

УДК:327 (575.2)(04)

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INVISIBILITY IN AFRICAN AMERICAN AND ASIAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

The paper presents a comparative study of the invisibility trope in African American and Asian American literature, distinguishing between various kinds of invisibility. While the topic explores invisibility in a variety of African American and Asian American literary texts, the main focus is on two novels: Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey*.

Key words: invisibility, literature, research, comparison.

В статье представлен сравнительный анализ неразличимости тропа в афро-американской и азиатско-американской литературах, несходные явления между культурами. В то время как тема исследует неразличимость в различных афро-американских и азиатских американских литературных текстах, основной акцент делается на двух романах: Человек-невидимка (Ральфа Эллисона) и Обезьяна-путешественница: его выдумка (Максин Хонг Кингстон)

Ключевые слова: неразличимость, литература, исследование, сравнение.

Is your life at risk and endangered if you are driving with your eyes off the road? Is it safe to walk down a dark and dangerous alley where you cannot see what is in front of you? Would it be a good idea to walk across the street without looking both ways first? The answer to all these questions are no. Why? Because in all three situations, there is a lack of vision. So, one can conclude that vision is of great importance to the visible world. Nevertheless, vision is also equally important in the invisible world. Because the most important things in our lives are invisible, vision into the invisible world is greatly needed to make life richer. The essentials to life: love, happiness, even grief and sorrow, are invisible now and forever, but vision allows us to see these and other intangible things. Vision allows us to draw the invisible world out.

Invisibility is usually taken to the extreme effect of truly being transparent, unseen by anyone and is often depicted in society as the hero, going behind the enemy's back to complete his mission.

The latest visibility comes from Franklin's in-depth book, compiled from research, writing and notes from a clinical practice spanning nearly three decades. In it, Franklin explains how the invisibility syndrome concept refers to Ellison's 1952 book "Invisible Man". He quotes from the opening of Ellison's book, in which the African-American narrator describes the concept of being invisible: "I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone...I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me...They see only my

surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination - indeed, everything and anything except me".

When people feel invisible, they can interpret seemingly innocent actions - such as the waiter putting the charge slip in front of Bill's client - as racist slights, which can create a palpable feeling that their integrity is under assault. These slights, or "micro aggressions", as Franklin calls them, can build over time and ultimately explode, as it did for Bill when trying to hail a taxi. "People's presumptions are filled with all types of stereotypes, leaving the real person invisible from those holding prejudiced attitudes," Franklin explains.

People used to live with a set of presumptions about their own status, and it came under assault when their status is not recognized. They have a series of encounters that frustrate them and boil over. That is a common experience and a common process.

And they occur in the most unlikely places. Two African American men were waiting for an elevator for several minutes with two white women during a period of heavy ridership. The women sighed impatiently for the elevator to arrive; yet when it did, and even though the two men held the elevator doors open for the women to enter first, the women said they would wait for the next ride. The only thing they could see was not professional gentlemen in coats and ties holding the elevator, but black men with criminal intent. That's the kind of stuff that happened every

day in America.

“Enduring such micro aggressions can damage one’s mental health”, Franklin says. In his clinical practice he has seen clients who say feeling invisible causes them a range of illnesses, including disillusionment, chronic indignation, pervasive discontent, anger, depression, substance abuse and hopelessness. It can also interfere with achieving professional goals or creating loving personal relationships, he adds.

Invisibility is often coupled with themes of isolation and alienation, as the invisible character’s ability marks him an outcast. The original “invisible man” became a sociopath because of his condition. And such position strains normal personal ties.

The world is full of blind men and sleepwalkers who cannot see a person for what he is, for what he wants and this makes a person feel himself an “invisible man.” The invisibility often manifests itself hand in hand with the blindness - one person becomes invisible because another is blind.

Blindness generally represents how people willfully avoid seeing and confronting the truth. People’s inability to see what they wish not to see - their inability to see that which their prejudice doesn’t allow them to see - leads them into a life of effective invisibility. But prejudice against others is not the only kind of blindness.

While blindness is treated usually negatively, invisibility is much more ambiguous. Invisibility can bring disempowerment, but it can also bring freedom and mobility. Indeed, the world history gives many examples when “invisible men” exert power over others, or at least undermine others’ power, without being caught.

While invisibility may bring safety, actions undertaken in secrecy cannot ultimately have any meaningful impact. One may undermine one’s enemies from a position of invisibility, but one cannot make significant changes to the world.

Society makes people “invisible” because people are naturally selfish and are often unaware to the needs of others, especially those who do not affect them. Society makes people “invisible” because many become so absorbed in their world of work that they become oblivious to others, especially if they do not seem to have any positive affect on the person. To improve the situation, people need to be informed about the fact that everyone affects everyone else; and also to become less ignorant. Groups made invisible can

fight this by coming up with a new way to express themselves that people will pay attention to, like jazz, blues, painting, lyrics... The example is that African Americans used Jazz and Blues to make themselves visible. Music is international and when you use music to communicate most everyone understands. The music compliments the ear but the lyrics are a story, an opinion. The lyric are the soul and allows the musician to say anything he or she wants. Looking at the lyrics you can see something that has been done. Someone put their feelings into a song, talking about the “Trouble” they’ve seen.

