praising the writing style to show how that accuracy actually works. Ellison actively reshaped history through his storytelling. He actively rewrote real life racial oppression like controlling northern charity, manipulated Black leadership, ignored Black labor and state violence in a powerful narration. Ellison has forced readers to see the hidden power dynamics that official history books leave out.

The narrator admits at the very first scene of the novel: "Nor is my invisibility exactly a matter of bio-chemical accident to my epidermis. That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar deposition of the eyes of those with whom I came in contact" (Ellison, 1952, p. 3). The speaker's invisibility is not physical as his skin and body are completely real and visible. In fact, he is invisible because other people refuse to see him due to their own prejudices, biases and mindsets. This matches Vanspankeren's (1994) argument that the narrator is invisible not because he lacks substances. It is simply because others are blinded by bias and cannot see him for who he truly is. Ruland and Bradbury (1992) argue that this invisibility is not only social but moral. Because he is Black, other people refuse to recognize that he also has feelings, choices and the ability to make meaningful ethical decisions. He is treated as if his existence does not matter morally.

Greenblatt's (1980) concept of self-fashioning is very helpful for understanding this novel. The narrator spends his whole journey trying to build a self for himself. He uses whatever options society gives him. He tries being a diligent student, a loyal member of the Brotherhood, a respectable person living in Harlem. But each attempt fails as the society

refuses to see him as capable of authentic self-definition. At one depressed point, he even realizes that the men who claim to help him; Norton, Emerson and Jack are all having same nature to him: "Jack and Norton and Emerson merge into one single white figure.....I was simply a material, a natural resource to be used" (Ellison, 1952, p. 393-394). This line shows exactly what Greenblatt (1980) means when he says people do not form their identity freely. In fact, they are shaped and often used by power structure around them. Muhammad (2017) analyzes the novel as psychological journey of narrator from ignorance to enlighten. But New Historicist reading argues that the narrator's awakening is not achieved through his own effort. Instead it is forced upon him by the harsh realities of life. All the white men who claimed to help him ultimately treated him as a tool to be used. They all were part of white supremacy that kept the narrator invisible and powerless.

Foucault's (1978) analysis of power adds another layer to the reading. In this novel, power is not in just one place, but everywhere. It is in the college, in the paint factory, in the Brotherhood. And the key point is that power does not work only by openly oppressing people or forcing them to obey. It also works through more subtle method: inclusion and manipulation. The Brotherhood makes this clearer. When the narrator asks about the methods, Brother Jack tells him plainly: "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!" (Ellison, 1952, p. 365). This is Foucault's (1978) idea of power in its purest form. An organisation that claims to represent people actually denies their real voice. The Brotherhood appears to offer the narrator sense of purpose and recognition. But the organisation ends up reducing him to just one tiny part of its own political plan. The organisation uses him as a symbol of Black legitimacy but refuses to give any real control or genuine power. This matches High's (1997) point that the narrator is made invisible by other's refusal to see him rather than anything missing in himself. And Hersey (1974) also interprets the novel as a result of power politics arguing that white institutions and society used absolute power to dominate Black people and denied their humanity.

The novel also tells us something important about history. History is not just a quite background that never changes. People are always fighting over what really happened and they keep on reconstructing history from their perspective. The narrator's grandfather gives him advice that sounds like surrender, but in reality it is a hidden way of fighting back. Late in the novel, the narrator finally decides to test that advice for himself: "I didn't know what my grandfather had meant. . . . I'd agree them to death and destruction" (Ellison, 1952, p.394). In this regard, Al- Nuaimi and Mustafa (2022) opine that the novel shows how African Americans have lost their identity and how they might regain it through struggle. The narrator's final decision to emerge from hibernation is not surrender but an attempt to recover identity through resistance. This moment turns the grandfather's secret words into perfect strategy of resistance. It is not preserved by official history but is done by the novel. In this sense, *Invisible Man* exactly brings back the stories of people that traditional history has ignored, left out or misread. It also extends the historically grounded reading of Kattel (2009) and Haugen (2011). Kattel reads the novel as quest for black identity, and Haugen examines it through the lens of race as a social issue. Both recognize the novel's engagement with Black American experience but they treat history largely as background context. Whereas a New Historicist reading shows that the novel actively recovers and re-textualizes history rather than merely reflecting it.

It is also worth noting what New Historicism helps us see about the novel's deeper symbols. The Liberty Paints factory, where the narrator works, makes paint called Optic White sold under the slogan, "If it's Optic White, it's the Right White" (Ellison, 1952, p. 168). This is the purest white you can get. But that is achieved paradoxically only by adding a few drops of black pigment that disappears into the mixture. This is not just weird, dreamlike imagery. It is a New Historicist picture of how the dominant culture swallows up and erases the very work and presence that keeps it going. Black contribution is made invisible at the exact moment it becomes essential and the company slogan turns that erasure into something to be proud of. Similarly, Lucius Brockway is an elderly black worker whose technical skill runs the entire factory. He proudly speaks, "Without what I do they couldn't do nothing, they be making bricks without straw" (Ellison, 1952, p. 166). Yet he receives no recognition, dignity and economic guarantee. He is the hidden backbone of White corporate success, but easily replaces and forgotten. Tod Clifton's death, "His name was Clifton and he was young and he was leader.... So he died;" (Ellison, 1952, p. 352), is not just a fictional tragedy but historical evidence that represents the unjust killing and erasure of Black people by white authority. Here, Taoutaou (2016) investigates the hidden injuries of racism, illustrating the difficulties that African Americans endured because of white assumptions. Clifton is killed because the police officer refused to see him as an individual. Similarly, Brockway's unrecognized labor shows how Black workers are exploited and erased. They are essential yet invisible. All characters and incidents work as both a piece of storytelling and a historical record. It captures the logic of social erasure that shaped Black American life all through the twentieth century. And this is the logic that Houmat and Mansouri (2017) and Melia and Labed (2023) also identify in the novel's wider use of Black Folklore and symbolism. Tod Clifton's death as Muhammad (2017) and High (1997) argue, is the ultimate refusal of society to see Black men as fully human. Bhurtel (2010) sees the death as culmination of internalized racism. Larson (2023) points out that Ellison uses irony to expose political hypocrisy of Brotherhood in condemning Clifton as traitor while ignoring police violence. Similarly, Kattel (2009) and Haugen (2011) place Brockway in the historical context of the Great Migration, a Black worker exploited within industrial capitalism.

