

Ralph Ellison's "Call" Text *Invisible Man*: Parodies of and Ramifications from Black Male Hatred in African American Women's "Response" Texts

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Abstract. This essay explores the transhistorical problems of castration experienced by African American males owing to white patriarchy and their Virginia Slave Laws of 1662 and 1669. The key scenes fixing *Invisible Man*'s lack of African Gnostic survival knowledge involve the grandfather's speech, the Trueblood scene, and the New York building burning episode. Especially in terms of IM's self-loathing and in-turn hatred of black women owing to Norton's public castration of him, black female authors Sonia Sanchez in her 1968 play "The Bronx is Next" and Denzy Senna in her 2004 novel *Symptomatic* expose how IM's Black Atlantic fractured psyche carry over to expose how and why black males rejection African American women of pure or mixed race as love interests or sexual partners. Always IM's problems and those of parodied representations hearken back to slavery and the Virginia Laws of 1662 forbidding miscegenation and of 1669 "killing off" black male power intended by the Norton-type early white patriarchs and legislators.

Keywords. Virginia Slave Laws of 1662 and 1669; miscegenation; the castration of black males as patriarch of the family; female headed households; the one-drop color rule; black female sexuality; mammy figures; jezebel whores; black male stud imagery; racism and sexism; oratory.

Ralph Ellison's 1952 modernist novel *Invisible Man* is widely conceived by scholars, teachers, and writers as a seminal work owing to its eclectic nature and metanarrative statements about the holocaust slave and post-slave experiences of Black Atlantic people in America from 1619 to 1950. The novel's micro-fragmented and then macro-developed expressions of its interdisciplinary themes have induced black writers since the 1960s to parody Ellison's work similar to the "call" and "response" traditions in African culture as articulated by Robert Stepto in *From Behind the Veil* (4-9). Ellison's



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three-part novel consisting of a “Prologue,” 25-chapter “Tale,” and “Epilogue” are reminiscent of the format used by slave narrativists such as the African Olaudah Equiano in 1789 and the African American Frederick Douglass in 1845 to relate their journeys from slavery to freedom. Ellison’s first-person narrator is no exception, but merely refreshes the slave narrative in its post-emancipation format of a neo-slave account with its transhistorical messagings about the continuing struggles of African Americans to obtain equal rights in America. For that matter, Ellison’s Chapter 1 that presents the micro-themes has especially attracted black writers as far back as the 1960s/70s to contemporary writers from 2000 onward. They have chosen to rescript *Invisible Man* and to upgrade its arguments in light of current claims that we, in the twenty-first century, are living in a “post-racial” world. Yet, many contemporary writers, and especially black women writers, have continued to reject the “post-racial” arguments, and have used *Invisible Man* as a mechanism to elucidate, by means of parody, the transhistorical resilient nature of American prejudice in both of its domestic and transnational contexts. For example, the grandfather’s trickster slave wit in Chapter 1 conflicts with his meek demeanor during his brief cameo appearance, and speaks to the necessity of slaves to playact before the master in order to survive. New World Africans and their African American descendents continued to pass down Nommo-type, spoken-word cautionary tales to their families for over three hundred years. However, there is a break in the oral tradition in the grandfather’s own genealogy: his second generation nameless son fails to perform his duty of passing on such African/African American gnostic knowledge about survival to his direct-descendent son Invisible Man (IM). That genealogical break in communication between the first-generation African American grandfather and his third-

generation grandson is what Homi Bhabha calls the interstice of “hybridity” (2; 37). A “black hole” of lost history has opened up at the second-generation level which the slavemasters created through their legislative acts of the lethal Virginia Slave Laws of 1662 and 1669 that hybridized, minimized, and/or “killed off” the African father-son traditions which guaranteed the generational continuity of gnostic knowledge--the heart of IM’s ontological problems of knowing how to be a “man.”

However, another question is, how do African American women successfully partner with their victimized black male spouses—legal or illegal? Other black writers have noted this key rift in the black family structure because of the malfunctioning of the second-generation father to perform his manhood duties. The latter transformation is significant because, in recreating dramatic or novelistic “response” parodies or intertextual repetitionings of Ellison’s “call” text, black women writers have, too, focused on *Invisible Man* in order to explicate the twentieth-century, Du Boisian “color line” problem as a twenty-first century on-going, racial matter still plaguing African American women (Du Bois 13). In Ellison’s representation of the Gilroy-type, Black Atlantic identity problems of IM, the grandfather’s Chapter 1, deathbed decree and then Trueblood’s Chapter 2, incest confessional both serve as prototypical scenes around which writers Sonia Sanchez in her 1968 play “The Bronx is Next” and Danzy Senna in her 2004 novel *Symptomatic* have parodied, inclusive of the New York sequences of IM’s life. Sanchez and Senna, in some form or another, “signify upon” the grandfather and Trueblood’ scenes in order to determine why, on the one hand, African American males from 1619 to the present day have been “erased” as formidable heads of their households or community groups, but then, on the other hand, why they have contradictorily targeted

black women as their enemies by rejecting them as their first-choice love or sexual mates. Sanchez and Senna expose the reasons for black males having difficulties of “manning up” as the saviors of black women because they are still hampered by transhistorical, white patriarchal legal discourse.

Most importantly, these two black women writers identify how African American women, particularly those of mixed-race heritage, have not only learned to cope as dual victims of racism and sexism but have also become economically self-reliant in the process. The monetary factor does not bode happy endings for these women, however. Ultimately, America’s white patriarchally-governed, Virginia Slave Laws of 1662 and 1669 still have transhistorical power not only literally or figuratively to “kill off” rebellious black males, but also economically-progressive “black” or “mixed-raced” African American women who cross over or “pass into” the white world.

“The Call Text”

In Robert Stepto’s investigation of the slave narrative genre in *From Behind the Veil* (4-9), the author has identified its structural matter by isolating four different formats. Two subgroups form Phase III. Stepto classifies Phase IIIa as a “Generic Narrative” because the basic slave narrative format “becomes an identifiable generic text, e.g. autobiography.” The first-person narrative voicing makes that genre clear, but the work also embraces another generic type which Stepto classifies as Phase IIIb--the “Authenticating Narrative.” This latter category is when the autobiography mutates into other genres such as the “novel, the “history,” or the essay” (5). These four, Phase III types can be construed as the “wingless” versions of the slave narrative, for Ellison’s work certainly does encompass “all of the above” general forms: it is a first-person

autobiography, a fictional work, a history of African American culture, and a literary essay by its stock, three-part layout of an “Introduction,” “Body,” and “Conclusion.” The four genres and/or disciplines—autobiography, novel, history, or essay--all reflect the eclectic nature of the slave/neo-slave genres. In Ellison’s 25-chapter “Body” or midsection of *Invisible Man*, he has incorporated the typical main section allotted to the “Tale” in the slave narrative that covers IM’s journey from neo-slavery in 1930 to gnostic freedom in 1950.

