

The Dream of the Iron Groom: The Construction and Function of a Symbol in Ralph Ellison's Unfinished Novel

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ABSTRACT

Dreams are a central feature of the extended realism of Ralph Ellison's second novel, some drafts of which have been published as *Three Days Before the Shooting* In this novel, dreams help Ellison's characters realize or present truths that cannot be presented in the language of straightforward realism. In a quasi-Freudian manner, Ellison's dream narrations reveal his characters' and novels' most fundamental preoccupations. In this article I analyze part of a dream sequence from Book I of *Three Days*. This dream, had by a white liberal character, is centered on the figure of an iron groom (or hitching-post boy) who cannot be removed from the doorway to a house. I analyze the construction and function of this dream figure and narrative through the lens of (1) Ellison's ritualist social criticism, (2) his extended-realist, tragicomic, and syncretic aesthetics, and (3) his allusive and narrative poesis. The iron groom is constructed as a stereotype of blackness, linked to the major black characters of the novel and to figures in Ellison's first novel. The groom-as-stereotype is subverted through verbal "signifying" and through the development of a tragicomic narrative rhythm. The dream functions to excavate the dreamer's (and possibly the reader's) "self-concealed racism" and to point the way toward what Ellison has called "the mystery of our unity-within-diversity."

KEYWORDS: Ralph Ellison, *Three Days Before the Shooting* . . . , symbols, dreams, race, stereotypes, tragicomedy, extended realism

* Received: December 30, 2022; Accepted: October 29, 2023

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Ralph Ellison's second novel, much like his first, was written in the mode of "realism extended beyond realism" (Ellison, *Collected Essays* 391). This mode is needed for Ellison because reality itself has become "distorted" through chaotic social processes. Surrealism has become necessary to convey the reality of modern American life: "reality is surreal" (Ellison, "Talk" 4). One way Ellison achieved his extended realism is through the strategic use of dream sequences.¹ Dreams had a prominent place in Ellison's first novel, *Invisible Man* (see Abrams), and became even more central to his second novel, sometimes known to scholars as "the Hickman novel" (after one of the novel's main characters). If literature reveals truths about experience which cannot be stated in ordinary or conceptual language (as some critics have argued; see Wimsatt 83; Vivas 38), dreams function, in the novels of Ralph Ellison, as literature *within* literature. Dreams help Ellison's characters realize or present truths—especially about their "psychic states"²—that cannot be presented in the language of straightforward realism. In a quasi-Freudian manner, Ellison's dream narrations reveal his characters' and novels' most fundamental preoccupations.

Ellison composed many thousands of pages for his second novel from the mid-1950s until just before his death in 1994. A small subset of this work was published in 1999 as *Juneteenth*; a larger and more representative subset was published in 2010 as *Three Days Before the Shooting . . .* I take a single dream sequence from *Three Days* as my material for analysis. What is the function of this dream within the Hickman novel? How did Ellison build up its striking and surreal imagery? What does it reveal about his and his characters' preoccupations?

¹ Ellison points to the influence of Dostoevsky in this respect: "I also have been strongly influenced by Dostoyevsky, and he has taught the novelist how to use the dream" (Ellison, "Interview" 266). A note found among Ellison's papers is a quotation from Ruth Mortimer's "Dostoevski and the Dream" (Mortimer 107; John F. Callahan Literary Archive [JFCLA] 41/34): "The device of the dream is effective, however, only where it is an integral part of the work and not merely an appendage or a flight of fancy. There must be a build-up of tension to the moment of the dream; there must be a line of thought which is released, revealed, or explained in the dream. The term 'catharsis' may be applied here as a literary technique as well as a psychological principle. The dream is kept within the context of the work also by means of a controlled symbolism, each image having its counterpart within the range of the story or of the experience of the character as he is presented in the story."

² Ellison responded in a note to his friends Albert Murray and Anatole Broyard's "objections to proliferation of dreams" in his second novel by pointing out "their function of revelations of psychic states" (Ralph Ellison Papers [REP] 141/5).

The story of Ellison's second novel revolves around the assassination of a northeastern United States senator named Adam Sunraider. By the 1970s, Ellison seems to have intended to tell the story from three different perspectives. As published in *Three Days*, Book I is from the perspective of a young white reporter, Welborn McIntyre, who witnesses and then attempts to investigate the shooting. Book II consists of a hospital-room conversation between the apparently-white Senator Sunraider and an elderly black southern preacher named Alonzo Hickman. Though narrated in the third-person, Book II is largely from the perspective of Sunraider. Then there is a whole set of materials which focus on Hickman "before the shooting," as the preacher gets wind of a possible assassination attempt on Senator Sunraider and tries to warn him.³

The materials Ellison composed for his second novel include several dream sequences of varying length and complexity: long, detailed dreams are had by McIntyre, Sunraider, Hickman, and even some secondary characters. The dream episode under consideration here comes from Book I of the novel. The draft of Book I (as well as that of Book II) published in *Three Days* dates from 1972 (Ellison, *Three Days* 3). Although Ellison would continue to revise a small number of scenes from this part of the novel, the 1972 typescript would seem to represent Ellison's final attempt at a unified draft.⁴ It is worth noting that Ellison composed at least two other lengthy dreams for McIntyre (found among his drafts as the "Telephone/Mr. Earman/Sam" and "Mother Strothers" dreams; see, e.g., REP I:126-127, I:224, II:53-54).⁵ These appear in earlier drafts of Book I; while the other dreams cannot be considered in detail here, they do point to the great importance Ellison placed on dreaming in his fiction.

The 1972 Book I, dream—especially the "hitching-post boy" or "iron groom" sequence—has special significance both within the McIntyre narrative and, I argue, within the Hickman novel as a whole. In Book I Ellison gives us something like a dark night of the white northern liberal soul—what Ellison in

³ One undated note (probably from the 1980s or early 1990s) casts the story in terms of three "Consciousnesses: Hickman's, Bliss[']s [aka Sunraider's], McIntyre's" (JFCLA 55/8).

⁴ Cf. this remark by Adam Bradley, co-editor of *Three Days*: "With the significant exception of the scene in which McIntyre visits Jessie Rockmore's townhouse from Book I (the last scene, incidentally, Ellison would work on before his death), Ellison seems to have spent little time revising McIntyre's first-person narration" (Bradley 43)—i.e., after 1972.

⁵ Citations of REP refer to Ellison's notes found in the Ralph Ellison Papers at the Library of Congress (see Works Cited). Notes are cited by box and folder numbers.

a note called “a night journey of the soul”⁶—with the dream as its climax. In epitomizing this existential crisis, the dream of the iron groom serves as what the critic Eliseo Vivas called a *constitutive symbol* (see Vivas 31-50). The dream sums up important aspects of the novel and, beyond that, of the American experience as Ellison understood it; and in doing so it provides a lens through which to interpret both the novel and the experience of reality symbolized by the novel. More specifically, it provides a synopsis of white northern liberal complicity in racial stereotyping through an evasion of moral perception.

To get a handle on how the dream does all this, I will be referring to three interrelated aspects or angles of Ellison’s work as a whole: (1) his ritualist *diagnosis* of American social illness; (2) his extended realist, tragicomic, and syncretic (mythic-modernist-vernacular) *aesthetics* with its reconstructive, therapeutic, or “demiurgic” aim; and (3) his allusive, mosaic, heteroglossic, and narrative *poiesis*, by means of which his diagnostic and aesthetically-reconstructive visions attained concrete literary form.⁷ We shall see that the dream sequence, in its function and constitution, is a particularly striking fulfillment of Ellison’s diagnostic, aesthetic, and poetic project.

In other words, in the first place, the dream exemplifies Ellison’s efforts to diagnose what he called the American “sickness” or “ethical schizophrenia” (*Three Days* 972; *Collected Essays* 148)—the American betrayal of its principles (its use of double standards) through the institution of racial hierarchy. This betrayal is made politically and psychologically affordable to white Americans through the ritual deployment of black stereotypes. Bryan Crable calls this *American sacramentalism* and has shown how Ellison’s diagnostics is rooted in his study of the Cambridge Ritualists (Crable, “Myth”). Ellison wanted to make clear the function of stereotypes of blackness, which

⁶ Writing about an earlier version of the Hickman novel in which McIntyre investigates the shooter’s past in Oklahoma, Ellison wonders: “Perhaps one meaning of McIntyre’s trip to Oklahoma is to undergo a night journey of the soul. A matter of plunging for whatever reason or motive, into the chaos that underlies his certainties. . . . The effectiveness of the journey will depend on his gaining self[-]insight as well as factual knowledge” (JFCLA 52/14&16).

⁷ To be clear, I use the term *poiesis* to refer to techniques of literary or verbal *making*, as opposed to the *values* controlling or implied by a verbal or literary act (usually designated by the terms *aesthetics* or *poetics*). The term is broader and perhaps more neutral than *rhetoric*. I have borrowed the various other concepts here from many places. Jack Turner (*Awakening*, ch. 4) has written of Ellison’s diagnostics and his reconstructive vision. John Wright (*Shadowing*) has referred to Ellison’s celebratory, syncretic, dialectical, and demiurgic impulses. Barbara Foley (*Wrestling*) and Bryan Crable (“Ellison’s Appropriation,” “Myth,” “Who”) have written in great detail about the ritualist foundation of Ellison’s social criticism. Horace Porter (*Jazz Country*) and Robert G. O’Meally (*Antagonistic*) point to the influence of the collage aesthetic on Ellison.

are deployed by one group of Americans in order to alleviate the guilt of subordinating another group of Americans. Stereotypes serve this function by purifying and simplifying a complex and hybrid biological and cultural reality, creating a stark black/white racial distinction. Ellison wants to reveal the workings, as well as the insufficiencies and ill effects, of this kind of ritual stereotyping. In Book I he strategically takes the perspective of an educated, white northern liberal in order to show how even those who are professedly sympathetic to African Americans find great difficulty in identifying with them “in terms of [their] immediate racial and social situation” (Ellison, *Collected Essays* 212; cf. de la Piedra 136-37).

