世界经典文学作品赏析(英汉对照)

Ralph Ellison's INVISIBLE MAN

Elizabeth C. Phillips

拉尔夫·埃利森的隐身人

外语教学与研究出版社

Simon & Schuster 国际出版公司

(京)新登字 155 号

京权图字：01-1996-0565

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

拉尔夫·埃利森的《隐身人》/(美)菲利普斯(Phillips, E. C.)著；杜建译. —北京：外语教学与研究出版社，1997
(世界经典文学作品赏析)
ISBN 7-5600-1253-1

Ⅰ. 拉… Ⅱ. ①菲…②杜… Ⅲ. 英语-语言读物、文学评论-英、汉 Ⅳ. H319.4：Ⅰ

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(97)第 11708 号

拉尔夫·埃利森的

隐身人

著：Elizabeth C
译：杜建

外语教学与研究出版社出版发行
(北京西三环北路 19 号)
北京丰华印刷厂印刷
新华书店总店北京发行所经销

开本 850×1168 1/32 5.5 印张 115 千字
1997 年 6 月第 1 版 1997 年 6 月第 1 次印刷
印数：1—31000 册

ISBN 7-5600-1253-1/H·706
定价：6.80 元

CONTENTS

目　录

英文部分

中文部分

RALPH ELLISON'S PLACE IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

LIFE: Although Ralph Ellison is fully aware of the injustices suffered by the Negro in America—his writing offers incontrovertible proof of such awareness—he did not himself suffer so painfully from those injustices as his friend and mentor, Richard Wright. Born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in 1914, a state which had no tradition of slavery and whose patterns of segregation were not so inflexible as to prevent an easy relationship between black and white, Ellison experienced a relatively happy childhood and adolescence. Although he attended segregated schools, the musical training he obtained there, in both jazz and classical, was excellent. In his essay "Hidden Name and Complex Fate," he ascribes much of his interest in jazz to the fact that when he was growing up, Oklahoma City was a center for southwestern jazz, and both orchestras and blues singers were constantly coming and going, bands like King Oliver's and singers like Ma Rainey and Ida Cox; and he pays tribute to Mrs. Zelia N. Breaux, high school teacher, through whose efforts the school music program included not only such courses as harmony, taught for four years, and music appreciation, but also an opportunity for participation in band, orchestra, brass quartet, a yearly operetta, a chorus, and a glee club.

The academic program, too, was of sufficiently high quality for him to have assimilated, by early adolescence, the concept of Renaissance Man. He wanted to pattern his own behavior and achievement after that model, just as though racial discrimination did not exist.

An adjunct to Ellison's formal education was his reading. When he was a small child there was no library for Negroes in Oklahoma City, but almost immediately upon the entrance into the main library by a Negro minister, and the subsequent discovery that there was no law against Negroes' use of these public facilities, provision was made for a separate accommodation. Two large rooms were rented in a Negro office building, where a pool hall had recently been located; a young Negro librarian was employed, shelves were built, and a collection of books of uneven literary quality was quickly amassed. For young Ralph, however, the opportunity to read was all that mattered. Starting with the fairy tales, he voraciously devoured the junior fiction and went on to Westerns and detective novels and into the classics. He also read with pleasure the Haldeman Julius Blue Books, inexpensive forerunners of present-day paperbacks, small books with uniform blue paper covers, whose contents ranged from Shakespeare to Nietzsche, and from Oriental epic to contemporary humor. For journalistic reading there were the syndicated columns of O. O. McIntyre, a popular humorist of the time whose vignettes of big-city life afforded many a reader his only acquaintance with New York. And *Vanity Fair* and the *Literary Digest* fell into Ralph's hands when his mother brought old copies home from work. But his catholic tastes included the pulp magazines also. There was still another important source, of a more specialized kind, the law library of the Oklahoma State Capitol. Its custodian was Ralph's adopted grandfather, J. D. Randolph—Ralph's parents had been living in Mr. Randolph's rooming house at the time of his birth. Ellison recounts with pleasure how white legislators frequently came to consult Mr. Randolph on points of law and how he could often answer their questions without recourse to the books themselves. Marvelous as Mr. Randolph's knowledge was, it was even more marvelous that the Negro who could answer the white men's questions bore the

name of Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy.

An element of even greater importance in his development as writer was his absorption of the very life of the times from the churches, the schoolyards, the barbershops, the cotton-picking camps, places where, as Ellison observes, folklore and gossip thrived. Such a place, he recounts, was the drugstore where he worked and where in bad weather older men would sit smoking their pipes and telling tall tales, anecdotes of hunting and their own versions of the classics. In addition to stories of buried treasure and headless horsemen, young Ralph heard recitals of such popular verse as "The Shooting of Dan McGrew," one of the best-loved ballads of life in the Yukon in Alaska by the poet Robert W. Service, and also stories of Jesse James, the notorious nineteenth-century American outlaw, and of black outlaws as well as Negroes who distinguished themselves in such unlikely vocations as that of United States marshal.

