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Title

**The Carnavalesque in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and
Camara Laye's *The Radiance of the King* (1954)**

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To my dear parents, my brothers and sister.

Abstract:

This research work is concerned with the comparison of two outstanding writers from two different countries but almost of the same period of time: Ralph Ellison (1914-1994) an African- American writer and Camara Laye (1928-1980), a black author from Guinea. This dissertation has demonstrated that both Ellison and Laye wrote their novels from a carnivalesque perspective. To explore the carnivalesque forms and themes, we have borrowed Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque developed in his book *Rabelais and his world* published in 1965. Two chapters are devoted to this issue; the first one deals with the analysis of the carnivalesque forms and themes in Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Laye's *The Radiance of the King*. It explores the grotesque imagery, the language of the marketplace and the comic aspects of the characters' behavior in the novels. It also studies the theme of invisibility and the picaresque journey that requires the carnivalesque forms to depict the experience and the adventures of the alienated protagonists. The second chapter considers the role of the carnivalesque in relation to some ideologies and some previous written texts with which the authors enter in polemics by focusing on parody to show oppositional views. The present dissertation is grounded on the assumption that common experiences and contexts can lead authors belonging to distinct geographical areas to write in a similar way and discuss the same themes. The major goal of this comparative study is to investigate Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Laye's *The Radiance of the King* (1956) by foregrounding their resemblances. It has demonstrated that Ellison and Laye were inspired mainly by the philosophies of Negritude and the Negro Renaissance which celebrate blackness and the uniqueness of the Blacks' experience.

I-Introduction:

Literature and culture are interrelated. For a long time, black oral literature which takes different forms like proverbs, riddles and poetry was conceived as an important component of the black cultural heritage. The necessity to preserve this legacy was soon felt. Indeed, no one doubts the richness of the African and Afro- American arts and culture which manifest itself within a number of genres including rituals, songs, dancing, folklore and collective performances celebrating symbolic festivals and significant carnivals. In literature, carnivalization is a literary process which resulted from the absorption of folklore by the novel. The carnivalized literary texts transcend the comic aspects of the traditional folk acts to pave the way to several philosophical, social and political interpretations. In fact, many black writers viewed literature as a form of expression and an appropriate defence against the harshness of African and the African-American experience under a racist white domination. Preservation soon became much more a question of integrating and refining the tradition and its modern art forms than mere anthropological recording.

Black writers adopted various modes of writings to reflect the issue of alienation, their quest for identity and marginalization. Some attempted to criticize the social, economic and political institutions by focusing on direct language whereas others amongst figure the black American, Ralph Ellison, and the Guinean Camara Laye referred ironically to the same issues and others by relying on exaggeration and humour peculiar to the carnivalesque respectively in *Invisible Man* (1952) and *The Radiance of the King*, first published in French under the title *Le Regard du roi* (1954). These two writers aimed to refine and revalue their cultures by mingling folklore with the western forms such as novels and poetry. In doing so, they effected a harmonious interplay of the popular folkloric rituals and customs with the different preoccupations of the black communities in the twentieth century giving a new literary form to their novels.

Broadly speaking, carnivalism is a universal concept and a socio- cultural institution through which people entertain themselves and celebrate symbolic occasions. Its roots go back to the most ancient civilizations. The carnivalesque elements then penetrated into the world of literature to become a literary mode of writing. It shifted from its traditional folkloric dimension to become a language in itself capable of communicating hidden meanings. In fact, popular carnivals have been studied from different angles: literary, psychological, and anthropological with an emphasis on their relations to politics and individuals' practices within the societies which perform them.

Concerning the individual dimension of carnival, Sigmund Freud in his theory of jokes explains that the latter are important aspects of carnivals, and they serve to maintain individuals' psychic health by liberating them from systems of social control. They provide the humans with a temporary sense of happiness and pleasure. Freud speaks about the functions of innocent and tendentious jokes which constitute a mechanism to express rebelliousness and forms of release necessary for the preservation of the inner and external order. ^[1]

Apart from the psychological study of jokes and carnivals, Roberto Da Matta proposes an anthropological analysis in his book *Carnival, Rogues and Heroes: An Interpretation of the Brazilian Dilemma* (1991). He emphasises the necessity of studying carnival, the military parade and religious procession as key elements to shed light on the Brazilian dilemma. The author's analytical framework is based on marginality and revenge as important aspects for the understanding of the Brazilian society.

In his work *Carnival and Theatre: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England*, Michael D. Bristol studied carnivals in the Elizabethan drama, which according to him, permits the examination of the relationship between the political power, popular culture and important works of famous figures and writers such as Shakespeare.

Bristol demonstrates that Elizabethan drama put into question the social structure in an immoral way which was judged by the puritans to be devilish.