Secondly, the dream exemplifies Ellison’s attempt to develop a literary idiom of tragicomic extended realism which would be true to his experience of American social and cultural surreality, fluidity, and hybridity. He privileges a syncretic literary language, combining white and European modernism (stream-of-consciousness soliloquies, blendings of present experience with memory, anticipation, hallucination, dream) with black American vernacularism (folklore imagery, bluesy tragicomedy, signifying rhetoric, jazzy competitive cooperation among voices), that can help us awaken to the hybrid identities that unify Americans within their diversity.⁸

And thirdly, the dream exemplifies the literary techniques by means of which Ellison analyzes and aesthetically reconstructs social reality. At the level of imagery, he uses a broad range of intertextual, intracorpous, and intratextual allusions, along with diverse cultural references, to build up syncretic and layered images or collages of images. It is not uncommon to find episodes or images in the novel built up out of intertextual allusions to Greek mythology, black folklore, and modernist writers such as James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, or André Malraux. Additionally, Ellison’s imagery is not only allusive of other writers and cultures, but alludes to his own earlier work. For those aware of them, these intracorpous allusions (to his short stories, essays, and *Invisible Man*) give additional resonance to his imagery; this will be particularly important to note with the figure of the iron groom.

⁸ O’Meally has commented on the connection between Ellison’s privileging of the black vernacular and his aesthetic of extended realism: “The use of black folklore enabled Ellison to achieve the ‘magical’ stylistic effects he had been seeking in his fiction for ten years. Not only did the folkloric allusions provide the work with a richness of texture and a solid structure; they also propelled its themes and images into a swirling dream world beyond that of social realism” (*Craft* 80).

Aside from these two forms of intertextual allusion (allusion to others' and his own previous creations), there are also intratextual allusions to note. McIntyre's dream is, to some extent, constructed in the way real dreams are constructed—out of the materials of waking life. Therefore, we will need to pay attention to how McIntyre's waking experience is transformed into dream form—what, after Freud, we can call the novel's *dream-work*.

There is one more element of Ellison's poesis that we will attend to, and this is narrative form. The Hickman novel, and the episodes that comprise it, are not simply a collection of resonant images. Rather, *things happen*; there is narrative progression. The fundamental technique Ellison uses to give his novel and its episodes temporal form is the narrative pattern of *purpose–passion–perception*. This pattern is apparent in much of Ellison's fiction. As a concept, it goes back to Kenneth Burke's analysis of "the tragic rhythm of action" (or the tragic "grammar") in Greek drama (Burke, *Grammar* 39-41.) and was developed further in Francis Fergusson's *The Idea of a Theater* (Ellison knew both Burke's and Fergusson's work well). The tragic rhythm involves an initiating purpose. This purpose, when acted upon,

meets unforeseen difficulties, evidences which do not fit, and therefore shake the purpose as it was first understood; and so the characters suffer the piteous and terrible sense of the mystery of the human situation. From this suffering or passion, with its shifting visions, a new perception of the situation emerges; and on that basis the purpose of the action is redefined, and a new movement starts. (Fergusson 18)

Fergusson goes on to mention that this tragic rhythm of action not only "constitutes the shape of the play as a whole" but "is also the shape of each episode" (18). Fergusson is writing here in the context of *Oedipus Rex*, yet the description, as we will see, fits Ellison's Book I quite well.⁹

⁹ Numerous notes by Ellison (archived in REP and JFCLA) explicitly apply the purpose–passion–perception framework to various parts of the Hickman novel. In a note published in *Three Days*, for example, Ellison writes of "the tension implicit in [Hickman's] unsuccessful quest as it builds from home to frustration through its cycles of purpose, passion, through partial perception to a realignment of purpose leading to other degrees of passion to different orders of perception-frustration" (974). Another of Ellison's notes on the novel seems to suggest that, on the largest scale, "Purpose belongs to Hickman and his group. . . . Passion belongs to Bliss/Sunraider. . . . Perception belongs to McIntyre" (JFCLA 52/34).

However, it needs to be pointed out that Ellison's tragic vision is not that of the Greeks, but rather that of the European existentialists (such as André Malraux and Miguel de Unamuno) and of the blues (see Wright 30-32). This "tragicomic attitude toward the universe" (Ellison, *Collected Essays* 177) laughs—but trembles even as it laughs (or laughs as it trembles)—at "the basic absurdity of the human condition" (617-18). As he once wrote to Kenneth Burke, his work moves "across a tight rope stretched between the comic and the tragic" (*Selected Letters* 207). With this amendment that the McIntyre story is *tragicomic*, we can see it as a large-scale pattern of purpose–passion–perception which contains episode-scale cycles of purpose–passion–perception. McIntyre's broader purpose is the investigation of the shooting of Sunraider; he suffers through various obstacles (principally Hickman); and he gains new insights (though partial and fragmented). The dream has its place as part of McIntyre's tragicomic undergoing of passion and potential gaining of perception.

I. The Dream's Narrative Context: A Dark Night of the White Northern Liberal Soul

Before proceeding to the analysis of this dream—its diagnostics, aesthetics, and poiesis—we need to have a sense of its narrative context. The dream occurs near the end of Book I (in the thirteenth of its fifteen chapters). By the time the reporter Welborn McIntyre dreams his dream, having fallen asleep in the hospital corridor outside Senator Sunraider's recovery room, he has had a number of bizarre experiences. Most shockingly, he has witnessed the attempted assassination of a United States senator. The shooting per se has little direct relevance to the dream. But the assassination attempt also coincided with the appearance of a large, elderly black preacher named Alonzo Z. Hickman. It is McIntyre's observations of and interactions with Hickman that form the immediate context for the dream.

I believe Ellison is relying throughout Book I on what Kenneth Burke called *perspective by incongruity* (see *Permanence* 89-147), or what Ellison indicates in the text as "wild reversals" or "a mishmash of images . . . a nutty blend of values" (*Three Days* 138, 175): the putting together of elements that do not, from an established perspective, belong together. A number of incongruities appear in Book I and elsewhere in the Hickman novel, but the

most important in terms of the dream is the indication of a profound yet mysterious connection between the seemingly white, northeastern, and racist politician Sunraider and the black southern preacher Hickman. Heightening the incongruity is the apparently superior status of the black Hickman vis-à-vis the white McIntyre. These incongruities (of equality between Sunraider and Hickman and of the superiority of Hickman to McIntyre) challenge the limits of McIntyre's supposedly liberal but implicitly segregationist model of the world. The "cognitive dissonance" that results from this and other incongruities forms the background for McIntyre's increasingly fragile psychic state in Book I.

The appearance of Hickman in the first chapter of Book I has itself a certain dream-like quality, as it occurs in the chaos of McIntyre's impressions during and after the shooting in the Senate chamber. Looking past scattering crowds toward the gunman in the visitors' gallery, McIntyre sees, "looming up" behind the gunman "like a bear suddenly cresting a hill, a huge old whiteheaded Negro" (Ellison, *Three Days* 14). This is Hickman, who is closely followed by armed guards. The gunman, seeing Hickman and the guards, jumps from the high visitors' gallery to his death on the floor of the Senate chamber. "There followed," the narrative continues, "a shattering silence," which is itself shattered by the "old Negro," who begins to utter "an inarticulate combination of prayer, sermon, prophesy, and song!" (15). McIntyre observes:

And in that place what an awe-inspiring sound! Yes, and *what confounding conduct*. A terrible calamity strikes the nation and this character *out of nowhere*—Hickman is his name—*he* converts it with a blast of his own voice into an occasion for condemning the entire United States Senate! What a state of affairs—one break in the wall of decorum, one fissure in this pattern of orderly events, and a Negro, a *Negro*, is crying in the gap *like blackest chaos!* . . . It was, there's no other word, *absolutely scandalous!* (15; emphasis added)

"The Earth seemed to slip its orbit," he continues; "it was absolute chaos" (16-17).

Note the highly-charged language used for McIntyre's perception of Hickman: "confounding," "chaos," "absolute scandal," "out of nowhere."

Hickman is, for McIntyre, a harbinger of the unknown, “a symbol . . . of some nameless chaos” (Ellison, *Three Days* 87). Right from the beginning Ellison builds up for McIntyre associations between black men and social—almost cosmic—chaos, and this sets the emotional context for his dream.

Following the shooting, McIntyre will eventually make his way to the hospital where he confronts Hickman, who, in a “flabbergasting” development (Ellison, *Three Days* 21), has been brought there at the request of Sunraider. After a series of tense interactions, McIntyre falls asleep on a bench and dreams. But much happens between the shooting and that moment, and these intervening events give the dream its specific character and meaning.

After the shooting, McIntyre is hustled into the halls of the building where he overhears bits of excited conversation. The confusion and discussion in the hallway triggers McIntyre’s memories of recent events. Only the day before the shooting, after bird-watching¹⁰ and brunch with friends, McIntyre happened to pass by the Senator’s estate where he witnessed black jazz musician LeeWillie Minifees setting fire to (“sacrificing”) his Cadillac on the Senator’s lawn, in protest against racially-charged remarks made by Sunraider (Ellison, *Three Days* 35-48). The image of the burning car is another association between black men and chaos and will reappear in McIntyre’s dream.