Still, this autobiography, novel, history, and/or essay additionally embraces the other forms described by Stepto in his identification of four styles of slave narratives. For instance, *Invisible Man* also dons the guise of Stepto’s category for a Phase IIb, “Integrated Narrative” that often has external “wings” of a third-party “Preface” and possibly a first-person or third-party “Appendix.” Ellison’s “Prologue” and “Epilogue” appear to have taken on these features. However, in this integrated style, the important authenticating matter is embedded within the midsection “Body” called the “Tale,” and the external authenticators function only secondarily to that of the slave narrator. Ellison again validates this point, for his Chapter 1 provides the cohesive narrative frames that appear to be senseless in the “Prologue.” Finally, *Invisible Man* most definitely fits Stepto’s category for a Phase Ia, basic or “Eclectic Narrative” in which “the authenticating documents and strategies (sometimes including one by the author of the tale) are *appended* to the tale” (5). This is especially significant as far as the “Epilogue” and IM’s decision to leave his underground hole after fifteen years.

An example of Stepto’s four, “winged” or “wingless” types of slave narratives is Frederick Douglass’s shapeshifting 1855 second autobiography *My Bondage and My*

Freedom. He has replaced the two white authenticators of William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips who dominated the prefatory matter to Douglass's basic or "Eclectic" first, 1845 *Narrative* with James M'Cune Smith as his sole authenticator (*Bondage* 9-25). As an ex-slave, sophisticated endorser at the "Preface," he does not overshadow Douglass's once 80 page "Tale" which now has swollen to 298 pages. Moreover, to illustrate Douglass's self-control over his text, his former "Appendix" consisting of one satirical poem now is comprised of five of Douglass's own pre-published speeches. Without doubt, Douglass's "word" as a well-traveled and globally-conscious "cosmopolitan" is the overriding testament of "truth" in the "Tale" and the "Appendices." This is why *Invisible Man*, a neo-slave narrative published in 1952, is just a temporal upgrade of the antebellum form. The orality of the text, most often common for illiterate slaves, is significant because of the confessor's lack of written literacy skills, but more importantly, because of its repetition of an African tradition. As Alisa Alkebulan remarks in her explication of the African Egyptian concept of "Nommo, " God passed down the power of the "spoken-word" "life-force" to *mntu* or humankind (28). He also empowered humankind to pass on this Nommo, spoken-word, life-force from one person to another—thereby giving the power of utterance to African people in order to insure the immortality and survival of oral-speaking African culture.

This Nommo, spoken-word life-force defines IM's character in the "winged" introductory-"Prologue" and conclusion-"Epilogue" sections. Like Douglas's 1855 oratory speeches in his Appendices, the grandfather's "Nommo" life-empowering words *should* inspire young IM's character on how to be a dissembling male revolutionary—but it does not. IM the young adult misses the main point about how the African speech act

can become a revolutionary tool. This is another point which Ellison is making about his spoken-word text, and speech-driven male hero. Elements of African gnostic life and traditions infuse the work, and are most obviously traceable to the Br'er Rabbit references. Folklorists have identified him as Kululah the African rabbit before captive African slaves brought the folktale with them to the New World, and the rabbit, like the slaves, was given another name of Anansie in the Caribbean and then Br'er Rabbit in America (Juba video). Ellison, too, has adapted Douglass the rebel's rhetorical techniques in his 1855 oratory-oriented, "Eclectic Narrative" that now is replete with Douglassian-type remarks about Africa, the West Indies, Europe, and America during his assaults on European-American "man-stealing" slaveowners. Ellison is precise in "signifying upon" the slave narrative traditions and Frederick Douglass as the subject matter of and/or format for *Invisible Man*. However, temporal differences are deliberately pronounced in the 1952 neo-slave narrative/novel. The author Ellison deliberately situates the 25-chapter "Tale" concerning the young adult's "Past" which dates from 1930 – 1935 between the Present-time, 1950 "Prologue" and "Epilogue" that concern the fifteen-year hibernation of the older adult, underground stowaway. Narratologically, the nameless hero engages in weakened or strong orations throughout the 25 chapters. He starts to elaborate more fully upon those claims which initially were stated fragmentarily and/or erratically in the "Prologue" and partially in Chapter 1. In the process of his maturation those references become more coherently-linked into expanded episodes because of the progressions of the "Tale" chapters and its link to the "Epilogue."

Following the slave narrative traditions, IM's "Tale" is a journey from mental enslavement to mental freedom, for it explains how and why he, the Present-time

narrator, sits in a hole beneath the streets of Harlem, New York, for fifteen years while wailing Louis Armstrong's blues piece "What did I do to be so Black and Blue?" He has been trying to figure out a solution to the "Negro Problem" of American neo-slavery. This problem solving is his own manhood test as a race leader, and he chooses not to emerge permanently from his hiding place until he has found the solution—which still remains unstated to the reader at the novel's conclusion. The Present-time narrator of the 1950s who is about to emerge from his hole is different from the culturally-dense, nameless hero of the 1930s, whose 25-chapter Past-time sequences illuminate him as an educated, but culturally-obtuse, Paul Gilroy-type Black Atlantic. He is completely blind-sighted and/or ignorant about African/African-American "gnostic" truths regarding America's eradication of African manhood traditions, despite overt signs of its effects still inscribing his neo-slave birth and growth in Alabama—a lynching state (Mudime x-xi; Gilroy 12; 15).

Why? Take the lethal effects of the Virginia Slave Laws of 1662 and 1669 still at work in erasing black masculinity. The grandfather's deathbed commandment in Chapter 1 and the Trueblood's confessional in Chapter 2 are two of the most significant scenes in *Invisible Man*. The setting is the South, hypothetically Tuskegee, Alabama, and temporally grounded in the 1930s era that is still shaped by the post-Reconstruction pandemic lynchings of black Americans and the 1896 ruling of Plessy vs. Ferguson mandating *de jure* segregation of blacks from whites known as "Jim Crowism." The first scene reflects the damaging effects of European-American slavery, and the reconstitution of African slaves into what Paul Gilroy calls "Black Atlantics" with fractured minds owing to their being suddenly torn from their homes in Africa and being mandated to

forget its traditions (12; 15). On American soil, the slavemasters some forty years after 1619 and the arrival of the first Africans at Jamestown, Virginia, very quickly put into effect the Virginia Slave Law of 1662 that changed forever the patriarchally-defined African, gnostic family structure into a matrifocally-headed household (*Heath* 14). African children of pure or mixed race or their African American descendants born to the slave mother must now re-formulate their identities according to western rules that have rescripted them as matrilineally-coded, nontribal individuals. This British Colonial American law abolished the thousand-year-old African gnostic practice of persons automatically being born into a known collective, tribal identity with a traceable patrilineal heritage. It also immediately fostered uncertainty and indeterminacy of heritage, since rape victim slave mothers were lawfully unable to name any white man as the father of their children. This Virginia Slave Law of 1662 set in place the ontological conditions either disabling or weakening the black male husband and/or father figure as head of household. It also caused identity problems for the affected children. The case of Douglass is the classic example of how this rule impacted or has continued to impact pure or mixed-race “Negro” children. He opens his slave narrative on the question of paternity and the indeterminacy of genealogy owing to his biological link to an unnamed white father (*Narrative* 12).