Contributing further to the Knowledge of the very fabric of American life was his observation of such human activities as circuses, minstrel shows, vaudeville, moving pictures, prize fights, foot races, baseball games, football matches, and church meetings. As for natural phenomena, his senses responded to such a variety of stimuli as spring floods and winter snows, catalpa worms and jack rabbits, honeysuckle and snapdragons, sunflowers and hollyhocks. There were also such unforgettable gustatory delights as raw sugar cane and baked yams, pigs' feet, chili and blue haw ice cream, and such visual and auditory images as parades, public dances and jam sessions, Easter sunrise ceremonies, and large funerals. And the various human types whose appearance excited the young boy's interest included bootleggers; jazz musicians; fortunetellers; old persons who had lived in slavery; prostitutes with enticing walks; Negro

hustlers with affected limping walks who wore Stetson hats, expensive shoes, well-starched overalls, and diamond stickpins in their tieless collars; blind men who preached on corners; and other blind men who sang the blues to the accompaniment of washboard and guitar.

All those impressions from his environment impinged upon his consciousness. But there was still another circumstance which played a major role in determining the course of his life, the fact that his father had named him after a great American poet and philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson. In his earliest years, the small Ralph was both puzzled and discomfited by his name. He did not understand what a poet was nor why his father had decided to name him for one. He could have understood it perfectly well if he had been named for his grandfather, but that name, having been given to an older brother who died, was out of the question. Why then had his father not named his son after a prize fighter like Jack Johnson, or a military hero like Colonel Charles Young, or an educator like Booker T. Washington, or a great spokesman for Negroes like Frederick Douglass, or even as so many other Negro parents had done, after President Teddy Roosevelt?

Adding to the young Ralph's confusion was the fact that a little boy next door bore the first name of Emerson. Consequently, when adults, amused by the incongruity of the great name bestowed on the small person, would add Emerson to Ralph's first two names, the child would insist vehemently that he was not Emerson, for that was the little boy who lived next door. But, to his increased fury, the grown-ups would laughingly correct him with the assurance that he was Emerson.

When Ralph reached the grades where his famous predecessor's works were taught, his resentment increased. Following, he says, the advice given in "Self-Reliance," he changed the "Waldo" to a simple, he hoped, unrecognizable "W" and in his own reading he thereafter avoided Emerson's works.

Upon graduation from high school, Mr. Ellison entered Tuskegee, the famous school founded by Booker T. Washington, with the original intention of studying music and becoming a composer. But during his second year he encountered a work which effected, he states, the real transition to writing. He read *The Waste Land*, T. S. Eliot's poem which deals with the moral and spiritual sterility of the twentieth century and which has had so wide an influence in this century. As Ellison expresses it, it seized his mind, and he felt that its rhythms were closer to jazz than those of the Negro poets whom he was beginning to read. Looking up the references in the footnotes to the poem, he gradually discovered such significant writers as Ezra Pound, Ford Maddox Ford, Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. This reading, in turn, brought him back to those great masters of American literature, Herman Melville and Mark Twain.

After his junior year Ellison went to New York, where in 1937 he met the man who was to become one of the greatest Negro writers, Richard Wright. At the time of their meeting, Mr. Wright had just published his first collection of short stories, *Uncle Tom's Children*. Under the direction of Wright he read Henry James' prefaces, first written as introductions to James' respective novels but collected in 1934 in *The Art of the Novel*; Joseph Conrad, the Polish-born author whose mastery of English is evidenced in his famous novels; Joseph Warren Beach, an eminent American critic;

and the letters of the great Russian novelist, Dostoevski.

It was also under Wright's influence that Ellison became associated with politically radical movements, but unlike Wright, Ellison never joined the Communist party. His strong sense of individuality, which is so evident in all his published works, prevented his being absorbed by any ideology.

A more significant result of Ellison's association with Wright, and with other Negro authors such as Langston Hughes, was that Ellison himself began to write and to publish. He did reviews and essays for such magazines as *New Challenge*, *New Masses*, and *The Negro Quarterly*. From the late 1930's until well into the fifties, Ellison published short stories dealing in one way or another with the idea that recurs in all his work, *the necessity for white Americans to recognize Negro identity in all its complexity*. Some of his better known short stories are: "Slick Gonna Learn" (1939), "Afternoon" (1940), "In a Strange Country," "Flying Home," and "King of the Bingo Game" (1944).

In 1952 came the great novel, *Invisible Man*. Its significance is attested to by its having reached its nineteenth printing by the late 1960's, by receiving the National Book Award for Fiction in 1953, and by being acclaimed by a 1965 *Book Week* poll of two hundred prominent authors, critics, and editors as "the most distinguished single work published in the last twenty years."