Following the Cadillac burning, McIntyre recalls, he had met his fellow reporters at their club (Ellison, *Three Days* 49-64). In this remembered scene we are introduced to the figure of Sam, a black waiter at the club, whom McIntyre ponders and who is alluded to later in the dream. We are also given an elaboration of the character of McGowan, McIntyre’s southern-born colleague. McGowan treats his fellows to a lengthy discourse on what he calls “nigras” (his paternalistic term for African Americans, presumably related to the term “Negros” and the much more denigratory term “niggers”). This scene also allows us insight into McIntyre’s complicated feelings of admiration for and revulsion toward McGowan which provide significant material for his “iron groom” dream.

Returning to the present, McIntyre then rushes to the hospital (Ellison, *Three Days* 64) where he will remain for the next several chapters. At the hospital McIntyre tries to talk to the preacher Hickman who is, inexplicably, praying for the supposedly racist Senator. Hickman, however, is in no mood to

¹⁰ Birds are a major and recurrent symbol in Ellison’s writings (see Sadler) and affect the imagery of the first part of McIntyre’s dream (which I discuss briefly below).

be questioned and rebukes McIntyre, to the latter's acute embarrassment (70-72). It is important here that Hickman refers to McIntyre as "boy," which McIntyre interprets as condescension and a subversion of social order.

McIntyre's memory then turns to the past. There is a lengthy reminiscence of his youthful romance with a young black woman named Laura Jean (Ellison, *Three Days* 101-11). Among other things, this episode functions to establish McIntyre's liberal bona fides while also suggesting his simplistic and self-serving view of black Americans: "I felt that Laura *endowed me with a special potency*, thus I considered myself the *possessor of a mysterious knowledge* which *gave me a touch of swagger* whenever we strolled the easily challenged streets arm in arm, eye to eye, mentally hypnotized by our daring" (101; emphasis added). But McIntyre gets Laura pregnant, and the romance ends in humiliation when Laura's mother turns down his request to marry her (see Johnson for a useful analysis of McIntyre's hypocrisy here).

Back in the present, the compounding of past and present humiliations overwhelms McIntyre. He tries to strike Hickman, but the elderly Hickman deftly thwarts his attack (Ellison, *Three Days* 128)—a violent dynamic that will be recapitulated at the end of McIntyre's dream. Then, still lost in thoughts of Laura, he begins to recall a more recent event of early morning on the day of the shooting (139-74). At the request of his editor, McIntyre had visited the townhouse of an elderly black antiques dealer named Jessie Rockmore. Rockmore is dead; the police think, murdered. This episode is the strangest yet, and it is in Rockmore's townhouse that McIntyre comes across the "hitching-post boy" figure that will literally come to haunt his dream.

Finally, we return to the present, with McIntyre keeping watch with Hickman outside Senator Sunraider's recovery room. And it is at this point, resting his head on the back of a bench in the hallway, that McIntyre begins to dream (Ellison, *Three Days* 175-76).

Important details from the forgoing episodes will be discussed as they become relevant. The important point for now is that McIntyre has undergone a very strange—even traumatic—couple of days. The chaos of the shooting has sent him reeling into the depths of his memory and destabilized his sense of reality. Significantly, the events of the last days and the memories stirred up largely center on black people: the jazz musician LeeWillie Minifees, Laura Jean and her mother, the dead Jessie Rockmore, Sam the waiter, and, most importantly, Hickman: "*Here and now*," McIntyre muses, "*dark things and*

dark people lost in the dark places of my mind are with me, and no search for peace nor pining for the past released them here, but him [Hickman], sitting there!" (127). Ellison is building up McIntyre's sense that blackness is "a symbol . . . of some nameless chaos" (87), as well as, I think, expressing his own sense that "in our culture the problem of the irrational . . . has taken the form of the Negro problem" (Ellison, *Collected Essays* 335). As Ellison put it in an essay, black people have become "shackled" to the white mind's "notion of chaos," "to almost everything it would repress from conscience and consciousness" (102).

McIntyre's orienting assumptions have been subverted by Hickman, revealing for him a "nameless chaos" that shocks and bewilders him. In the corridor outside Sunraider's hospital room, just before he falls asleep, McIntyre recalls his recent experience and thinks to himself, "What a mishmash of images! What a nutty blend of values! The world had become a Mr. Badbar of nutty contradictions . . ." (Ellison, *Three Days* 175). He has acted purposefully, but his faulty assumptions about the world (his mismatched *orientation*, to use Kenneth Burke's term; see *Permanence* 5-18) have led him into suffering. His perception of the world is now confused, disoriented. What was familiar has become unfamiliar. It is in this disturbed and confused frame of mind, haunted by incongruities, that McIntyre dreams.

II. Overview of McIntyre's Dream

McIntyre's anxiety-inflected dream is structurally and symbolically complex. It actually comprises two fairly distinct sections. The first of these is constructed according to a collage aesthetic centered on a group of talking and singing buzzards. The second section, which focuses on McIntyre's struggle with an iron hitching-post boy, is narratively patterned by the tragicomic rhythm of action. We transition from one section to the other when McIntyre flees one location and enters a second.¹¹

The first part of the dream seems to function as stage-setting for the second and main part, moving us out of Washington, D. C. and into more of a rural,

¹¹ Freud and other psychologists have made some interesting comments about multi-part dreams (see, e.g., Freud *Interpretation* 328-35; *New Introductory Lectures* 32-33), and Ellison's work in various aspects shows the influence of Freud (see Campbell; Doane). As I focus here on a single part of the dream I leave a fuller discussion of this aspect for a future occasion.

southern locale. It is mainly built out of three sets of images: war imagery from McIntyre's (and Ellison's) memories of World War II;¹² a Bull Durham Tobacco sign, a bit of Americana which appears in other of Ellison's writings (*Flying Home* 21; *Collected Essays* 660); and a group of talking, singing buzzards (*Three Days* 176-78). This last image is the main focus of this first part of the dream. Buzzards have strong associations with the southern US and with the black vernacular tradition. Ellison has drawn on these associations in other writings and draws on them again here to set the stage for the iron groom.¹³ In the dream the buzzards' sing a song about "running for where the living don't / Bury the living dead." This possibly refers to a bringing to awareness of what T. S. Eliot called "the presence" of the past (*Sacred Wood* 49), a concept much approved of by Ellison and reiterated in his own essays (e.g., *Collected Essays* 416-17; also see Pinkerton 219).¹⁴

While the first part of the dream is a collage-like juxtaposition of images and concepts without clear narrative momentum, the second section of the dream, centered on an iron hitching-post boy, is obviously structured by Ellison's tragicomic narrative technique. The hitching-post boy or iron groom is himself, however, something of a collage. In Freudian terms, he is exemplary of the dream-work technique of *condensation*, in which diverse elements with some point of similarity are *condensed* into new unities—"composite structures"—by the dream-work (Freud, *New Introductory Lectures* 25; *Interpretation* 310-11, 336-41). The groom is constructed out of elements (characters and objects) from earlier in the novel and also resonates with figures from Ellison's *Invisible Man*.

¹² Compare, for example, McIntyre's memory (Ellison, *Three Days* 81) and dream imagery (176) with Ellison's descriptions in his letters (e.g., *Selected Letters* 195).

¹³ The buzzards, in particular, deserve more extended analysis than I can give here. On buzzards as symbolic of the past, see Ellison's "Flying Home" (in *Flying Home*), a story which also contains imagery redeployed in the McIntyre dream. The discussion among the dream buzzards derives from old folktales (see Young 64; Dorson, *American Negro Folktales* 114-15; Hurston 58). The buzzards' theme had been associated with T. S. Eliot in Ellison's essay "Tell It Like It Is, Baby" (see *Collected Essays* 38; also see Pinkerton's discussion of Eliot in relation to this essay). Likewise, the song of the buzzards at the end of the first part of the dream derives from another folktale from the nineteenth century that was repurposed during World War I (see Dorson, "Negro Tales" 7-8; Dorson, *American Negro Folktales* 112-14). The song is seemingly mixed here with the Eliotian motif of living death (as in *The Waste Land* and "The Hollow Men"), a motif also used by Ellison in *Invisible Man* (290) to symbolize those relics of a rural past whose values are out of place in the industrial present. It is also significant that Hickman is described by McIntyre at one point as an "old buzzard" (Ellison, *Three Days* 73).

¹⁴ For a general consideration of Ellison's approach to the past in the Hickman novel, see Parrish.

The basic action of this part of the dream involves McIntyre struggling to remove the iron groom who is blocking the doorway to a house. This symbolic action clearly partakes of the tragicomic rhythm of purpose–passion–perception. Most immediately this dream-struggle is an allegorical replay of McIntyre’s struggle with Hickman outside the door to Sunraider’s hospital room, with all the frustration and bewilderment it gave rise to. But the dream is also meant to reveal McIntyre’s (and perhaps the white reader’s) “self-concealed racism” (JFCLA 52/20).¹⁵ For the iron groom that has replaced Hickman is a racist caricature drawn from earlier in Book I. The “signifying” speech of the iron groom, elicited by McIntyre’s actions, serves to excavate the unexamined racist assumptions—the implicit stereotypes—that undergird McIntyre’s view of the world. It reveals, and reveals the cracks in, McIntyre’s “stereotype-armored mind” (to borrow an Ellisonian phrase; see Ellison, *Selected Letters* 207). The groom’s speech also points in the direction of a new perspective on reality. The groom, in other words, functions as one of Ellison’s major diagnostic and aesthetic-reconstructive devices.

