**Du Bois’ Double Consciousness and Invisible Man**

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

**A Discussion:**

Double Consciousness as it had been suggested by Du Bois refers to the internal conflict the African-Americans experience finding themselves in a state of “two-ness” where they do not only care about how the white hegemonic society represents them but also see themselves through the eyes of the white society, rejecting any self-consciousness. This phenomenon, not inherited, but socially constructed and imposed, had endangered the African-American identity and psychic for a long time that a call for change had to arise in the horizon. As usually explained in our lectures, these kind of issues have been reflected in literary texts which belong or were affected by the social and literary tradition(s) of the time.

As any African-American author who witnessed the changes caused by the aftermaths of the Civil War (1861-1865), the WWI (1914-1918), The Great Migration and the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance Movement during the Roaring Twenties, the growth of liberating philosophies of the time, and the effects of the WWII, Ralph Ellison helped in the establishment of the African-American literary tradition in opposition to the hegemonic white canonization. Du Bois’ theory of Double consciousness theory, logically, lies at the heart of Ellison’s writing as it became a political and literary tool throughout which the spiritual and psychological facets have been highly debated.

From one hand, critics consider Invisible Man as a novel which "discovers AMERICA in a stunningly energetic blues manner" (Blues 173) in which the writer does not fail to use the double consciousness stigma and reverse it to become the African- American individual’s tool of power and pride. Ellisons’ story empowers the African-Americans and allows them to regain agency. Through the protagonist’s behavior and thoughts, Ellison suggests that African-Americans can reject the white people perception of the world and that they cannot be manipulated without their own consent. The protagonist in the novel is not really blind but pretends blindness to avoid the white hegemonic and supremacy over the blacks next to the blacks’ submission to it in which many African-American find themselves entrapped in a double consciousness dilemma. Instead of letting himself duplicate their conception, he runs towards his own self-conception and self-assertion.

Through the use of sight imagery, Ellison provides his protagonist the power to overcome the imposed one-eyed perception “Perhaps we don't care to look at unpleasantness. They think we're blind—uncommonly blind. And I don't wonder. Think about it, they've dispossessed us each of one eye from the day we're born. So now we can only see in straight white lines. We're a nation of one-eyed mice—Did you ever see such a sight in your life? Such an uncommon sight!" (186). He instead suggests to get rid of both the white misperception of the black soul and to correct the black people manipulated and distorted perception. He accordingly created a story that can submit an application of the double consciousness reversed tactic to be applied by all people of colour, not only African- Americans, but all non-European different ethnic groups in US.

Yet, many critics see Invisible Man as a double edged story in which Ellison tried to define the double consciousness strengths and weakness and how to overcome its burdens but failed to escape the traditional ways to exemplify it. His submission to the western modernist traditions of writing style failed to present a purely free African-American literary experience, as Abner N. Berry argues "439 pages of contempt for humanity, written in an affected, pretentious, and other worldly style to suit the king pins of world white supremacy" (qtd. in Neal 34).

**Works cited:**

Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt, and Brent Hayes Edwards. *The souls of black folk: Oxford world's classics*. 2007.

Neal, Larry. Visions of a Liberated Future. Black Arts Move- ment Writings. Ed. Michael Schwartz. New York: Thun- der's Mouth, 1989.