The second Virginia Slave Law of 1669 totally erased, muted, or “killed off” the black male’s power to govern his household within the house or from a distanced location. This law enabled the master or his/her agent to “kill off” with impunity any rebellious slave. Basically, it permitted the slaveowner to murder his “estate” or “chattel property” and escape prosecution (*Heath* 14). Such white male power allowed the

slaveowner to destroy the power of the African patriarch over his household as well as to annihilate any rebellious slave on the spot such as the master's killing of his slave James as reported by Harriet Jacobs in her 1861 slave narrative (48-49). One has to recall that British Colonial America was founded on the principals of European epistemological theories defining one's citizenship in society. The master-slave hierarchical roles were defined very early by Aristotle in his 350 B.C. publication "On Natural Slavery." In it, he identifies leaders as those few who are ruled by their "minds" or "souls" and, in the lower rank, those masses of people who are ruled by their lower-order "bodies" (117-18). Once Columbus sailed around West Africa during his explorations from 1498-1500, he set in place the racialization of Aristotle's master-slave, mind-body philosophy to justify European imperialism, conquest of the Americas, and enslavement of Africans. From ancient times, Native Americans peopled the Americas and Africans remained on the mainland before Columbus's explorations changed history (Columbus 128-21). Once he discovered and publicized the wealth abounding in the Americas, European mercenary kings and queens acted quickly to seize the treasures (Rubio 114-15). It was merely two years later in 1502 that Europeans removed captive Africans to "Hispanola"—now Haiti/the Dominican Republic—for slave labor (Conniff 72). Columbus inaugurated the model for European capitalistic greed and aggression, and England was no exception in applying Aristotle's mind-body theories at its holdings in Virginia/British Colonial America.

Thus, in the Chapter 1, father-son scene, the grandfather plays a key role in showing the wreckage to the African/African American patriarchal-to-transformed matriarchal governed family owing to the Virginia Slave Laws of 1662 and 1669. On the

one hand, there immediately seems to be a contradiction, for there are still three living black males in IMs family in the opening scene, for wives and children had little or no vocal power. What then does this scene mean? It means that Aristotle's mind/body theories, later taken up and expanded by John Locke in his 1695 "Essay on Human Understanding" are at play. Locke, too, defined the body as the lower order driven by its Sensations, which send signals to the mind. He also argues that at birth, one's mind is a "tableaux rasa"—a blank sheet—which translates, organizes, and classifies the signals of the body. Repeated acts become "experience," and over time alert us to "good" or "bad" actions (635-36). One can say that the grandfather's scene with IM is a Lockean example. IM, while a high school student, is infantilistic, a mental blank sheet, and culturally ignorant about his racial heritage. The episodic events following the grandfather's deathbed decree become IM's "learned experiences" as each of his bungling acts by accretion become experiences for him to classify into modes of practical knowledge—just as the grandfather had learned. But the Virginia Slave Laws of 1662 and 1669 have created problems in IM's family—despite the grandfather's safeguarding. The African gnostic principles which he inherited from relatives have only been fragmentarily recalled or erased in America; a "tableaux rasa" exists in the grandfather's slave history. There is no information about his birth, his parents, his siblings, or plantation rearings; his family history has been ruptured, fractured, and/or erased by the slavemasters. This means that the grandfather's genealogical paternal and maternal heritages are more "blank" and mysterious to him than that of Frederick Douglass. At least Douglass briefly knew his mother Harriet Bailey, even though her physical appearance according to Douglass's written and then revised slave narratives of 1845 and 1855, and then "history"

published in 1882, seem to alter, refute, and/or shapeshift with each of his re-publications. However, the most important point is that she had learned to “read”—a forbidden act, which inspired her rebel son Frederick to duplicate as well.

A fact which readers do learn from the grandfather is that he fought in the Civil War, which suggests that he was a runaway slave who joined the Union side. Somewhere along the way, he, like Frederick Douglass, learned slave or survival wit and became a cunning, Kalulu rabbit-type rebel. The African Sankofic trinity of insuring that Elders perform a Nommo ritual in order to maintain ancestral traditions and pass down oral literacy to the Present generation has been retained by the grandfather, but somehow has become lost, obscured, and/or indecipherable to his son whose obligation is to pass on such knowledge to the younger and/or future generations. The Virginia Slave Laws of 1662 and 1669 have worked effectively on the second generation son in losing his survival “wits” (Mudimbe ix-x). The elderly grandfather, on the other hand, has managed to survive the horrors of slavery and postbellum lynching rituals by following his rabbit wit and survival instinct. He has lived long enough to be aware of the other race theories circulating in society. But by being not formally-educated, however, he probably could not name all of the European and American statesmen, natural scientists, and philosophers who had invented a host of climate, biological, polygenesis, and small-brain theories to justify his enslavement after they reached their peak in popularity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These included the writings of David Hume of England (49-51); Immanuel Kant of Germany (52-53); Georges Leopold of France (54-57); and Thomas Jefferson of America (43-48). Building upon Aristotle and Locke, these leaders devised philosophies to extol the mentality and lighter skin coloring of

Caucasians as being superior to the dense intelligence and repulsive black skin colorings of Africans or the yellow or fair skin colorings of Mongolians. Even later were the theories of Josiah Nott and George Gliddon who, in 1854, just a year before Douglass published his second autobiography, released their theory of “polygenesis” in their book *Types of Mankind*, which claimed that blacks and whites were born in different temporal periods (386-90). They even included cranial sketches to prove that blacks were descendents of “apes”—a theory tauted earlier by French natural scientist Cuvier in 1797.

With these European-American race theories abounding globally in conjunction with the Virginia Slave Laws of 1662 and 1669, it is no wonder that IM’s grandfather has had to act surreptitiously like Douglass in order to plot revolution and/or devise methods to achieve “social equality.” He was drowned by a preponderance of legal, lethal laws meant to annihilate his presence. This is why Ellison, in constructing his novel, signifies upon these Aristotelian to Lockean to Jeffersonian and Nott-Gliddonian mind-body race theories claiming differences of physical characteristics between blacks and whites, in order to dismantle, corrupt, or expose the racist European-American words, images, and meanings afloat in American society which have affected the life of the grandfather and his descendents. And Ellison, in writing a modernist work, affixes and then destabilizes these markers in the text in order to denote their temporal and spatial changes between 1930 and 1950. These modernist impulses of cultural indeterminacy and fragmentation of language and meanings affiliated with the horror of World War I affected all racial and cultural conjunctions. And they are also the reasons for IM’s nameless, formless, or shapeshifting character of being transmutable and indefinable, for generally, he is identified by his race and/or age and not by his physical characteristics. Additionally,

Ellison has imbedded binary oppositions of material/immaterial; corporeal/spiritual; voice/disembodied voice; and seen/unseen symbols to illustrate that IM's amorphous black body is a white social construction, a racial perception, and a changeable illusion similar to Rinehart's self-constructed multiple characteristics. But IM the high school student must learn this himself.