Shadow and Act, a collection of essays, was published in 1964. In the years since the publication of *Invisible Man*, Ellison has combined writing, lecturing, and teaching. Mr. Ellison has taught at Bard College at Annandale-on-the-Hudson, New York, and at Ben-

nington College at Bennington, Vermont. He has also served as writer-in-residence at Rutgers University, as a visiting fellow at Yale, and as a lecturer at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. At present Mr. Ellison is living in New Youk.

THEMES: A recurrent theme in all of Ralph Ellison's writing—essays, short stories, and the great novel, *Invisible Man*—is the problem of identity. And this concern is not exclusively racial. Although he recognizes and accepts the Negro's identity, he also deals with the white man's search for, and frequent failure to discover, his own identity. Thus, the *identity* theme in Ellison's work eventually embraces the major problem faced by all his countrymen in the twentieth century, the problem of American identity.

Closely related to the identity theme is that of *kinship with all black men*. The recognition of that kinship is often painful for his protagonist, who begins by attempting to conform to the standards of the white world and thus make a place for himself in it, only to learn that there is no real acceptance for him there. This theme is well developed in a short story first published in 1944, "Flying Home." The protagonist in that story is a young Negro aviator who has crashed in an Alabama field, where he is befriended by an old Negro. Tod, the aviator, is first repulsed by the old man's ignorance and rustic humor, but after the white owner of the land attempts to have the "nigguh" intruder put in a straitjacket, Tod gratefully accepts the old Negro's aid and acknowledges their racial kinship.

Pride and *freedom* are equally prevalent themes. Tod, in "Flying Home, has both nourished his pride and achieved his freedom through his mastery of the air. And it is his pride which is assaulted by both the white man's scorn and the Negro's sympathy. Also in

another story of comparable excellence, "King of the Bingo Game," the nameless hero, proud of his skill in the bingo game, strives to hit the jackpot so that the money he will win can free him from the anxiety of his wife's illness.

Still another recurrent theme is that of *love*. Like other Negro writers, Ellison knows that hate is more likely to destroy him who harbors it than the recipient of it. His central characters, whether in his short fiction or his great novel, succeed in ridding themselves of the corrosive element of hate, whether self-hate or that of their black brothers or their white oppressors, and in achieving a genuine love for human kind.

Finally, *art itself and its liberating, regenerative power* is a theme dealt with by Ellison. In two short stories mentioned previously, "Flying Home" and "King of the Bingo Game," the protagonists have so perfected a particular technique as to make it a means of escape from deprivation and discrimination. And at the conclusion of *Invisible Man*, the central character comes to the realization that the one thing he has not conquered in going underground is the mind. The mind always creates a form out of formlessness and an order out of chaos. Moreover, it is by means of this order and form that the human being is enabled not only to see his world and all other human beings but also to accept his social responsibilities.

TECHNIQUE: Ellison's thematic treatment of artistic form as a means of imposing order on the apparent chaos of the human experience is exemplified in his own literary techniques. *He is perhaps the greatest stylist of all our black writers* and, indeed, he is among the greatest of all contemporary novelists. He uses language with the skill of a polished craftsman, investing each word with multi-level

richness of connotation by such reliable devices as puns, allusions which range from folklore to the classics, and onomatopoeia, which engages the senses as directly as the intellect. Nor are the auditory effects of his prose confined to single words; the rhythm of his sentences invariably conveys the very sound and movement of the event, whether it is a boxing match between blindfolded boys, a sermon delivered in the college chapel, or a rioting mob surging through Harlem. But his technique includes even more complex elements. His writing abounds in symbolism and allegory, and effectively blends fantasy and reality, dream and waking activity, in a manner reminiscent of the work which he acknowledges as being strongly influential on his development as a writer, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Thus, Ellison takes his place among great twentieth-century writers not only because of the relevance of his themes but also because of the unfailing brilliance of his technique.

INVISIBLE MAN:

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION TO THEME, TECHNIQUE, OVERALL STRUCTURE, AND LEVELS OF MEANING

THEME: *Invisible Man* is concerned primarily with identity. Its nameless protagonist experiences a series of situations, during which he attempts to establish his identity by successive association with a white-dominated educational institution, a white-controlled industrial organization, and a political movement which is eventually revealed to be as indifferent to the welfare of black people as any blatantly racist group. Clustered around this central theme of identity are other relationships: protest against injustice; pride in the peculiar attributes of the Negro; the necessity for freedom for all human beings; and, as a kind of obverse of the last-named, the continuing responsibility of each human being toward the society of which he is a member and toward other members for whom he must display genuine love. In addition, there is one other theme, that of the artist's obligation to impose order on apparent chaos. Mr. Ellison's treatment of the inextricably related themes which cluster around the core of the identity theme is characterized throughout *Invisible Man* by a pervasive Emersonian idealism.