Because this section of the dream is so symbolically and narratively resonant with Ellison’s broader aesthetic and intellectual concerns, we will consider its elements in greater detail.

III. Introducing the Dream Struggle: McIntyre and McGowan vs. the Iron Groom

McIntyre enters the main setting of his dream having fled the obscure, collage-like scene of the buzzards. The location is ambiguous, but we would now seem to be in a small town as McIntyre can “see a thriving field in which an odd-shaped machine rested like some strange and satiated Moloch”;¹⁶ beyond this “the roofs and smoking chimneys of a thriving city showed” (Ellison, *Three Days* 178).

¹⁵ Citations of JFCLA refer to Ellison’s notes found in the John F. Callahan Literary Archive (see Works Cited). Notes are cited by box and folder numbers.

¹⁶ The choice of the symbolically-rich word “Moloch” here is intriguing. Moloch has sometimes been imagined as a bull-headed god to whom sacrifices must be made (similar to the Greek Minotaur). There are resonances here with the Bull Durham image earlier in the dream and with the motif of sacrifice that occurs throughout *Three Days* (e.g., p. 39, p. 180) and Ellison’s other writings. It is also notable that Moloch is sometimes used as a symbol of modernity, as in Alan Ginsberg’s “Howl,” written in 1955 around the same time that Ellison was writing the early drafts of his second novel.

McIntyre “pass[es] a burning automobile”—an intratextual reference to the burning Cadillac he had witnessed the previous day—and sees his colleague “McGowan leaning wearily against a lamppost” (Ellison, *Three Days* 178). McGowan, “strangely transformed and extremely weak,” complains of “having terrible trouble with a nigma” (178). The apparent problem is that a black man is blocking the door to McGowan’s house and will not let him go inside. McGowan is not feeling up to dealing with the situation and so asks McIntyre for assistance. LeeWillie Minifees’s Cadillac “sacrifice” comes up again when McIntyre asks if McGowan did anything to insult the fellow; McGowan replies, “Oh, hell, no, that was the Senator, not me” (179) (and this implies something about the identity of the “nigma”). McIntyre is not eager to get involved but ultimately agrees to see what he can do.

He follows McGowan’s directions and comes upon the house. But what he finds there in the doorway is not “the stubborn, angry Negro of the stature of [the famous boxers] Jack Johnson or Joe Louis whom I’d expected” but “a small cast-iron hitching-post figure in the form of a diminutive Negro” (Ellison, *Three Days* 180). A hitching-post boy (also known as a lawn jockey or iron groom) is a small statue to which people once hitched their horses. Hitching-post boys were made in different styles, and the one Ellison describes is of the “Jocko” style—an unflattering caricature of an African American boy (see Figure 1; also see Goings 52). In the dream McIntyre explains that such iron grooms “were once to be seen mainly in the South, but . . . in recent years [they] have mushroomed throughout the North and are now all over the place—especially before the meanest, least aristocratic of dwellings—where they stand in strident postures.” The iron groom “was a cheap, crudely made symbol of easily acquired tradition; the favorite statuary of the lazy seeker for facile symbolic status” (Ellison, *Three Days* 180).



Figure 1: A Jocko-style hitching post, similar to the one described in *Three Days*. John Barker, “Lawn jockey,” March 13 2008, *Wikimedia Commons*.

McIntyre, somewhat perplexed and suspicious of a practical joke, nevertheless decides to move the little iron groom out of the doorway. But as he lifts the “iron boy, straining with the unexpected weight,” the groom begins to speak to him. McIntyre, shocked, drops the groom, who lands back in the doorway (Ellison, *Three Days* 181). Thus begins McIntyre’s dream struggle, cast in the tragicomic rhythm of purpose–passion–perception. Over the course of this section of the dream he will act to move and even argue with the iron groom, suffer under the loquacious groom’s verbal assaults, and perhaps gain some insight into “*la condition humaine*” as the groom says (184) (alluding to the novel by André Malraux, an important influence on Ellison).

But first, who or what is the iron groom?

IV. The Iron Groom as Composite Sacramental Artifact

The iron groom has both intratextual and intracorpus connections. Earlier in Book I McIntyre had seen a groom very similar to this dream version in the townhouse of the rich black man (Jessie Rockmore) on whose death he had been sent to report. At one point, making his way through the cluttered passageways of the house, McIntyre is

brought to a shuddering halt by a particularly repulsive example of a traditional cast-iron hitching-post figure in the form of a small blackamoor with dull black face, bright red lips, and popped thyroid eyes. . . . [F]or a moment the popped eyes held me in what seemed to be a derisive interrogatory gaze (Ellison, *Three Days* 144)

In the logic of the novel it is not surprising that the hitching-post figure becomes material for McIntyre’s dream. But the groom in the dream has an unusual appearance. Although it has the traditional Jocko-style “gleaming black” skin, “white teeth showing through parted bloodred lips,” and “thyroid [i.e., bulging] eyes,” it also has some differences:

instead of the traditional blouse, short-visored beanie, and flapping trousers of such figures, this one wore a tiny blue suit which, oddly, was cut in the fashionable short-jacketed style

known as “Italian Continental.” Its sharp-toed shoes, with large brass buckles, were also Continental. (180)

And instead of holding a ring for hitching horses, it held a “glass of dark oily liquid” (180).

These physical details connect the iron groom to Hickman, but also perhaps to Sam, the waiter at the club where McIntyre had met McGowan and the other reporters,¹⁷ and even to other black characters. In other words, with the iron groom we find a symbol produced through identification (of blackness and incongruousness) and condensation.

That the groom is linked to Hickman is indicated (beyond the structure of the dream involving a struggle near a doorway) by details of attire. Hickman, for instance, was described earlier as wearing a “blue tropical worsted suit” (Ellison, *Three Days* 75)—“tropical” here suggesting a lightweight suit as would be the groom’s “Italian Continental.” Just as the groom’s costume is non-traditional, so Hickman “was dressed as no minister that I’d ever seen” (78). Then there is the glass of liquid. Just before McIntyre started dreaming, Hickman had asked a nurse to bring McIntyre a glass of water. And yet, when McIntyre first approached McGowan’s house he half-expected to find Sam “standing at the door with a tray of iced drinks” (180); and he later tells the groom, “I didn’t order a drink because I had quite enough hours ago, and I didn’t even ring for you . . .” (182)—as if he were talking to Sam. The “dark oily liquid,” then, may be some mysterious cocktail. On the other hand, a careful reader may also recall the glasses of Jack Daniel’s whiskey held by the dead Jessie Rockmore, found sitting up in a coffin in the townhouse where McIntyre first glimpsed the iron groom, and by Rockmore’s helper Aubrey McMillen as he is being questioned by the police (146). Then again, the darkness of the liquid may be seen to have symbolic properties: of the darkness of the mystery confronting McIntyre, of the sudden contamination of his world by blackness. Moreover, remember that McGowan had claimed that “the Senator” had insulted the man blocking his doorway. This is a reference to the jazz musician LeeWillie Minifees, who burned his Cadillac on Sunraider’s lawn after hearing a speech in which Sunraider called Cadillacs “coon cages” (42) (“coon” being

¹⁷ In an earlier draft of Book I, McIntyre’s dream takes place at home after the club episode. The beginning of the dream in this version focuses on Sam, and a voice in the dream refers to “hitching-post sammy” (REP II:52/14, p. 126).

yet another derogatory word for African Americans). Each of these characters—Hickman at Sunraider’s hospital room, Sam at the club, Jessie Rockmore and Aubrey McMillen in the expensive and cluttered townhouse, LeeWillie Minifees on Sunraider’s lawn—are identified for McIntyre through their blackness and the sense of incongruity or disorientation to which they give rise.¹⁸

Shifting to intracorpous connections, artifactual stereotypes like the iron groom are also important to Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. Major episodes in *Invisible Man* center on a cast-iron “jolly nigger” bank (319-22, 327-32) and paper Sambo dolls (431-49)—similar racist caricatures of black men as servile and happy-go-lucky simpletons. The former is even described in words similar to those used for the iron groom: a “cast-iron figure of a very black, red-lipped and wide-mouthed Negro, whose white eyes stared up at me from the floor” (Ellison, *Invisible Man* 319). These artifacts—the cast-iron bank and the paper dolls—enrage and haunt the invisible man. In Book I of the Hickman novel, however, it is not the *stereotyped* who is haunted but the *stereotyper*.¹⁹

¹⁸ We can see the identity of the groom changing and complexifying over the drafts of McIntyre’s dream. Some drafts indicate a possible identity with Laura, McIntyre’s black lover from his youth. One handwritten draft of the hitching-post boy dream has written at the top “The negro is an invisible woman” (REP I:126/4), and one of the “Mother Strothers” versions ends in this way: “‘Stop him! Stop,’ Mother Strothers called, ‘That McGowan promised my mama he’d marry me.’ And I looked back to see the hitching post boy pointing toward me” (REP II:52/14, p. 184). Another draft clearly identifies him with Sam the waiter: “in the middle of the night, in a dream, the black waiter appeared but this time strangely transformed. He was no longer the tall, rather handsome waiter of the club but had shrunken to the height of the familiar little hitching post Negro” (REP I:126/4). In this version the hitching-post boy wears a white jacket like the waiter. De la Piedra has suggested that the iron groom is “Hickman *and* Vannec” (147), the latter referring to a French intellectual whom McIntyre meets during World War II. It is true that Ellison has placed elements of McIntyre’s war experience in France around the edges of the dream, and there may be elements of Vannec peppered into the figure of the groom. The main evidence for this would be a few French words used by the groom. Additionally, one could draw attention to one of Ellison’s notes: “Hitching post [boy] asks some of Vannec[’s] questions but in a far less abstract way” (REP I:126/4). However, these questions do not seem to appear in the 1972 version. De la Piedra also points to the groom’s “Italian” suit, but this could have many other explanations: as a reference to McIntyre’s time in Rome after the war, for example, or to some Italian writing McIntyre saw when he first saw the hitching-post boy at Jessie Rockmore’s, or even to Shakespeare’s Iago, whom McGowan refers to as “that nasty Italian bastard” (Ellison, *Three Days* 56). This last possibility, though far-fetched, is intriguing as the iron groom plays a rather Iago-like role in McIntyre’s dream—though in fact the groom refers to himself as “Otello” (192). Ultimately, most of the evidence points to the groom being a composite of Book I’s black characters filtered through McIntyre’s biases and disorientation as well as through Ellison’s aesthetic and diagnostic sensibilities.