On American shores, white society's determination to disassociate slaves from the human family and rank them just above the animal kingdom on the Great Chain of Being commenced immediately for the captive African slaves in 1619 and, thereafter, their first or generationally-descended African American family members. The grandfather's indefinable African ancestry proves this point. Because of the Virginia Slave Laws of 1662 and 1669 having transformed his former African foreparents into dehumanized chattel objects like tables, chairs, or animals on American shores, these black Americans by law were transformed into "invisible" non-human objects and classified as "estate" property eligible for easy disposal according to the Virginia Slave Law of 1669 (*Heath* 14). However, the grandfather, by means of his homegrown slave wit, derails in a few colloquial words these European-American racial stereotypes and meanings by seizing the master's language and transforming it into a Nommo, colloquially-spoken, life-giving, oral commandment of emancipation to his family members.

From Douglass to Richard Wright, Ellison implies that there is an African American gnostic pathway to freedom, which IM must learn in terms of cultural survival. What is needed is an African American epistemology to counteract such lethal decrees as the Virginia Slave Laws of 1662 and 1669. And declaring of such an African American gnostic tradition is what Richard Wright eventually calls for in his 1937 essay "Blueprint

for Negro Writing” (36). He points to the location of culture where African American gnostic truths as well as the means for gauging truths could be recovered in the culture of the masses. In rejecting both Aristotle’s and Locke’s western, scientific-oriented methods of knowing truth, Wright argues that knowledge can be gleaned from human experience and specifically the lower-level masses whom the Europeans associated with the lower-order body. It is to this orally-literate collective of people who have remained untarnished by bourgeoisie politics to whom Wright is pointing out as the proper, uncorrupted role model for revolutionaries. One simply has to recover and re-codify, like Douglass, those African/African-American-based oral creeds, gender definitions, and ontological traditions and recalibrate them into encoded African American counterdiscourse. And as Wright, himself a descendent of slaves, iterates, this African American site of gnostic truth, resides solely within the lower-class collective. .

In applying Wright’s theory to the domain of *Invisible Man*, that collective class would be equivalent to the lower class of IM’s grandfather who both survived and then thrived on the slave experience. And similar to the slave/ex-slave Douglass having become a practitioner of slave wit, Ellison, a student of Wright, reveals in fiction that the lack of knowing and then practicing of these African American gnostic traditions of survival are the reasons that IM becomes totally confused about his identity after the grandfather utters his deathbed edict to “yes” the white man to death until he “busts wide open” (Ellison 16). When the dying man performs this African/African American Nommo, oral ritual specifically for his son’s manhood rite, his action leaves the son and the other second-and-third generation family members reeling with fear and rushing from the room. The grandfather is specific with his last breath for the son to “Learn it to the

younguns,” which includes IM (16). But, unfortunately, the second-generation son has no trickster wit survival skills or a rebellious, masculine streak in his nature.

The reason for the second-generation son’s emasculation is obvious. It is still the 1880-1930 highly visible, Jim Crow eras of white backlash and lynching violence quite evident during IM’s graduation speech in which he accidentally utters the words “social equality” before the group of rowdy, drunken white businessmen who have asked him to repeat his high school valedictory speech. Children of ex-slaves since Reconstruction had begun to receive a modicum of education at schools racially segregated for them. Perhaps the son has acquired such formal knowledge; certainly, IM the high school student has been a benefactor of “Negro progress.” However, whites still exercise power over their lives. When IM makes a verbal slippage in phrasing before his inattentive white audience, the members freeze in silence as IM quickly adjusts his remarks to mean “social responsibility.” His is a moment of experiencing the toxicity and lethality of vengeful white power (30-31). IM’s second-generation father has grown up in this excessively violent lynching era of black male castration and has chosen not to challenge the system. Far worse, the grandfather has not had time to teach his effeminized, second-generation son on how to “man up” and beat the system by playacting and dissembling before the white master. When IM is called to task by the white businessmen, somehow he instinctively institutes some grandfather wit and feigns ignorance that his verbal slippage had been intentional. This epochal moment is IM’s first survival test. It is apparent that some portion of the grandfather’s edict to dissemble has stuck in his mind, even though IM quickly resorts afterwards to his old way of thinking that the old man’s insanely-sounding decree has become more of a curse than a blessing to him.

The lynching which IM the youth escapes at the town meeting possibly explains his adult father's character. IM's second-generation father acts spinelessly most likely because of the twinned, Virginia Slave Law of 1669, which was designed to insure the impotency of the African/American male. Not only is he not able to control his household but also he is not able to leverage control over his own life. This law has enabled any master—such as the white businessmen--or his agent with impunity to “kill off” any rebellious slave (*Heath* 14), thereby rendering the male's sexual death of being unable to propagate any dynastic or future generations. As a result, this potent 1669 law rendered the African American male—the one most often who, like Frederick Douglass, would act physically aggressive towards a slave owner, plot a slave revolt, or successfully run North to freedom—completely powerless to protect his wife, children, or relatives since he would be rendered realistically or metaphorically “dead.” The chilling, pre-lynching moment of IM's verbal slippage signifies the lethal racial climate under which IM's family has been living in 1930s Alabama. Thus, by indirection, IM's second-generation nameless father signifies by his body language of rushing everyone from the room that he has not competed for the white businessmen's accusation to IM of being a “smart Negro” and for which IM even declined. Invariably, any “Negro upstart” daring to raise his/her hand or voice against the master, even in the 1930s, would still face being “1669d.”

Indeed, the lethal nature of the Virginia Law of 1669 had been designed to castrate or “kill off” the black male and render him, if alive, into a shadowy or invisible substance of a man. This diminishment or annihilation of the African American male is reified again in Chapter 2 of *Invisible Man*. This chapter is famously known as the Trueblood scene when IM has become a third-year college student. On this occasion,

twenty-one-year old IM still lacks judgment and drives Mr. Norton, a powerful white northern philanthropist, to a tabooed area one-mile from campus that still bears the taint of slavery. IM foolishly reveals the incest-taint linked to the Trueblood family, and foolishly stops his tour, upon Mr. Norton's orders, to witness Mr. Norton's quizzing of Trueblood on how he has managed "to [look] upon chaos and [has] not been destroyed?" (51). In other words, Mr. Norton wants to know how Trueblood has managed to circumvent the greatest taboo of all--incest and the impregnation of both his wife and daughter—and live to tell it. And the fact that Trueblood has gotten away with it satisfies Norton by way of psychological transference. He generously rewards Trueblood with a one hundred dollar tip for orating the lewd incest tale which Norton, himself, had acted out or wanted to act out with his now deceased daughter.

On the other hand, IM comes out metaphorically "1669d" in this storytelling scene. Invisible Man stands back meek, mild, muted, and unmanned by the powerful white philanthropist because IM cannot rise up against the white master and stop Trueblood's Scheherazadian tale telling. This is where IM falls into the westernized, individuated mode of self-preservation, and opts for the weaker method of channeling his frustration. He turns his self-hatred upon Mrs. Trueblood and daughter Matty Lou Trueblood for witnessing his castration at the hands of a white man. In this top down, gender- and racially-charged power play successfully leading to black-on-black crime, Mr. Norton metaphorically "1669s" or "kills off" IM's virility by first ignoring his presence, and secondly, by non-rewarding him as being relevant to his life at the moment. In both instances, Norton renders IM as both invisible and impotent while IM, in reality, is physically, visibly present although as a shell of a man.