A black man in 1930s America considered himself invisible because people never saw his true self beneath the roles that stereotype and racial prejudice compel him to play. The black man feels that the only way he can ever be accepted in society is to actually be white. He feels inadequate with the color of his skin, because he knows how people view him. He knows he cannot be accepted unless he is the same as everyone else. The man is trying to act like a white person but finally realizes that is not who he is. He knows that he should be accepted just the way he is, whether black or white.

Shedding his blindness, he struggles to arrive at a conception of his identity that honors his complexity as an individual without sacrificing social responsibility.

In 1952, Ralph Ellison's novel “The Invisible Man” gave voice to the feelings of many black Americans who felt that they were not “seen” by American society. The novel won the National Book Award in 1953 and was also published two years before the Supreme Court ruled the Brown vs. Board of Education to outlaw separate but equal education in America. While the Civil War freed the slaves, it did not integrate blacks into the American mainstream. As did so many from this generation, the nameless protagonist of Invisible Man leaves the South for New York City. Here he becomes a pawn for a political group, and he discovers he is not seen as an

individual human being. After becoming involved in a Harlem riot, he realizes that he must deal with people of both races. He also realizes that many people see him as a Black Man, and therefore his real nature is unseen by them - this makes him “invisible”.

Many times, people, often introverted and alienated from the rest of society, have found themselves in situations in which they are on the

outside looking in. These people often have a feeling of being “invisible” and unidentified to the rest of society and therefore undergo a need to search for their identity in order to be recognized and have a place at the “social table”. In this particular novel, our character which calls himself the “invisible man”, is faced with the challenges of being a young African American male from the south, living in the north, who encounters a number of baffling experiences while on the road to self-discovery. The “invisible man” reveals profound insight into every man’s struggle to find his true self. As the story unfolds, the “invisible man” gradually reaches the destination of his soul-searching journey, in which his progress is marked by four significant stages: self-ignorance, exposition, false freedom, and self-discovery.

Although immigrants from Asia and Americans of Asian descent have been writing in the United States since the 19th century, Asian American literature as a category of writing only came into existence in the early 1970s. Asian American literature is an ongoing source of discussion for Asian American literary critics: who is an Asian American? Is “America” only the United States, or does it include the rest of the Americas? If an Asian American writes about characters who are not Asian American, is this Asian American literature? If someone who is not Asian American writes about Asian Americans, is this Asian American literature?

The challenges around defining Asian American literature are not unique to it and indicate difficulties not so much with the field of Asian American literature but with issues of race, culture, and national identity that are endemic to United States history and culture.

One of the Asian American writers is Maxine Hong Kingston, a Chinese American author of memoirs and fiction. The theme of ethnic self-determination is the most important theme in Asian American literature and the writers reveal this theme through the investigation of the relationship in the family of immigrants: the parents who came from China and their children who were born in America and became Chinese American.

Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book is the book written by Maxine Hong Kingston. It was published in 1989. The story follows Wittman Ah

Sing, an American graduate of University of California, Berkeley of Chinese ancestry in his adventures about San Francisco during the 1960s. Wittman is an English major, poet, and playwright. He is fired from his job; he subsequently goes to party in Oakland and meets a Chinese woman. He also meets a woman with blonde hair at the party. The first section of the novel ends with Wittman marriage to avoid the draft. In the next parts of the novel, Wittman visits his mother and aunts. He travels to Reno to search for his grandmother. He alludes to his Chinese heritage, although he considers himself one-hundred percent American. Wittman is a young man and at the end of “*Tripmaster Monkey*”, he has grown in the sense that he is still in the process of developing his artistic and political identities. Yet this is only a start. He is aware that writing his play and having it performed on stage is not the end of his dream to create a community. It cannot be “built once-and-for-all”. Kingston demonstrates that Wittman has imagined, practiced, and re-created a community, but others must do the same. Although Wittman’s final rant and rave is full of anger and is perhaps even disturbing and difficult to read, he expresses his last plea for a community. He wants to see Chinese Americans surpass this conception of being enigmatic. “We need to be part of the daily love life of the country, to be shown and loved continuously until we’re not inscrutable anymore”. By the end of “*Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*,” Wittman stages his plays.

Kingston ends the novel with a character contemplating the meaning of being a “Chinese American”. Heavily influenced by the Beat movement, and exhibiting many prototypical symptoms of postmodernism, the book retains numerous themes, such as ethnicity and prejudice.

Invisibility presented by the African American and Asian American writers who define various kinds of invisibility reveals the essence of the term through the lives of the characters of the novels. We think that Ralph Ellison and Maxine Hong Kingston are the authors who vividly showed the nature of invisibility. Among the themes and issues explored in African American and Asian American literature are the roles of African Americans and Asian Americans within the larger American society, culture and equality.

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