¹⁹ While I have not noted any obvious intertextual allusions with respect to the artifactuality of the iron groom, an anonymous reviewer has alerted me to one possibility: Flannery O’Connor’s short story “The Artificial Nigger” from her 1955 collection *A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories*. In

The groom, then, though strongly “Hickmanesque,” has a broader symbolism. It is a *collective representation*, a universal symbol for incongruous blackness as McIntyre has experienced it. And, as brought out by its links to the racist artifacts of *Invisible Man*, it has a *social function*. Its representational and functional properties mark it as a sacramental object or *daimon* (in Jane Ellen Harrison’s ritualist terms; see Crable, “Ellison’s Appropriation,” “Myth”). This sacramental object is like a mask which may be borne or forced upon any number of individuals for the purpose of fulfilling its ritual social function. Specifically, such racialized objects make scapegoats of those who are represented, scapegoats into which white Americans cast their fears of change and uncertainties of identity. These sacramental objects are ritually consumed to protect white Americans against change—to ensure “the solidity of white American identity” (Crable, “Myth” 122) and to “to allow whites a more secure place (if only symbolically) in American society” (Ellison, *Collected Essays* 632). While painful to those they stereotype, objects such as Jocko hitching-post boys function “not so much to crush the Negro as to console the white man” (97) over his ethical schizophrenia.

In the dream, however, we are given no ordinary hitching-post boy, no passive caricature. Along with a certain physical incongruity and intransigence, Ellison has endowed his iron groom with the power of speech. The groom is not simply an inanimate *thing* submissive to McIntyre’s control, but, through the power of speech, takes on a life and agency of his own. The groom speaks using a highly-literate version of the vernacular “rhetorical strategy” (Abrahams 51) of *signifying*, effectively subjecting McIntyre to what one draft calls “a ‘grand Inquisition’” (REP I:126/4).

Geneva Smitherman has defined signifying as

Ritualized verbal art in which the speaker puts down, needles, talks about (*signifies on*) someone, to make a point or sometimes just for fun. *Signifyin* depends on double meaning and irony, exploits the unexpected, and uses quick verbal surprises and

this story, at the end of a difficult and disorienting trip to Atlanta, a boy and his grandfather pass through a wealthy suburb and come across a “plaster figure of a Negro” attached to a fence in front of one of the houses—a figure that returns them to some sense of certainty in the world. Whether Ellison knew of this story is unknown to me, but certainly its “southern Gothic” flavor, sense of disorientation, and use of a stereotyped artifact bear similarity to McIntyre’s dream.

humor. When used as social critique, it is characterized by nonmalicious and principled criticism. (*Black Talk* 260)²⁰

She has also provided a longer list of characteristics:

indirection, circumlocution; metaphorical-imagistic (but images rooted in the everyday, real world); humorous, ironic; rhythmic fluency and sound; teachy but not preachy; directed at person or persons usually present in the situational context (siggers do not talk behind yo back); punning, play on words; introduction of the semantically or logically unexpected. (*Talkin* 121)

All of this appears profusely in the groom's speech. Indeed, one scrap of paper saved in the Ellison archives has the phrase "Signifying monkey is in McIntyre's dream" scrawled on it (JFCLA 52/50)—the signifying monkey being an African American trickster figure associated with the practice of signifying.²¹

The groom's eloquent signifying links him with other culturally-black characters in the novel such as Hickman, Sunraider, and LeeWillie Minifees (see Mills). Likewise is he linked with characters and character-types from the broader Ellison corpus, such as the narrator of *Invisible Man* and the "little man at Chehaw Station" (from an essay of that name by Ellison). There is even a sense of kinship with Ellison himself, who responded to his own critics not only with logical refutations but also by encircling them with subtle but deadly signifying snares.²²

The groom speaks almost musically, improvisationally, using elaborate puns, allusions, innuendo, metaphors, and so on to *put down* and *needle* McIntyre while at the same time *bragging* about himself. However, this is not a signifying of the streets and clubs (as with Minifees or the young Hickman)

²⁰ The *g* is often left off of the term *signifying* when it is used in this sense, though Ellison sometimes retains the *g* in his own writings. Incidentally, one of the major studies of signifying, Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *The Signifying Monkey*, is heavily indebted to Ellison's work, including parts of the Hickman novel that had been published by that time.

²¹ On the signifying monkey, see Gates. It is unknowable which version of the dream Ellison is referring to, as they all feature signifying. The groom's small stature, however, makes him a likely incarnation of the signifying monkey.

²² See, e.g., his responses to the critics Irving Howe ("The World and the Jug" in *Collected Essays*) and Clifford Mason (in a letter to *Life* magazine editor Thomas Griffith; *Selected Letters* 667-75).

or of the political or religious event (as with Sunraider or the older Hickman), but signifying almost as it might be performed by a T. S. Eliot or James Joyce (or Ellison himself when speaking in his own voice). Indeed, the groom's speech is peppered with allusions so numerous and obscure (from blues pianist Pinetop Smith to southern politician E. H. Crump) that it might well have been footnoted after the model of Eliot's *The Waste Land* or an annotated edition of a work like Joyce's *Ulysses*. In the groom's speech, as in so many other places, Ellison has mixed the black vernacular (in particular, its rhythms and signifying word-play) with the language of European high modernism.

Signifying occurs throughout Ellison's writings (see, e.g., Gates), but the iron groom's stereotype-shattering eloquence—his obscure cultural allusions, his expansive vocabulary, his use of foreign words, his lengthy and syntactically complex sentences—speaks to Ellison's more specific interest in creating black characters with “intellectual depth,” who were not merely conscious but “hyperconscious” (*Invisible Man* xix; *Collected Essays* 486). Such characters are African American extensions of Dostoevsky's, Malraux's, or Joyce's characters, rather than kin to Richard Wright's.²³ The groom himself tells McIntyre: “eloquence is eloquence, no matter how we attain it, and *I am nothing if not eloquent*” (Ellison, *Three Days* 184; emphasis added). McIntyre reports: “The speech was precise, even cultured, with a certain archness and theatrical stridency. It was the very last type of speech I'd have associated with a hitching-post figure—even taking into account the absurd clothing” (182). His way with words is the groom's primary mode of incongruity, his strategy for subverting the ritual social function indicated by his stereotyped features.

In this way the groom is an embodiment of what Ellison called “the little man at Chehaw Station,” referring to “those individuals we sometimes meet whose refinement of sensibility is inadequately explained by family background, formal education, or social status.” These individuals are precisely incongruous. They have been subjected to “a mysterious enrichment of personality” due to the chaotic “random accessibility” of culture in the US (Ellison, *Collected Essays* 497). This ability to shock one's supposed social superiors with cultural attainment was highly prized by Ellison. A telling

²³ Ellison criticized the inarticulateness of Wright's characters Bigger Thomas (from *Native Son*) and Fred Daniels (from *The Man Who Lived Underground*). For example, Wright, Ellison claimed, “could not for ideological reasons depict a Negro as intelligent, as creative or as dedicated as himself” (*Collected Essays* 167). Such depictions, though true-to-life with respect to some portion of the population, could have reactionary effects when circulated through the culture (see Genter 198-99).

instance: When a “young white professor” asked the older Ellison, after one of his lectures, “how does it feel to be able to go places where most black men can’t go?” he responded, “What you mean is, how does it feel to be able to go places most white men can’t go” (Ellison, *Selected Letters* 682). His cultural attainments, he signified, were beyond not just those of most other *blacks* but those of most other *whites*.²⁴

We should, then, expect to find connections between the iron groom and other intellectual and eloquent Ellisonian characters, as indeed we do if we turn again to *Invisible Man*. The principal point of contact is, of course, the invisible man himself, whose desire for leadership is thwarted by a racist society but whose desire for wisdom is fulfilled nonetheless. The groom tells McIntyre, alluding to something like the invisible man’s disillusioning journey:

you are a follower while I am a leader And why am I a leader? It’s because I have been there, baby. I’ve been to all those places that you only think about and fear to investigate. ... when your old man started forcing me into the seams and cracks of things I was compelled to grow up in the ways of the wise. (Ellison, *Three Days* 193)

In the autobiographical elements of the groom’s speech are to be found echoes of the prologue and epilogue to *Invisible Man*, as when the narrator, speaking in double meanings, says that he once “lived in the darkness into which I was chased, but now I see. I’ve illuminated the blackness of my invisibility—and vice versa” (13). Forced to the margins of society, both the groom and the invisible man had to “wise up.”