In this work, we shall study the penetration of carnival into the world of literature to examine its significance in *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King* that we intend to compare in this research work. Ellison and Laye criticise sharply the whites' racial prejudices and stereotypes towards the blacks in America and the colonized Africa by deploying the carnivalesque. Much more explicitly, the American Negroes still suffer from segregation and humiliation even after the abolition of slavery. Their civil rights as American citizens are neglected, and their black identity was devalued and even denied at the time of the publication of Ellison's novel. The latter's *Invisible Man* exposes these issues to the black as well as the white readers. The issues of racism and dehumanisation were also prevalent in colonial Africa. The latter was depicted as an unsettled primitive continent which needed to be civilized. The indigenous people were not viewed as agents able to act and react, but as mere objects in nature, that is part of the decor.

These clichés were produced by exotic literature and reinforced by travel writers who helped to produce demeaning, stereotypical representations of the Africans to the western audience. It is this description of Africa as being primitive without culture that motivated many African writers amongst whom Camara Laye, to write corrective works. They undertook the task of painting a more faithful image of Africa than the one that Western authors had propounded.

From their dates of publication, one can notice that *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King* were published nearly in the same period. Ellison's *Invisible Man* was written in 1952, a period that corresponds to the Negro Renaissance or the Harlem Renaissance that started in the early 1920s. This literary and artistic movement had a great impact on black artists and writers. In their writings, they praised their African past, through the glorification

of their blackness, culture and folklore. *The Radiance of the King* was written and published in a period when most African countries were under European colonisation. The colonial experience, in fact, had a great impact on the indigenous Africans. These natives were stereotyped as uncivilized people living in an awkward tribal system and needed to be freed from the oppressive regimes of their traditional chiefs that should be replaced by a new western system. The latter was obviously refused by the Africans who revolted in many parts of the continent to denounce the colonialist humiliation towards the natives.

The imperialists applied various systems of colonialism. The French, for instance, showed less respect towards the colonised and condemned everything related to them as savage. As far as its policy of ruling is concerned, they adopted assimilation as a means to subjugate the natives. It was in this context that Laye wrote *The Radiance of the King* in which he focused on folklore as a form of identity affirmation and to demonstrate that all their traditions and rituals remained untouched and that the Africans never assimilated to the European culture.

1- Review of literature:

Both *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King* have already been subjects of studies by many critics. Ellison's novel is praised as a modernist text. In his *Figures in Black*, Henry Louis Gates Jr explains that Ellison's narrative is a set of signifying tropes turning on repetitive formal structures and their differences. In light of this, Gates pits Ellison's modernism against Wright's naturalism. He sees Ellison as signifying upon Wright by parodying and "explicitly repeating and reversing key figures of Wright's fiction" to expose naturalism as a hardened convention of representation of the Negroes' problem. Ellison's use of metalanguage and his reliance on "form of critical parody, of repetition and inversion" which are defined by Gates as "critical signifying, or formal signifying" puts Ellison, in Gates' view, in the centre of the African American tradition.^[2] As far as the carnivalesque is

concerned, many scholars studied it in the *Invisible Man*. However, most of them have discussed only some prominent aspects of it. In this respect, Elliot Butler Evans, in his essay *The Politics of Carnival and “heteroglossia” in Toni Morrison’s Song of Solomon and Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man*, discusses heteroglossic voices of carnival in *Invisible Man*. He shows how the use of the blacks’ vernacular voice can transform the traditional African American narrative into a textual construct based on more complicated structure.^[3] That is to say, Ellison’s characters are given voices to expose distinct and contradictory points of view.

As far as *The Radiance of the King* is concerned, Toni Morrison in her essay *On the Radiance of the King* published in the New York review of books in 2001, claims that this novel “accomplished something brand new ... in fresh metaphorical and symbolic language” she adds it’s “a fine art of subversive potency” and Camara Laye did this in “a sophisticated, wholly African imagistic vocabulary”.^[4] According to Charles Larson, the last paragraph is one of the most beautiful passages in all African literature. Laye succeeded in assimilating the African materials into the novel form.^[5] The work is concerned with the clash between the African and western civilisations. Yet, his way of exposing this conflict distinguishes him from the other African writers. In the novel, the protagonist is a mock-epic European character who encounters difficulties when he comes into contact with the African culture. Laye reversed the usual traditional pattern of portraying the Africans in a reduced status and under-estimated by the Westerners who attributed stereotyped discourses on them.

2-The Issue and Working Hypothesis:

Though Ellison and Laye are recognized as two important figures in African American and African literatures, so far they have not been viewed from a comparative perspective. Their novels are pointed out by critics in their emphasis on laughter but they have rarely looked at the thematic dimension of the carnivalesque. So, in our view, though Ellison and Laye belong to different geographical backgrounds, they share some similarities

and differences in their novels. Our task through this work is to discuss to what extent we can consider *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King* as carnivalesque novels and to what extent they submit to the carnivalesque elements of the black popular culture. In other words, we will focus on the way the two authors investigated the same carnivalesque aspects, such as laughter and grotesque in their works to present opposing critical views. As far as the content is concerned, we will show that both novelists discuss nearly the same issues concerning the Africans and African-Americans in the first half of the twentieth century. Our aim is to confirm and demonstrate that though Ellison and Laye wrote their works in different languages, they share more similarities than differences in their novels either at the level of form or content.

