**Ralph Ellison Invisible Man 1952**

**1/The Great Migration:** the term is related to the period around 1910 when Harlem, New York, became the destination for African Americans. Southern life was difficult for the African Americans who sought to find both freedom and economic opportunities in the north. During the WWI the demand for equipment and supplied offered them factory jobs and the news spread that the north is to become their escape from segregation and poverty. A huge number of African Americans relocated and this has become to be known in the American history as The Great Migration.

**2/ Harlem Renaissance:** the term refers to an intellectual movement of African American artists and writers which established itself between 1920 and 1930. Most of the artists lived in the neighborhood known as Harlem which became the unofficial capital of African American culture and activism. A flowing literature flourished with arts and music at that time in which the Negro race used their creativity to be heard by the white American society A key figure in Harlem’s rise is W.E.B. Du Bois a well-educated Massachusetts-born African American leader who helped in the foundation of the National Association for the Advancement Colored People (NAACP) in New York. Du Bois served as editor of a magazine called The Crisis, a major outlet for African American poetry and writing which helped promoting the African American arts movement. The Harlem Renaissance would lead to the foundation of the Civil Rights Movement later. Famous writers include Zola Neal Huston, Langston Hughes, and Richard Wright. Du Bois’ concept of Double consciousness would revolutionize the world of sociology and of psychology for better understanding of the Negro consciousness.

**3/ Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison**

**A/Genre:** the novel is a Bildungsroman, a genre which traces the psychological, moral development, and maturation of major character (most of the time the protagonist). Sometimes it is referred as the ‘coming of age story’ which can also show the inverse development of the antagonist. The Bildungsroman writer created situations that allow the reader to see the young protagonist grow and experience struggles during his/her journey to adulthood through different topics (education, relationships…). The writer often shows the transition of the innocent character and the responsibility that comes with adulthood.

**B/ Narration:** The story of Invisible Man is a told from the first person point of view. The reader becomes conscious through reading with the presence of two I’s (the young and adult narrator and protagonist). The story hence is overloaded with the use of flashbacks which serve the narrator to shift from present to past situations. The reader also feels that the young narrator is most of the time unreliable for his innocent reasoning and naïve conclusions whereas the adult is more experienced yet illusioned.

**C/ Setting:** Details of the period are accurate including descriptions of houses, public transportation, and working conditions. The descriptions of the college and the tri around the city and the Golden Day reflect conditions and expectations of the black people coming from the south. It also serves the writer to picture the conflict between the assimilationists and the separatists within the black community (represented through Bledsoe and Ras the Exhorter).

**D/ Ellison’s Style in the novel: -**Ellison’s style echoes that of other African-American writers, particularly those involved in the Harlem Renaissance. His writing contains many sound devices—particularly alliteration—he utilizes anaphora to highlight some of his most emotional points. Ellison employs an impressive vocabulary, his style is not formal. It is almost lyrical with its considerable use of sound devices. Similes and metaphors, particularly in the “battle royal,” the Golden Day, and the Liberty Paints scenes, extend the effect of the sound devices as far as emphasizing particular thematic points. This reflects Ellison’s affect by the Jazz music.

 **E/ Themes :** The central question of the novel is: “How can one person make a difference when all of the avenues to power are occupied by the dishonest?” No matter where the narrator tries to pursue success and autonomy in an authentic manner, he finds the road ahead of him blocked by those who have decided to collude against those below. His initial solution, to hide in a basement and steal power from the electric company, fails to solve the problem, so he ultimately decides to come forth and pursue change. The writer’s focus is the alienation of the African-American in an ostensibly free society. He analyzes the ways in which race is used as a mechanism of power—not only by whites over blacks, but by some blacks (such as Dr. Bledsoe) over other blacks. This alienation becomes apparent through the hysterical tone of much of the book. The themes can be summarized as: Identity Fragmentation and Invisibility- Racism- Double Consciousness- Dreams and the Unconscious- Ambition and Disillusionment.