V. Perspective by Misnomer: McIntyre as McGowan

While exemplifying Ellison’s syncretic aesthetic, the groom’s signifying also serves Ellison’s diagnostic purposes, allowing him to excavate the presuppositions and preoccupations of the white northern liberal psyche (cf. Shreve). I will consider three ways in which the groom performs a diagnosis of

²⁴ Also: “Once I shocked a white man whose shoes I was shining by revealing that I was familiar with Freud’s theory of dreams, but neither of us were prepared to communicate on that level, for it would have placed too great a strain on the arrangements of social hierarchy—and on the two of us!” (Ellison, *Selected Letters* 732).

the white northern liberal “ethically-schizophrenic” psyche. One part of the groom’s diagnostic strategy is his misnaming of McIntyre. The groom persistently calls McIntyre “McGowan” or some variation: “McGow-wand,” “McOldcowhand,” “McGoldinhand,” “McFoldedhand,” “McCoolhand,” “McGobback,” “McGee,” “McGoahead.” This is effective in getting under McIntyre’s skin, and we observe him wondering, “what if the groom . . . actually knew that my name was McIntyre, and his insistence on calling me ‘McGowan’ was deliberate? Or was it that I had in fact *become* McGowan?” (Ellison, *Three Days* 186).²⁵ Misonaming is a common form of *low-rating* or insult. When McIntyre challenges the groom on this, he replies sharply with another insult: “All of you ofays are McGowan to me—McGowan” (181). This reverses an old white person insult about all members of a given non-white race looking alike (*ofay* being a derogatory term for a white person).

Misonaming is not *merely* an insult, however. Calling things by their “wrong” names is a form of Burke’s *perspective by incongruity*, and more specifically an attempt at *exorcism by misnomer* (*Permanence* 175; also see Genter 196). McIntyre is reclassified as a form of McGowan (“was it that I had in fact *become* McGowan?”), linked to the latter through similarities of social function (cf. Blake 132). By misnaming McIntyre, the iron groom of McIntyre’s subconscious draws attention to McIntyre’s own segregationist and stereotyping attitudes—what Ellison’s notes refer to as McIntyre’s “unconscious sharing of some of McGowan’s prejudices” (JFCLA 52/14). These attitudes then become ripe for exorcism or transformation. If McIntyre does not want to “be” McGowan, then the implication is that he needs to change his attitudes.

This theme—of the unacknowledged similarities between northern and southern whites—is pervasive in Ellison’s writings, but the Hickman novel gives us his first attempt to explore it from the white person’s perspective. McIntyre is an embodiment of white northern liberals’ complex feelings about the South. Throughout Book I, McIntyre, a self-described “liberal, ex-radical Northerner” (Ellison, *Three Days* 61), endeavors to ideologically distance himself from the conservative southerner McGowan. And yet he is also strangely, even obsessively, drawn to McGowan, to the extent of hallucinating

²⁵ A similarly disorienting misnaming occurs in a variation of one of McIntyre’s “Mother Strothers” dreams which occurs instead to Hickman. In the dream (or dream-like episode) called “Night” a black female preacher named Mother Strothers continually refers to Hickman as “McIntyre” (REP II:54/11).

the southerner's voice while under duress in the hospital (127) as well as dreaming of him. An earlier draft of the dream acknowledges this directly, with McIntyre speaking of his own "compulsive identification with McGowan" (REP II:54/2).

As mentioned earlier, McIntyre recalls meeting McGowan and some other reporters in a club, where McGowan treats his comrades to a long discourse on "nigra politics" and the dangers of black politicization. McGowan distinguishes between "good" or "proper nigras" and "bad [political, subversive, rebellious] nigras" (Ellison, *Three Days* 55-60). The latter include those who are found "in the wrong section of town after dark," who brush "against a white person on the street," who roll their eyes and poke out their mouths at a white person, who talk "about moving up North," who talk "too loud on the street," who talk "about sending [their] kids north to college," and so on. McIntyre is both amused and disturbed by this speech. He worries that McGowan will offend Sam, their black waiter. "After all," McIntyre opines, "during the thirties I had learned to regard the sensibilities of his people and to avoid all anti-minority stereotypes and clichés. One simply didn't laugh at victims of minority persecution" (54). A version of this scene published in 1963 brought out McIntyre's hypocrisy more pointedly: "One simply didn't laugh at unfortunates—*within their hearing*" (1048; emphasis added).

McIntyre is also disturbed by the ways in which McGowan's orientation to reality seems to be structured by black people:

McGowan was obsessed by history to the point of nightmare. He had confined the dark man in a mental package which he carried with him as constantly as the old-fashioned watch which he wore on a chain, and I imagined him consulting one for time and the other for social and historical orientation. (Ellison, *Three Days* 60)

Yet, at the same time, McIntyre recognizes "the element of truth" in what McGowan says, and envies the latter's ability to say things "openly about Negroes" which McIntyre "dare[s] not even think lest I undo my delicate balance of tolerance, justice, and sense of fair play" (60). And because McGowan is open about "his prejudices" he is "freer" and "more honest" than McIntyre (60-61). Perhaps even McGowan, "in his very injustice [is] quite

possibly more *just* than” McIntyre.²⁶ We see in the “nigra politics” episode McIntyre beginning to question whether he, the northern liberal, is really more enlightened than the southern conservative. This theme is carried forward into the dream, in which McIntyre (as representative of the North) serves as segregationist kin to McGowan (the South).²⁷

When it came to their approaches to race relations, the similarity between northern liberalism and southern conservatism was a long-standing concern for Ellison, and one rooted in his own experience of both North and South. In *Invisible Man* this was apparent in his characterization of white northerners such as Mr. Norton, Mr. Emerson, and Brother Jack. Seemingly sympathetic and philanthropic on the surface, their paternalistic, segregationist, and instrumental view of black people is revealed by their actions and ultimately perceived by the narrator:

I looked around a corner of my mind and saw Jack and Norton and Emerson merge into one single white figure. They were very much the same, each attempting to force his picture of reality upon me and neither giving a hoot in hell for how things looked to me. I was simply a material, a natural resource to be used. (Ellison, *Invisible Man* 508)

Invisible man does not escape racism by going north; as with whites of the South, the whites of the North project onto him the image they need to see in order to maintain their social and political order, their sense of reality. Thus the partial fungibility of northerner and southerner in McIntyre’s dream.

Yet North and South are different in their racism. As the references to the white northerners of *Invisible Man* attest, northern racism was often obfuscated under the cover of *helping*. It was a racism disguised by outwardly good intentions. This made it especially difficult for whites themselves to perceive and thus for blacks to draw attention to. In a 1963 interview, Malcolm X stated the issue starkly, comparing white southerners to “white wolves” and white

²⁶ This perplexing statement is perhaps illuminated by Ellison’s comment in a note that “stereotyping reveals a negative admiration of Negroes on McGowan’s part” (JFCLA 52/14). McIntyre shows no evidence of admiration (positive or negative) for blacks, only a desire to not openly offend them.

²⁷ In an early typed draft of the dream, this North-South connection is also made by the house where the action takes place. The “Southern manor house” that McIntyre first comes upon suddenly transforms into “a small, badly designed New England style ‘split level ranch house” (REP I:126/4). Also recall McIntyre’s comment (quoted above) that hitching-post boys spread from the South to the North.

northerners to “white foxes” (61). As he put it, “this white fox here in the North is even more cruel and more vicious than the white wolf in the South.” This is because the “southern wolves always let you know where you stand. But these northern foxes pose as white liberals.” By posing as black people’s allies and benefactors, the white foxes gain an advantageous position from which to “strangle [blacks’] militant efforts toward true freedom” (61).

Ellison was similarly disturbed by the segregationist attitude of so-called northern liberals. While he was painfully conscious of (and experienced in) the terror and violence of the white wolves, Ellison spent most of his mature life in the North, among the white foxes, and became well attuned to unreflective liberal prejudice. One of his most open statements about this occurs in his “The Myth of the Flawed White Southerner,” in which he recalls defending, in 1965, President Lyndon Johnson against “those Northern liberals who have become, in the name of the highest motives, the new apologists for segregation” (Ellison, *Collected Essays* 556).²⁸ As with his invisible man, Ellison perceived these liberals as “attempting to force [their] picture of reality upon me and neither giving a hoot in hell for how things looked to me” (*Invisible Man* 508). In the essay he says, “I found it irritating that they seemed to assume that *their* interests were automatically mine, and that, supposedly, I and those of my background possess no interest that they, my friends and colleagues, had any need to understand or respect” (Ellison, *Collected Essays* 557). Arguably, Book I, with its portrayal of the dark night of the white liberal soul, is Ellison’s attempt to puncture the northern liberals’ “smug attitude of moral superiority” (*Collected Essays* 568), to “break through [their] stereotype-armored minds” (Ellison, *Selected Letters* 206), and to bring to consciousness what Burke called “our unconscious Nortonism” (after the philanthropist in Ellison, *Invisible Man*; Burke, “Ralph Ellison’s Trueblooded Bildungsroman” 359). One way Book I does this is by having McIntyre enact an uneasy symbolic alliance with McGowan. By suffering through this dark form of antagonistic cooperation, McIntyre gains at least the potential for a new perception of reality.