TECHNIQUE: All the stylistic excellence demonstrated in Ralph Ellison's short stories is evident in the novel. Perhaps more than any other Negro novelist, Mr. Ellison utilizes satire and allegory. Indeed, some of his satire is worthy of comparison with that of

Jonathan Swift, the great eighteenth-century British satirist. Whole episodes in the novel, though absorbing as narration, also take on an allegorical function and serve the satiric purpose of attempting to correct vice or folly by holding it up to ridicule. Among such allegorical segments are these: the boxing match in which the young protagonist is forced to participate, blindfolded; the story Jim Trueblood tells of his incest; the melee at the Golden Day; the protagonist's experience at the Liberty Paint factory in Long Island; Clifton's defection from the Brotherhood and his selling animated dolls; and, of course, the protagonist's going underground. Closely related to allegory is the employment of symbols, because allegory itself is a kind of extended symbol in which all elements of a narration—character, event, and location—stand for much more than their surface denotation. Major symbols in *Invisible Man* include the following: the gold coins the boys scramble for in the boxing match and which turn out to be brass pocket tokens; the Golden Day, the combination gambling-hall and brothel where Negro veterans from the insane asylum are allowed to visit once a week; the Optic White paint in the Long Island factory where the protagonist secures work; the cast-iron bank in the form of "a very black Negro" in the Harlem rooming-house; the link of chain given by Brother Tarp; the Sambo dolls sold by Clifton; Brother Jack's glass eye; the dummies hanging from the lampposts in the Harlem riot; the protagonist's brief case; and the 1369 bulbs with which the underground hole is lighted.

Another stylistic device frequently employed by Ralph Ellison is the pun, that plays on words—sometimes on different senses of the same word and sometimes on a similar sense or sound of different words—which has been the delight of English writers since Shakespeare's time or earlier. One striking example is a quotation

from a song sung by Louis Armstrong, the great Negro singer and trumpet player, "What did I do, to be so black and blue?" Another instance is the protagonist's remark as he eats a hot yam bought from a street-vendor in Harlem, "I yam what I am!" There are puns in some of the characters' names also. Rinehart, for instance, the mysterious person whose identity changes with each acquaintance, is finally explained as both the rind and the heart of the whole matter of identity.

STRUCTURE: Although the structure of *Invisible Man* is not so complex as that of many contemporary novels, and the main portion of it being narrated in a generally chronological order, it will nonetheless be helpful to note that it falls into six divisions which can be recognized with relative ease. First there is the Prologue, pronounced from the subterranean apartment in which the narrator has taken refuge. Next comes the account of his childhood in the South and his experience in a Negro college from which he is expelled, an account which comprises Chapters 1 – 6. Following this is a segment of comparable length, Chapters 7 – 13, which treats the protagonist's first encounters in New York. Somewhat longer, comprising Chapters 14 – 21, is the section which deals with the Brotherhood. Then there is a brief but tightly-knit portion, consisting of only two chapters, 23 and 24, in which the protagonist brings himself to an acceptance of his invisibility, and having fallen into a dark recess when running through unfamiliar territory and plunging down where a manhole cover has been removed, deliberately takes up residence in his underground sanctuary. The concluding division is a relatively brief Epilogue. It summarizes the motives which have sent the protagonist underground. Of even greater significance, however, is its announcement of his decision to come out of his hole. What has brought him to this decision is his realization that in spite

of invisibility he must fulfill his social responsibility.

COMMENT: In reading *Invisible Man*, the student must always be conscious of *two levels of meaning*: (1) the narrative level, at which exciting events take place and the reader is carried along by the momentum of the story itself; and (2) the symbolic and allegorical level, at which the meaning of objects, persons, and happenings is greater than that of their obvious denotations and at which the theme becomes clearer. This will be easier to achieve if he has already had practice at reading an allegorical work, like Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, in which the seventeenth-century British preacher, while imprisoned for preaching without a license, used a story filled with stirring adventures and terrifying monsters to set forth the duties and temptations of a Christian in this world, or a satire like Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, in which the great eighteenth-century British author used a series of four imaginary voyages to strangely inhabited islands in order to present his criticism of contemporary governments, churches, schools, and society in general. If the student has read either or both of those books as a child, he will remember that the stories themselves held his interest and he was constantly eager to know what would happen next. Then, if, when he was somewhat older, he re-read them, he began to see that the people he encountered and the thrilling adventures he imaginatively participated in all stood for more than he had realized. But even if the student has not read either of those great works, he can train himself, through a careful reading of Ralph Ellison's book, to look for and discover profounder meanings beneath the surface of a gripping story.