Trueblood, in essence, becomes the “man” of the hour. He symbolizes illicit sex and sordid black male stud potency which Mr. Norton has managed to experience vicariously with his deceased daughter by means of Trueblood. This is an ironic switch in allegiances, especially considering Mr. Norton’s earlier praisesong to IM about his intelligence and scholastic achievements. Previously in the car, Mr. Norton had told IM that “You are my fate” (44). At Trueblood’s place, Mr. Norton reveals his true mode of racist thinking and fallen back on John Locke’s seventeenth-century dated ideas and particularly the 1797 Second Essay “Concerning Civil Government,” which states that the Laws of Nature must prevail and that the “Reflections” or logic of the mind must contain the State-of-Nature body governed by its “Sensations” in order for people to act civilized and safely in a politicized, civil society (1051). And since philosophers and statesmen from David Hume to Thomas Jefferson proceeded to build upon Locke’s seminal mind/body theories to justify slavery and the labeling of African Negroes as being savage, intellectually inferior, bodily driven and morally licentious, the Trueblood types fulfill this lewd, stud imagery of African American males. In this scene and continuing throughout *Invisible Man*, the Lockean to Jefferson mind/body, master/slave, and superior/inferior racial binarisms are at play. Trueblood the body is the opposite to IM the mind. Trueblood signifies that sixty-five years of Negro educational uplift can be destroyed within minutes by ignorance and sexual decadence. Like his father, IM the son, too, has been emasculated by powerful white patriarchy.

Mr. Norton, the prototype, wealthy white power figure in Chapter 2, is merely a macro-representation of the micro-splintered, collective but powerful white businessmen in Chapter 1 who eventually provide IM with a scholarship to college. Additionally, Mr.

Norton the rich white philanthropist becomes the symbol of white masculine authority that continually orchestrates or undermines IM throughout the next five years of his actions to 1935 in the New York sequences of the novel, and then haunts him for the next fifteen years from 1935-1950 during which time IM hibernates underground. These micro-, Mr. Norton-types include the off-stage, wealthy giants who run America's corporations and governments named in the Golden Day brothel scene, Chapter 3, such as J. P Morgan, Rockefeller, General Patton, etc. This chapter additionally critiques Ellison's signification upon whiteness discourse. He reverses literal cultural assumptions about whiteness as meaning goodness and purity by changing the positive connotation into negative meanings. The Golden Day rioters actually practice perception theory relating to sightedness-blindness binaries which shapeshift and splinter singularly and profusely when the rioters collectively conceive of Mr. Norton as being a composite representation of White Everyman—just as IM symbolizes Black Everyman. Moreover, the Golden Dayers associate whiteness with power and blackness with disempowerment. However, IM will learn that, it too, is indefinable as a color symbol when he trains in a New York paint factory to add a drop of black dope to a white base in order to make pure white paint.

Black women writers, in fact, will also parody the paint factory scene to illuminate the arbitrariness of white and black color symbols, and their negations of or confusions with each other when acts of miscegenation occur and mixed-race children are born. Ultimately, it has been the Mr. Norton types or other white authority figures who not only invented, violated, and then enforced the lethal Virginia Slave Laws of 1662 and

1669 but also who have kept alive the warped side effects allied with the Black Atlantic fractured and sometimes insane psyche plaguing African American males and females.

The “Response Texts”

Ellison’s encyclopedic novel has been so significant in African American culture that black women writers, too, have parodied its neo-slave format in forms of the novel, as identified by Stepto, and a “wingless” one-act play in order to upgrade its messages from slavery to contemporary times. In “The Bronx is Next,” a play, and the novel *Symptomatic*, the black female authors show how the transformed African American postmodernist black family still bears the fragmented psyches caused by the Black Atlantic holocaust (Gilroy 12; 15). The first effect is the transformed black female-headed family structure dating back to the Virginia Slave Law of 1662, and the second effect is the diminishment or erasure of the black male presence in or out of the family home because he has been symbolically or realistically “killed off” owing to the Virginia Law of 1669. Yet, despite their most affluent circumstances, the African American women of “pure” or “mixed race” heritages in these contemporary works are still Black Atlantics with fractured psyches because the missing black male authority figures still suffer with problems of impotency and/or low-self esteem.

Hence, both Sanchez and Senna deliberately complicate Ellison’s 1952 fictional, neo-slave narrative by reflecting the fluid and destabilized boundaries of race, class, gender, and sexuality as well as the geographical boundaries more illustrative of a global, postmodernist world. In the works published since 2000 inclusive of Senna’s, the writers have portrayed their IM-types as sometimes being gender or racially different major or minor heroes and heroines who not only live in national settings, but have ties to relatives

or friends who even travel globally. Such contacts cast them in social relations with presumptively “cosmopolitan” people aware of the breath and scope of international connections (Appiah 242). However, such assumptions of their broadmindedness prove to be incorrect. No matter how far the major or minor cosmopolites travel domestically or internationally to distance themselves from American racism, their new locations only magnify that IM’s struggles to achieve “social equality” in the 1930s have varied little for African Americans in the 2000s. From Sanchez’s 1968 play “The Bronx is Next,” to the contemporary novel by Senna of *Symptomatic*, all of the conflicts in the works spin off from the grandfather’s message, the Trueblood scene, and/or the New York riot sequence. Overall, Sanchez, and Senna demonstrate that when black women victims attempt to escape IM-type, black male sexism and resort to white male partners, the latter group, unfortunately, turn out to be variations of Mr. Norton.

Take Sanchez’s 1968 play “The Bronx is Next” for example. It may seem to be different and even outdated from Senna’s 2004 fictional work, but it actually is a forerunner to the parodies which follow. The author signifies upon various discriminatory acts in Ellison’s work that concern both racism and sexism. Furthermore, all incidents seem to hinge around sexuality in general, and the black woman’s sexuality particularly which African/African American males have failed to or could not protect for so long. For example, the collective in the grandfather’s scene consists of the nameless grandfather; his second-generation nameless son, a father; the son’s nameless wife; IM the nameless young hero, and several unnamed small children. The collective in the Chapter 2, Trueblood incest scene consists of IM; Mr. Norton; Trueblood; Mrs. Trueblood, pregnant and with no name but referred to as “ole lady” in Trueblood’s incest

Tale; and their unmarried daughter Matty Lou Trueblood, also pregnant but with a proper name. The only other proper name affiliated with Trueblood is that of his one-time love interest Margaret (54; 56).