Equally significant is the character of Mary Rambo who represents the symbol of real historical tradition of Black communal care and mutual aid counterbalancing all institutional exploitations. During injury period, she offers the narrator food and shelter without any charge. She represents the informal network of survival that sustained black communities during great migration. What makes Mary significant from New Historicist perspective is that the narrator eventually betrays her when he joins the Brotherhood. He admits: "I couldn't return to Mary's or any part of my old life" (Ellison,

1952, p. 443). This betrayal represents a reoccurring historical tension within Black political movement; the conflict between communal solidarity and individual ambition. Mary represents what Kattel (2009) and Muhammad (2017) identify as the communal foundation of Black identity. Yet, she also embodies the historical reality that Haugen (2011) documented as the informal networks of survival that sustained Black communities during Great Migration. However, Bhurtel (2010) suggests that the narrator's rejection of Mary reflects a deeper structural pressure that demands cut off of individuals with their origin communities for the progress within white dominated institutions. From Greenblatt's (1980) concept of self-fashioning, the rejection of Mary by the narrator is not a personal failure but a structural pressure.

The cultural displacement is powerfully dramatized in the dispossession scene, where the narrator sees the possessions of an elderly Black couple scattered in to the Harlem street. Those things are precious and painful for the narrator since they represent southern Black life. The narrator experiences: "And it was as though I myself being dispossessed of some painful yet precious things which I could not bear to lose" (Ellison, 1952, p. 211). The scattered objects are not background props, but the actual pieces of Black history and culture. Throwing these items into Harlem Street shows how painful moving north was for Black people. These people carried a history crucial to their identity. Yet, they could not keep it alive in the northern city. Looking at this scene through critics like Greenblatt (1980) and Foucault (1978), the novel not only shows historical loss, but also uncovers history that official records ignore. Foucault (1978) argued that official history is shaped by power and those in control decide what gets recorded and what gets erased. The scattered items show how state power intentionally tries to erase uncomfortable historical truths. Greenblatt (1980) showed that literature does not passively reflect history. Rather, it actively interacts with cultural artefacts and forgotten records to challenge dominant ideas (Bist & Kandel, 2026). By bringing these forgotten items to the center of the story, Ellison did what official history failed to do. He restored lost voices and created a counter-history that challenges the standard American story of endless progress.

Conclusion

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is far more than a novel about one man's search for identity. On reading it through the lens of New Historicism, it reveals itself as a literary archive of Black American Experience. It is a text that holds within it the socio-economic, political and cultural realities of African American life in mid-twentieth century. Its characters are not merely fictional; they represent real types of people from history. The events are not just invented; they are fictional versions of real patterns of racial oppression, resistance and survival that actually happened. The grandfather who advised pretending to go along with the system, the wealthy donor who confuses charity with genuine solidarity, the Black college president who serves white power to protect his own position, the young activist killed too young; each of these figures has a real life counterpart in the documented history of Black America. Ellison's brilliance was to bring them all together into single narrative and show how they are connected, how the power structures that shape each of their lives are the same structures, operating at different levels and through different mechanisms. New Historicism teaches us that literature and history are not separate realms but mutually constitutive discourses. Ellison knew it intuitively and wrote a novel that shows this idea on every single page. *Invisible Man* is at the same time a work of art and a work of history. Its lasting power comes from the fact that it does not allow to let us forget that the two cannot be pulled apart. What makes the novel so remarkable, from a New Historicist perspective, is not just that it reflects the conditions of its time. Many novels do that. What is special is that it actively textualises history. It makes visible the power relations that official history usually tries to smooth over or hide completely. As Montrose argued, New Historicism cares about the historicity of texts- meaning texts are always products of their time and the textuality of history- meaning history is always written down and shaped by someone's point of view. *Invisible Man* is a perfect example of both. It is a fictional story blended with historical truth. It also contributes to the ongoing work of building and understanding what Black American history really was. As long as question of race, power and identity stay alive; and they certainly do, Ellison's *Invisible Man* continues to speak and the history he carries with him keeps on asking to be read.

This study has argued that reading the novel carefully through a New Historicist lens opens up new ways of understanding it. These new ways compliment and extend the older critical approaches that focused mainly on identity, existential questions and creative storytelling techniques. Future researchers might usefully look at other works by Ellison through the same lens, including essay collections *Shadow and Act* and *Going to the Territory*. Scholars can trace how his non-fiction writing also takes part in the same project of showing Black American experience as something shaped by history. Similarly, New Historicist reading might also be applied in productive ways to other works of African American literature from the same time period. Examples include James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*. These novels also build into their fictional worlds the contested power structures of the historical moment in which they were written.

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