²⁸ There are many such places in his essays and letters which critique northern liberalism. For instance, he notes that there is a “Northern white liberal version of the white Southern myth of absolute separation of the races” (Ellison, *Collected Essays* 163) and that “Northern whites have reacted to the pressures of black Northerners for more equality as vehemently and in some cases as violently and irrationally as their Southern counterparts” (427). Also see his written interactions with his white northern liberal friends and acquaintances such as Stanley Edgar Hyman (“Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke” in *Collected Essays*), Kenneth Burke (Ellison, *Selected Letters* 203-08; also see Crable, *Ralph Ellison*), and Irving Howe (“The World and the Jug” in *Collected Essays*; also see Genter).

VI. Playing the Dirty Dozens with McIntyre's Mother

A second important form of the groom's signifying diagnosis is his playing on McIntyre's anxieties over his childhood and specifically his relationship with his mother (a theme introduced earlier in Book I through a flashback). Occasionally the groom infantilizes McIntyre, misnaming him not only as McGowan but as a child: "Variety . . . is the very froth of existence, baby. So now drink your medicine and when you're finished I've got your bathwater on" (Ellison, *Three Days* 182).²⁹ Later in the dream, the McIntyre-as-child theme veers into the *dirty dozens* (a derogatory form of signifying, often of a sexual nature, involving another person's family).

The groom reminds McIntyre of "the time long ago when I was the boy serving on your mother's boat": "you envied my position so much," he tells McIntyre, "you were almost wild—and especially when you guessed my importance" (Ellison, *Three Days* 191). This section of the dream is full of innuendo. "Boat," for instance, is elsewhere used as a euphemism for "vagina" (449, 631), and may have that significance here—especially as the groom names several other men (Joe Curran, Captain Bradley, Sugarhips, Johnny Velasco, who may or may not have been sailors) who have "trod the deck" (191). The groom continues more explicitly in this vein:

I've always been quite manly—as your mother well knew. Shall I show you my muscle? . . . I served her rather well whenever it was my opportunity and pleasure to do so. . . . [W]e had some most delightful sails together. We most certainly did. Just your mother and I. . . . She called me her 'little man,' and I was proud. And sometimes her 'darling darky darling.' And again her 'handsome African *commodòro*' and 'Otello *mio*'—how do you like the swing of that? And in especially pensive moods it was in quick succession 'Oh, my jiggling Joy Boy, Master of my Solitude, Dark Secret Delight, Gypsy Lover, Cellmate, Joy Rocker, and Dirty

²⁹ The groom often refers to McIntyre as "baby," which in this instance takes on infantilizing connotations. Smitherman's comment on the use of the word *baby* in Black English also seems pertinent here: "Among males, at one time, the term was perceived as demonstrating not only solidarity, but also security about masculinity. That is, the man who used it was secure enough about his manhood to address another man as *baby* and not worry about being perceived as a homosexual" (Smitherman, *Black Talk* 59).

Richard.’ And once in a moment of classical exuberance she called me her Jockey Boy of Artemesion! (192-93)

This is an elaborate and erudite form of the common vernacular male jest that brags of one’s own sexual prowess and/or asserts the sexual promiscuity of the other fellow’s mother (Wald’s *The Dozens* gives numerous examples). In this case it also plays on white society’s “fear of the white woman and the black man getting together” (Ellison, *Collected Essays* 543-44; the theme of miscegenation is addressed elsewhere in the dream as well). McIntyre’s own, somewhat pathetic, response near the end of the dream is to call the iron groom a “Joady” (a term for a man who has sexual relations with another man’s wife or lover) before throwing him to the ground (Ellison, *Three Days* 193).

VII. The Invisible Groom and the Price of Civilization

Thirdly, the groom not only *embodies* ritual stereotyping (as addressed above); he also riffs on the *function* of ritual stereotyping in disguising the humanity of the stereotyped (rendering it “invisible”) in order to humanize the steeper (cf. Foley, “Becoming” 70). White Americans found in this dialectic the solution to what used to be called “the Negro Problem” or “the American dilemma”³⁰: namely, how to reconcile, in Ellison’s words, “the sacred democratic belief that all men are created equal” with the “treatment of every tenth man as though he were not” (*Collected Essays* 85; black Americans being roughly ten percent of the American population at the time). “You find me repulsive,” says the groom—this stereotype of black humanity—“and you have absolutely no feeling for my suffering You refuse to recognize my humanity, you really do, so admit it!” (*Three Days* 183).

But the American dilemma is never quite satisfactorily resolved through the mechanism of the ritually-consumed stereotype; there remains a residue of national psychic tension over the institutionalization of inequality in a country founded on the sacred value of equality. And because of this there is a wish on the part of some whites and blacks to be done with the dilemma once and for

³⁰ See, for example, Booker T. Washington et al.’s *The Negro Problem* (1903) and Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944). Ellison had written a review of the latter upon its publication, but this was not published until the 1960s (see Ellison, *Collected Essays* 328-40). Ellison uses both the phrases “the Negro problem” and “the American/national dilemma” in various essays.

all, through black expulsion or secession. But this “fantasy of a benign amputation” (Ellison, *Collected Essays* 583) is only a fantasy; the iron groom (the human population he represents) cannot be removed. Blacks and whites (and other kinds of Americans, of course) are stuck with each other.

This morally- and emotionally-fraught situation is tolerable for whites as long as blacks suffer, says the groom, “quietly, *sans* self-pity, *sans* self-indulgence and with an admirably heroic silence” (Ellison, *Three Days* 187). In the face of blacks’ “heroic silence,” whites may even be moved to acts of charity (à la Mr. Norton in *Invisible Man* or Mr. Dalton in Richard Wright’s *Native Son*). But charity is yet one more ritual by means of which the northern liberal is able to evade what Ellison calls “moral perception” (Ellison, *Collected Essays* 809)—the recognition of black human suffering as a cost of American civilization. When the suffering becomes visible or audible, the result is outraged defensiveness.³¹ “You love everybody and anybody,” says the groom to McIntyre,

until you see their faces, or hear their voices raised in passionate description of the truth of their own condition. But then, baby, your love goes limp. ... At the first sound you tell yourself, ‘Oh, oh, they’re suffering so hugely that they must hate me! Why can’t they be more *considerate*?’ That’s what you do. (Ellison, *Three Days* 187)

And again:

just let the silent sufferer show his true face, or speak what is truly on his mind—then my-oh-my, how you’d put him down. Oh, but you *would*! What right has he to complain? you’d scream. Who the hell does he think *he* is, you’d say. (188)

Nevertheless, the groom voices a “passionate description of the truth of [his] own condition” and intimates its social and moral import:

³¹ The phenomenon described by the groom has more recently been categorized using terms such as “white defensiveness” or “white fragility” (see DiAngelo).

I tell you no lies, I suffer immeasurably and unceasingly. And do you know why? I'll be pleased to inform you, baby; I carry the weight of society on my shoulders. You just think about that, baby; and you'll see that it's true. It's not you, not the President, not the political gang, and not the preachers, but yours truly. *I* carry the stinking weight.

And do you know why? It's because there are certain little necessities which must be taken care of, certain small costs of civilization—and I am *nothing* if not civilized! So someone has to pay the fee, there are many fees, baby, and I have picked up the tab for far too long. I've suffered long and patiently, but now I've become tired of trying to teach you by example to be honorable and manly. I have now lost faith in my appointed role, so that you must understand that the check—my check—is long overdue and the balance is upset and the hockey's piled high as an elephant's eye (189)

This theme of the “costs of civilization” recurs in Ellison’s work. For example, in an interview with John Hersey in the early 1970s, Ellison argued that “this society has structured itself to be unaware of what it owes in both the positive and negative sense to the condition of inhumanity that it has imposed upon a great mass of its citizens” (*Collected Essays* 808-09). By marginalizing some citizens, conditions were improved for others. Life “was made easier” for white Americans because they did not have to contend with many blacks “who were ruled out of the competition.” The relatively better condition of whites, their civilizational progress, was “paid for” by blacks, the nation’s “unwilling scapegoats.” Indeed, “the nation’s peace and prosperity,” its “sophisticated gadgetry,” were paid for “in terms of blood and frustrated dreams.” The unwillingness of whites to acknowledge this “cost” is the source of much “black fury” (808-09).

Even earlier we find this theme expressed in the drafts for *Invisible Man*. In material excised from the final version, a character named LeRoy, who was to serve as a role model for the unnamed protagonist, writes in his journal, “[The West] has flourished through our own dehumanization, debasement, through our being ruled out of bounds; since we have been brutalized and forced to live

inhuman lives so that they could become what they consider ‘more human.’”
And he continues,

[The paradox of being a Negro stems from] the constant remembrance that even the best that the Western world has attained—art, science, culture—even religion—has been attained through our degradation[.] There is black blood alike in bullion cubes and in bullion gold, and in the bulls of popes and bulletins of state, and the loftiest arguments by the loftiest minds. (qtd. in Foley, *Wrestling* 230-31)

Whites would ideologically prefer to overlook that which blacks would bring to (as Ellison often wrote) “conscience and consciousness” (*Collected Essays* 45, 59, 102, 149, and elsewhere). But the groom—this condensed black mask of humanity—insists that McIntyre perceive him honestly: “Obviously, you wish to convince yourself that I’m not here,” the groom says. “You’d rather plead insanity than deal with me honestly, such is your McGowan pride. But don’t cliché me, baby. I’m real and there’s nothing simple about me” (Ellison, *Three Days* 184). In the dream, with his waking defenses down, McIntyre is allowed to glimpse some of the complex human reality behind the stereotype.