How do these two scenes translate into the “Bronx” play? The setting is 1968 during the Civil Rights Movement. And, despite its modernist time period, the one-act play upgrades the ramifications of the Virginia Slaves Laws of 1662 and 1669 depicted in *Invisible Man* to illustrate that these laws have continued to create disharmony between African American males and their female alliances—whether spouses or grandmother figures. Sanchez also integrates the Chapter 2 sequence of the Trueblood scene with the Harlem building burning scene just prior to the 1935 full-scale riot in *Invisible Man*. At this event, IM comes upon Scofield and Dupre preparing to set fire to a rat-infested tenement building. They assist an old woman out of the building as nameless other tenants depart. A white policeman on horseback is heard nearby. Sanchez, like Ellison, provides no history or genealogies of the named male heroes; like the grandfather, they, too, just arrive fully grown on the scene. More like the Trueblood and New York sequences, however, they, too, have proper names of Charles, Roland, Larry, and Jimmy that putatively humanizes them. Or does it? They force Old Sister, Black Bitch, and White Cop—who are rendered as personifications or abstract things still evolving since the Virginia Slave Laws were enacted—to exit the building and to confront their fates.

Sanchez sets out to illuminate the ongoing fallaciousness of IMs Freudian slip on “social equality,” for little or no social equality exists for black women during the turbulent 1960s Black Arts Movements, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Panther movement. In this time period, artists, politicians, and the general black public

reprised African Gnostic customs and patriarchal traditions as a means to heal the Black Atlantic colonized mindsets of their people which were caused by legislators like Mr. Norton. Unfortunately, his white authority models still managed to disempower black men; consequently, black women, in a trickle down effect, became the victims of both racism and sexism as reported by Assata Shakur in her named biography (223-26). Their sexism becomes the central argument in Sanchez's play.

Charles and his revolutionaries seize upon this one epochal moment of black male empowerment, but illustrate their incapacities to engage in Lockean thinking. Instead, they allow their sensations and reactions to be their guide and decide not only to burn down the dilapidated buildings owned and operated by the rich Norton types, but also to rid themselves of black women, who, too, have been responsible for their emasculations. To them, their targets are not individualistic or human but the composite, transcendent, nameless, abstracts which have continued to evolve from IM and Trueblood's world of the 1930s into the late 1960s: White Cop (Norton); Black Bitch (Trueblood's daughter now a mother) and Old Woman (Mrs. Trueblood aged). On the other hand, like Rinehart the multifaceted preacher, pimp, and number runner for whom IM, once he dons dark sunglasses, is mistaken, Sanchez's three black men become multiple fragments of IM. Their stage performance is a scene about black men still expressing their racial hatred of white men, sexist hatred of young and old black women, and gender hatred of themselves. They believe that "killing off" the White Cop, Black Bitch, and Old Sister at this one, opportune moment, will heal their warped Black Atlantic psyches. Their bitterness over being "unmanned" is also the reason that Sanchez has parodied the Chapter 2 Trueblood scene reflecting IM's hatred of Trueblood and Mr. Norton, but

capable only of channeling his rage over feeling impotent towards the two, helpless black pregnant female bystanders. Charles and his cronies first attack the White Cop who stands for a Mr. Norton type of legislative power since 1662 that removed black men from heading their households. And by the White Cop's having engaged in an illicit sexual relationship with Black Bitch, he also stands for the Virginia Slave Law of 1669 that allowed white masters or their agents to "kill off" rebellious black male slaves while they, themselves, escaped punishment. Here, the upstart black males dare to raise their hands against the white master and briefly enjoy empowerment and revenge. They make White Cop grovel and playact on being black in order to make him feel Lockean sensations so as to gain Lockean knowledge from personal experience on what it feels like to be rendered impotent and powerless to protect himself, and by default, his family.

What is worse in this parody of the Trueblood scene is how Charles and his group also demean Black Bitch for being sexually complicit with the white power system. Their denigrations recapitulate IM's feelings even though he utters no words of condemnation to the Trueblood women. Similarly, Mrs. Trueblood and Matty Lou have no speaking parts in Ellison's novel to rebuke Trueblood, Mr. Norton, or IM, but in Sanchez's play, the author empowers her black women to speak. The men especially hate the Black Bitch and the Old Woman for being the paid whore or mammy for the white master as does IM feel towards the Trueblood women, who, by default, become monetary beneficiaries of Mr. Norton's generous tip to Trueblood. In signification on the money issue, Charles, Roland, Larry, and Jimmy all verbally attack and once physically assault Black Bitch for accepting monetary support from the White Cop (817-18). Yet, her appeal for these men to reclaim her as mate and role model for her children and to provide monetary support

falls on their deaf ears because of their own inabilities readily to assume the role of head of household. Hence, like IM, they do not see the faults within themselves. And to cure their problems of manhood impotency in one action, Charles orders Old Woman, Black Bitch, and White Cop back into the burning building to die at once, thereby supposedly ending the emasculation problems of black men in America.

Sanchez's play was written in 1968, but is still contemporary with other black female authors writing on the subject of victimized black women dating back to the Virginia Slave Laws of 1662 and 1669. In fact, the other black woman writer reveals that no matter how high in education they rise or how far across the country they escape, African American women also still remain Black Atlantics with fractured psyches. For, despite their successes at achieving higher educations and high-paying jobs, the problems of the color line still exist in their private and professional lives. In Senna's representation of the castrated black male head of household, it differs from IM's family representations in Chapter 1. His father, mother, and siblings are mere two-dimensional statements. Only the grandfather has a somewhat three-dimensional presence owing to his shocking speech. Senna appropriates these microcosmic family-member representations in Chapter 1 of *Invisible Man* to parody by difference the macrocosmic family structure of the main heroine. For one, the author makes a gender switch; the nameless black female heroine has assumed the role of IM. In the beginning of the novel, her Muslim, African American father is off-stage on a research trip to the Middle East, her Maoist-practicing, white mother in California is away at a Zen spiritual retreat, and her dreadlock-wearing, nameless mixed-race brother is still at home. The liberal-minded ideological couple parody the liberal white wife/CP member who deflowers IM in her

apartment, and to IM's amazement, with the consent of her liberal CP husband (417). IW's mixed-race parents, too, have vested themselves in ideological and spiritual causes, and too, represent themselves as liberal minded. Nonetheless, the African American father's actions still resonate the same bias towards black women as that of IM in the Trueblood scene. He, like IM, illustrates how black males have taken revenge against the white masters for their Virginia Slave Law of 1662 forbidding miscegenation—especially in terms of the black male/white female alliance—by stealing their women and begetting bi-racial children by them. The nameless female heroine is a tinged- but still fair-skinned mulatto. She uses her voluntary migration to New York to deny her mixed-race heritage. Again, the “passing” trope affiliated with IM is reenacted in Senna's novel.