VIII. The Tragicomic Rhythm and Fool’s Errands

The iron groom sequence is not simply a diagnosis of the American sickness. It is also a symbolic enactment of it, and this brings us to the narrative structure, or tragicomic rhythm (purpose–passion–perception), of the episode. Throughout this section of the dream, we repeatedly see McIntyre act to remove the iron groom, suffer under the groom’s physical intransigence and verbal bombardment, and drop the groom who mysteriously lands back in the doorway. McIntyre remains relatively oblivious to the import of the iron groom for most of the dream, thinking that the groom is either the mechanism of some practical joke or a hallucination. In the end though, the groom’s signifying rhetoric breaks through McIntyre’s defenses, and he comes near to an epiphany regarding the American condition (full perception remaining beyond McIntyre’s grasp in Book I).

As mentioned earlier, this part of the dream rehearses McIntyre's waking struggle with Hickman outside the hospital room door. McIntyre's dream-work has blended this interaction with other recent experiences and produced this dream-struggle with an iron groom in the doorway of McGowan's bungalow. The fact that the waking and the dreamed confrontations take place outside doorways is significant, given Ellison's interest in the Cambridge Ritualists. Lord Raglan, a popularizer of ritualist theories, has noted that "the usual setting for a ritual drama is a door-way or gateway" (257). On one side of the doorway lies the throne or tomb or shrine—the seat of spiritual or worldly power. On the other side lies the public space. "The place where the ritual can most appropriately be performed, that is to say, where sacredness can be combined with visibility, is the entrance to the shrine, and it is there that the ritual drama is performed" (257).³² Senator Sunraider's hospital room is such a place of symbolic power. Yet the ritual of racial stereotyping begun by McIntyre at its doorway has gone off the rails because of Hickman's refusal to play his proper role—a dynamic full of potential tragedy as well as comedy. The rhythm of the iron groom dream sequence allows for a reenactment and a plumbing of the hidden depths of this subverted ritual.

While he is undergoing the groom's deconstructing, signifying verbal assault, McIntyre is struggling to remove the groom from the doorway. But the unexpectedly weighty figure always returns to its original spot—a likely symbol of the futility of fantasizing about a nation "without blacks" (a fantasy critiqued in Ellison's "What America Would Be Like Without Blacks"; see *Collected Essays*). The attempt to remove African Americans from US society and culture is, Ellison seems to suggest by this narrative device, a "fool's errand" (533). Fool's errands are, in fact, another major intracorporeal motif, closely related to the tragicomic rhythm. In the published speech and discussion "On Initiation Rites and Power," Ellison discusses the fool's errand as a "rite of passage." The errand is a form of practical joke in which the "fool" is sent, for the amusement of others, on a quest which turns out to be something other than expected. Though not a real *errand*, a fool's errand is a real *rite of passage* "through which important social values [are] projected and reinforced" (533). Specifically, it "prepare[s] the uninitiated for the ongoing uncertainty of our national existence" (Ellison, *Selected Letters* 940).

³² On Ellison's reading of Lord Raglan see Crable ("Who").

Invisible Man was a sequence of fool's errands. The protagonist's destiny to act the fool was forecasted by his dream following the "Battle Royal" episode (itself a practical joke as rite of passage; see O'Meally, *Craft* 80-81). Invisible man had received a briefcase for his efforts, inside of which was a college scholarship. Later he dreams of his grandfather: "he told me to open my brief case and read what was inside and I did, finding an official envelope stamped with the state seal; and inside the envelope I found another and another, endlessly, and I thought I would fall of weariness" (Ellison, *Invisible Man* 33). The envelopes, we are told, represent years. Finally, invisible man opens the last envelope only to find an obscene but revelatory joke: "To Whom To Whom It May Concern, Keep This Nigger-Boy Running" (33). And invisible man keeps running, from one errand to another, until he finally understands enough to stop. Through suffering fool's errands we become wiser. The iron groom sequence as fool's errand is one rite of passage on McIntyre's road to perception.

That the sequence is potentially a fool's errand or practical joke is indicated in the text a number of times. There is, first of all, the "shock" of finding "a small cast-iron hitching-post figure" where he expected a real human being (Ellison, *Three Days* 180). McIntyre then wonders whether McGowan or the other reporters are playing some kind of "joke" or "trick" or "gag" on him, "having fun with a Yankee" (180-82, 186). He reminds himself that "this is a nation of practical jokers, so play along with the gag. Don't be taken in" (181). The iron groom sequence is not, of course, a *real* practical joke, unless one can play a practical joke on oneself. Yet it does function, within the context of the novel, as a real rite of passage, as part of a real dark night of the soul. It is part of McIntyre's initiation into what Ellison calls "the mystery of our [American] unity-within-diversity" (*Collected Essays* 471; cf. de la Piedra), a mystery in which "all blacks are part white, and all whites part black" (*Collected Essays* 446).

The dream ends, after a lot of purpose and passion, with a final moment of perception. In a parallel of his unhinged attack on Hickman in the hospital, McIntyre feels himself pushed to his limit by the iron groom's "malicious insinuations" regarding his mother (Ellison, *Three Days* 194), lifts the groom above his head, and slams him to the ground. Then, just as he is about to attack the fallen figure, he sees "the black orbicular cheeks give way and my own face, pale and ghastly, eyes closed and dank-haired, was emerging as from the cracked shell of a black iron egg" (193). McIntyre glimpses, at last, a

fundamental truth, which the groom had already revealed earlier in the dream: “Well, I’ll admit that I’m repulsive—but so are you, baby. We both are. As repulsive and as noxious as crows. That’s how it is: black crows and white crows” (183)—a unity-within-diversity.

The perception, however, is still incomplete. We leave McIntyre in a state of uncertainty: Does he or does he not see the connection between dream and reality? McIntyre awakens from his dream and stares “with disgust” at the sleeping form of Hickman nearby:

Echoes of the iron groom’s precise and tauntingly loquacious ventriloquist’s voice sounded in my head as I watched him.

What in my waking life could have conjured *him* up? . . . Surely it wasn’t Hickman, because as annoying as I found him, I could see nothing about the old man that should inspire me to dream of the iron monster. And yet . . . I couldn’t be sure. Perhaps if I looked at him for a moment longer he’d become aware of me and I’d see the smaller, iron-cast face again, grinning at me through the features of a living man. (Ellison, *Three Days* 194)³³

Ellison wrote elsewhere that “it is in the unpleasant, in that which is charged with emotion, with fears, with irrationality, that we find great potential for transforming attitudes” (*Collected Essays* 544). He has exposed McIntyre, over the course of Book I, to the unpleasant, the irrational, the emotionally charged, as epitomized by the iron groom. He thus brings McIntyre up to the brink of transformation. Whether Ellison, at some stage of the Hickman project, intended McIntyre to undergo a more thorough transformation of attitude remains unclear. As it stands, rather than providing for McIntyre’s wholesale redemption, Book I instead arguably sets the stage for the reader’s own transformation through experiencing the racially and culturally fluid world of the Sunraider and Hickman narratives which follow (cf. de la Piedra).

³³ Waking from one of the “Mother Strothers” versions of the dream (centered on a black female preacher), McIntyre seems to approach greater self-knowledge: “indeed, could it be that I am, in some uncanny manner, not simply McIntyre but also McGowan? And then as my mind faltered before the next notion, that I was also the hitching post boy and Mother Strothers, it was enough to make me reach for the bottle of sleeping pills . . .” (REP II:52/14, p. 185).

IX. Conclusion

I have focused on the iron groom sequence of McIntyre's dream, which represents an especially rich and condensed expression of Ellison's major aesthetic and social-critical interests. The dream is packed with symbolic resonances deriving from the groom's intertextual, intracorpous, and intratextual relations. The iron groom, in his materiality and signifying verbiage, resonates *intertextually* with the black American vernacular tradition and with Western high modernism; *intracorpously* with Ellison's first novel and his essays; and *intratextually* with elements of McIntyre's waking life. In this way the dream exemplifies Ellison's syncretic aesthetic sense and allusive poesis. Likewise, the iron groom sequence presents in compact form his poietic technique of tragicomic narrative patterning, moving rapidly among the phases of purpose, passion, and perception.

Because of this I suggested that the iron groom sequence serves as what Vivas called a *constitutive symbol*: it has condensed within it the major themes of Ellison's writing, and thus provides us with a particular perspective on the broader Hickman project and on the reality which informed that project's narratives. Tradition and modernity, North and South, moral evasion and moral perception—these historical and very American tensions coalesce in McIntyre's dream, bringing before us an image of an American dilemma resolvable only when we realize that there is no present without the past, no North without the South, no whiteness without blackness, no America without the Negro (African American).

In a handwritten note, Ellison wrote that "McIntyre too must seek actively for his true identity as writer, witness, puzzler over unity and diversity in the US" (REP I:139/4). McIntyre begins his seeking in Book I, but it does not seem that Ellison ever let him complete his quest. Although McIntyre acts and suffers (has purpose and passion), he does not himself fully attain an honest perception of American unity-in-diversity and the moral commitment which that entails. Perhaps Ellison chose to leave this realization for readers to complete (see de la Piedra 150). Perhaps it was his hope that a collaboration with "his most receptive reader" (Ellison, *Collected Essays* 701), wherein the latter furthers or completes what is begun by the novelist, would contribute toward the birth of what he called "the ideal American character—a type truly great enough to possess the greatness of the land, a delicately poised unity of divergencies"

(*Collected Essays* 83). McIntyre occupies a particular place along the road to the “ideal American character”; the “receptive reader” who partakes of his struggle has the chance to advance farther.

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