Senna's work highlights the insanity trope associated with the Prologue “hole” scene and Chapter 3 sequence in which IM takes Mr. Norton to the Golden Day brothel to regain his strength after talking to Trueblood. The black male patrons at the brothel have recently come for a visit from the insane asylum. The white masters metaphorical “killing off” of highly-educated black males by institutionalizing them has been an alternate, effective method of the Mr. Norton types to enforce the Virginia Slave Law of 1662 reforming the black family structure into female-governed, and the Virginia Slave Law of 1669 that “killed off” those black males who became aggressive and rebellious. These are the messages to be gleaned from the Golden Day sequence and the aftereffects upon IM. Mr. Norton, by means of his instrument Dr. Bledsoe, the African American Dean at the Negro college, expels IM at his third year and sends him on a bogus job hunt to New York. The Golden Day debacle is his third major blunder after the “social equality” slippage and Trueblood expose. His error in judgment is another stage of IM's

descent into madness which culminates in the Prologue sequence. Prior to this section, his first action in Harlem is another illustration of his Black Atlantic warped psyche. After travelling to the black section of town and finding himself to be hungry, IM goes into a restaurant to order breakfast. He denies the white waiter's astute reading of his character as being southern and his suggestion to IM of ordering a meal of pork chops. Instead, IM settles for orange juice, toast, and coffee rather than expose himself (178).

Ignorance or denial of one's racial or regional heritages are forms of insanity. Senna takes the theme of IM's father's ignorance of his African/African American cultural heritage, IMs echo tableaux rasa mindset, and, IMs denial of his regional roots by magnifying them all as key issues related to insanity in *Symptomatic*. Even willful denial of mixed-race heritage or confusions about skin color pejoratives create mental problems. Like IM, the nameless mulatto heroine briefly becomes homeless in New York once her IM-altered women's boarding house proves to be unsanitary, even in 1992. On a chance subway ride, Invisible Woman (IW) meets Andrew, a young white male in her age group who offers her a place to stay while she is apartment hunting. Here, Senna again modifies key themes and scenes involving IM's life. As far as romantic and sexual relations, IM does not become a Trueblood sexual stud with black women. Instead, he remains a virgin and never has a sexual relationship with a black woman throughout the entire novel. However, when his sexual initiation does occur, it is with white female partners only who imagine him to be a sexual dynamo like Trueblood. IW somewhat parodies IM's trajectory of failed sexual relationships with same-race and opposite-race partners. She reveals later in the text that her previous relationship with Claude, a black man in California, did not develop beyond sex. That aborted encounter simulates IM's first

sexual tryst with a Communist Party (CP) white female who turns out to be married. So, IW's brief fling with Claude parodies IM's brief fling with the CP woman, although IW had chosen a black man to be her partner. However, being bi-racial, her admixture allows IW to make cross-racial choices which seem logical rather than IM's clear-cut aversion to women of his own race. And, because she can explore both sides of the color line, IW, after arriving in New York, opts for a white man as a potential, romantic partner (107).

Nonetheless, relationships built upon deception work no better for IW than they had with IM with his CP partner. In fact, almost as rapidly, IW's relationship with the young Norton-Emerson composite fizzles within days because of the heroine's failed admission of her black racial ties. Andrew and his white friends, on one festive evening, resort to telling "coon" jokes and acting out racial stereotypes in IW's presence (14). Their actions resonate of Todd Clifton's attempts to warn blacks that the CP has been manipulating them like the Sambo dolls which he starts to sell on the streets of Harlem. The white friends of Andrew who playact the Sambo scene parody Clifton's activity. And, to IM a witness, Clifton appears to be insane by his hawking of the dolls on the streets of Harlem, and also publicizing racial truths about the CP to bystanders. The point is that the blatant playacting of IW's white friends better illustrates the insanity of IW's choice of passing for white by omitting to state her bi-racial heritage. She allows Andrew's friends to feel as if they are all racially unified. However, as IW learns from her IM-type blunder, racism rears its head when whites feel safely alone to express their true racial hatreds for blacks.

IW's young white male friend is also a micro-composite of Emerson, Jr. The latter seemingly appears to be honest by treating IM as a social equal and revealing to

him, without Emerson, Sr.'s permission, that IM has been on a bogus job hunt orchestrated by Mr. Norton and Dr. Bledsoe. Seemingly sympathetic, Emerson, Jr. then refers IM to an employment opportunity, which eventually more truly reflects the son's similar racial perception of blacks as being inferior to whites like that of his father. The job, which IM eventually accepts, turns out to be that of a manual laborer in a paint factory. Whether senior or junior, IM, a third-year college student, learns that white men at all levels of authority work adversely to keep black men illiterate, under-educated, manually-employed, and disempowered. Similarly, IW learns from her witnessing of racial slurring that whites still think adversely about blacks even in her putatively post-racial world of the twenty-first century.

Senna's character parody of IM, too, shifts in gender focus. Brother Jack punishes IM for becoming too autonomous and re-assigns him to the Women's Division of the CP in Manhattan. Thematically, this segment illustrates how insanity still remains as an after effect of miscegenation and the Virginia Law of 1662 tainting the parents as well as the children breaching this law. Once IW leaves the apartment of her white male friend, she forms an affiliation with another female employee, Greta Hicks, a fact-checker at the magazine company where IW, as a prestigious "Riggs Fellow," has been hired as an intern (25). Unlike IM, social equality works for IW and her college education has paid off by her landing of white-color position in her field of journalism. Social equality also seemingly works because IW's older colleague Greta, who also appears to be white, identifies an empty apartment in Brooklyn which happens to be available for rent. IW believes her world has evolved into peace and continuity. However, the opposite happens.

Passing for white or being off white, like the production of paint at the factory where IM briefly had worked, can make one ill. This is Senna's message in exploring the one-drop of black blood rule applying to miscegenated children which has continued to be associated with the Virginia Law of 1662. IW's "olive" skin coloring causes trauma for the racially-indeterminant heroine (49). To express it, the author signifies by difference upon IM's experiences of working in a paint factory, becoming ill from an orchestrated explosion, and recuperating in a private home. It turns out that IM encounters nothing but trouble once he lands this job. First, some white employees mistake him for being a union snoop, and decry his working in their sector. Once being re-assigned to work for Brockway in the boiler plant, IM's troubles compound even though he is being supervised by a black man. Brockway believes that IM is trying to steal his job, and manipulates his work assignment so that IM ignorantly elevates the heating pressure of the boiling paint and causes an explosion that nearly kills him. He awakens disoriented in a metal healing tube at the medical center; then he is released from the plant hospital with monetary compensation. Fortunately, he encounters a black mother savior or mammy figure, Mary Rambo. She rescues her ill patient on a Harlem street, takes him home, and nurses him back to health. His stay is peaceful and harmonious, interrupted only by IM's own shedding of dead skin from his burns and concerns over not working or paying rent.

Contrarily, IW moves not to a room in black Harlem but to a "transitional" neighborhood, multi-ethnic building, and single-occupied apartment in Brooklyn (38). Yet, her apartment becomes her torture chamber—a cavern-like hole similar to IM's healing chamber and/or underground hideaway. The bulk of IW's escapades concern IW's friendship with Greta. The latter turns out to be a passing mulatto as well, and she

uses her mixed-race, African American father-German mother blood lineage as an excuse to exclude pure blacks from her world (47; 51). As an Army brat, Greta is more “cosmopolitan” and world travelled than IW. Yet, Greta is no different from IW’s friendship with the white youth Andrew, for Greta, too, is deceptive. She is another composite of Brother Jack, the white man who recruits IM into the CP, and then sabotages his success when Brother Jack believes that IM has garnered too much attention as a junior, CP member. Greta performs similar acts of manipulation and subterfuge. Over four year’s time, IW discovers her to be the previous tenant of the apartment and author of the mysterious phone calls, odd smells or noises at night, and actually to be Vera, the addressee of the strange mail and leaflets sent to the apartment.

For the spooky apartment sequence, Senna parodies the Epilogue in *Invisible Man* when IM begins to explore the extent of his underground cavern. He learns to siphon off light from Monoplated Gas & Light, explore and discover the basements of aboveground businesses, churches, or flats, and to eavesdrop on conversations. Moreover, the trash mail which IW receives and discards mimics those contents of IM’s briefcase—his high school diploma and scholarship, his bogus referral letters for employment, Brother Jack’s threatening note, etc. All of these things used to symbolize hope, promise, and success to IM, but once he drops into the hole, they signify his disempowerment and disillusionment with America and its racist culture. Having learned by Lockean experience, his burning of these material emblems is indicative of his growth in self-knowledge, self-emancipation, and self-empowerment. Finally, his “manning up” to become, in the words of the Vet, his own “father” is his first step towards liberation. For IW, it, too, takes years for IW to figure out that Greta is the author of those scary communications. And IW, too,

eventually has a Lockean epiphany. For, everywhere IW turns, she finds Greta to be present—whether at work, on the street, or at her apartment. She knows that she must cast off this “bilious” woman Greta (91; 151) similar to the “shedding” imagery attendant to IM’s loss of dead skin from his accident and destruction of items in his briefcase.

In an additional parody of IM’s “shedding” himself of Sybil, his sex-crazed white love interest who tracks him to Harlem and exacerbates an already pending race riot, IW finds herself caught up in a maelstrom of evil and violence as she attempts to escape from an insane passing mulatto who becomes both her stalker and would-be killer. Just by donning sunglasses, IM discovers that he spins off into a multiple version of Rinehart during his street interactions to escape the Communists and Sybil. Greta is this Rinehart-Sybil composite. She has acted like a chameleonesque Rinehart in her multiple guises of colleague, apartment hunter, friend, and desired lover. All of her actions have been to separate IW from other people and to keep both of them locked away from a world encompassing black people and black men particularly (153). Similar to IM’s obtuseness about Brother Jack, it takes IW a long time to catch on to Greta’s Sybil-type, obsessive sexual desire for her (97; 151). Hence, Greta becomes the lesbian counterpart of Sybil the heterosexual who becomes sexually obsessive over IM (Ellison 159).

Like IM, however, IW does not cooperate on any level as a romantic interest of Greta the stalker (67; 127; 149). At the novel’s conclusion, in fact, IW manages to escape Greta’s attempt to “1669” her for not dedicating her sole allegiance to Greta’s “for passing whites” only nation of two. As an eyewitness, IM sees first hand the deliberate murder of Todd Clifton, which was orchestrated by the CP. As the victim, IW has a face-to-face showdown with Greta inside the Brooklyn apartment and then on the rooftop. The

confrontation is as lethal as the Todd Clifton affair. However, Greta is “1669d.” She beats IW, ties her up, stabs her, and then forces IW onto the rooftop. But IW manages to elude Greta’s efforts to kill her; IW sidesteps Greta’s lunge and the deranged woman falls off the rooftop, thereby “killing off” herself. IW’s act of self-defense is still technically another “black-on-black crime,” although no one in the building regrets Greta/Vera’s death—unlike the mass rioting in Harlem following Clifton’s murder. Moreover, IW’s life thereafter simulates IM’s hibernation in a hole. She moves back home to California, and then eventually moves into her own apartment. And in parody of the IM hole sequence, her new dwelling becomes IW’s hole of insanity as she engages in flashbacks about her black lovers Claude and Ivers, and in hallucinations about seeing Greta or hearing her voice similar to the hauntings from Mr. Norton claimed by IM.

Is she mentally healthy? Certainly in California, IW’s new body of multi-ethnic friends--inclusive of renewed friendship with African Americans such as Ivers and then Lola with her lesbian African lover--do not seem to signify that there still exists a color line problem in the twenty-first century. She even has greater contact with her Muslim African American father and Maoist-Zen mother. Yet, IW’s parents and even her brother, while adding a three-dimensional presence in her life, unlike the two-dimensional family of IM, still add no great value to IW’s mental growth. Her father, while growling Muslim-African advice which IM’s father should have done, and IW’s mother, while adding a Zen-Communist spin to the mix, leave no real impact on IW’s mindset because of their liberal upbringing of allowing for free will. This lack of a gnostic solution explains why IW is still haunted by her Lockean, New York experience five years later. In other words, IW falls into a mental abyss despite her great distance from the East

Coast. And, at the novel's conclusion, IW does not seem to be emerging from her mental hole unlike IM, although she, like IM, has the freedom to foray in and out of her prison-apartment at will. Thus, Senna illustrates that being a female is still mentally challenging for African Americans—mixed or pure—in today's putative, "post-racial world."

Ultimately, the Virginia Laws of 1662 and 1669 recur to "kill off" literally or figuratively not only black males in the 1950s (Clifton; IM), but now in the 2000s the mixed-race, female issue of such illicit or legal unions (Greta) or, in the extreme, to leave the mixed-race person mentally imbalanced from being culturally and/or racially bifurcated (IW).

To conclude, the white master's creation of the Virginia Slave Laws of 1662 and 1669 have wreaked havoc upon the African/African American family to create mental warping over African gnostic survival traditions for the Black Atlantic victims. Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man* has created an encyclopedic base text/neo-slave narrative that illustrates from the decree uttered by the grandfather to his obtuse grandson Invisible Man that loss of African heritage and knowledge of its survival mechanisms have eroded the structure of the African/African American family, killed off the black male as patriarch and head, created a distorted matrilineal family grouping, and left the pure and mixed-race children of slavery's misalliances adrift in the maelstrom of American racism from the times of slavery to the present day. Invisible Man, in his misadventures of attempting to achieve "social equality," only reveals through his blunders how the white master's legislative acts set in motion the schism still extant between African American males and females owing to the black males' castrated masculinity from white patriarchs. And, as a result of their victimizations as illustrated in *Invisible Man*, African American males have illogically construed black women as unfavorable mates and, consequently,

caused the ignored female victims to suffer greatly. For this latter reason, African American female writers have taken up the mantle to lobby for racialized-gender freedom by parodying Ellison's basic work in order to illuminate in Sonia Sanchez's play "The Bronx is Next" and Danzy Senna's novel *Symptomatic* how entrenched in history black male hatred of their same-race female partners have been orchestrated and manipulated by the Mr. Norton-type white power figures. Moreover, for African American women who even achieve monetary success and advanced educations beyond IM, their fates or destinies are still racially bound. As a result, the trope of insanity attached to the warped, Black Atlantic psyche still pervades the lives of pure or mixed-race African American women attempting to transcend the barriers of white male and black male racism and sexism, which, ultimately, still leave the side effects of unwellness to their minds and bodies and genders and sexualities as both Sanchez and Senna illustrate.

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