As for the methodological outline of our work, it contains an introduction dealing with a general overview about the subject of our research , the review of the literature and the issue. Then come methods and materials which provide the summary of the novels that we intend to compare in relation to Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque. The results section will include all the final findings reached after raising the hypotheses. As far as our discussion is concerned, we will divide it into two chapters. The first one will deal with the analysis of the carnivalesque forms and themes in Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Laye's *The Radiance of the King*. In the second chapter, we will focus on the study of parody as the main function of the carnivalesque literature in *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King*. Finally, our work will be concluded by a general conclusion.

II- Methods and Materials:

1- Methods:

We have previously seen that carnivalism has been studied from different angles sociological and psychological. Our aim here is to study this aspect from a literary perspective. In order to fulfil our task, we will borrow Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque developed in *Rabelais and his World* (1965) and *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*. He identifies the carnivalesque in literature as a semiotic cultural code. For us, the carnivalesque means much more than just written texts which deal with specific traditions in medieval Europe. It is deployed as a narrative strategy in modernist fiction. Bakhtin says that folk celebrations and humor allowed for the parody of authority. He states that the fundamental function of the carnivalized literature is to parody the high genres of different kinds: literary, religious, and political. Thus, it liberates the lower classes from the rigidity of the dominant official cultures and the oppression of the church.

The carnivalesque offers an opportunity to express iconoclastic tendencies. Within the carnivalesque spirit, all the barriers and social hierarchies are broken. Higher classes and official cultures are mocked on; people are not perceived in their individuality, but rather they constitute a unity in which the body becomes the subject of laughter and celebration. We shall argue that Ellison's and Laye's modernism resides in the use of folklore and carnivalesque instead of myth as a prop for their plots. Contrary to James Joyce, for example, it is much more the tradition of laughter peculiar to the carnivalesque than classic literary myth that Ellison and Laye deploy in their novels.

Furthermore, the carnivalesque in its broadest meaning includes various forms such as **ritual spectacles** which are constituted of carnival pageants and comic shows of the marketplace. The other form which is worth mentioning is the **comic verbal compositions** that are embodied in parodies both oral and written, in Latin and vernacular. Moreover,

Bakhtin suggests the **various genres of billingsgate** such as curses, oaths and popular blazons”.^[6]

Bakhtin proposes some notions to identify various aspects of carnivalesque practices, among them **grotesque realism** which emphasizes the importance of the materiality and the images of the grotesque body, images of “exaggeration, hyperbolism...and excessiveness”.^[7] Bakhtin stresses the difference between the classical body and the grotesque body. In contrast to the classical art where the body is depicted as a completed figure, Bakhtin presents another perception of the body which he sees in an act of becoming and in a state of metamorphosis which has not reached completion yet.

Bakhtin explains that the grotesque imagery is not only concerned with the body’s orifices, mouths, noses, hind parts and genital organs, but it is also preoccupied with its dynamic physical functions that allows the interaction of the body with the external world. Such functions can be resumed in: eating, drinking, digestion, copulation, and defecation in an exaggerated and grotesque way. The aim of grotesque realism, according to Bakhtin, is degradation in which the official and the sacred texts are debased and destroyed. However; this degradation is not merely negative since it leads to renewal and regeneration. Grotesque realism is deeply connected with laughter that allows people to overcome fear and the various threats which would prevent them from achieving triumph.^[8] The carnivalesque is marked by the market place language since it takes place in the street: The carnivalesque crowd is manifested in the marketplace or in the streets. However, it is not merely a crowd. It is the people as a whole, but organized in their own way, the way of the people. It is outside of and contrary to all existing forms of the coercive socioeconomic and political organization, which is suspended for the time of the festivity.^[9]

The grotesque imagery and laughter are manifested in the marketplace where all people are melted together into a single unity detached from all existing forms of control. The

marketplace language rejects the official one to substitute it by people's unofficial discourse which combines "abuses, curses, profanities, and improprieties".^[10] It is a free place of communication where all controversial ideas are welcomed and accepted.

Bakhtin defends the idea that language both in its spoken and written forms is dialogic. Every utterance or word is a response to previous speeches. Writers, especially novelists, do not use language in its prelapsarian form. Their language is not a dictionary language. It contains other voices by writers who have already used that language.

In *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin claims that fiction writers provide reader with alternative ways and languages to understand the message. According to him, dialogue is different from monologue. The former is a double voiced discourse whereas the second is a single voiced discourse. Bakhtin specifies that the carnivalesque focuses on some specific types of speech such as stylization, hidden polemic and parody which are also borrowed by prose writers in their discourses. In stylization, the author [...] make[s] use of someone else's discourse for his own purposes, by inserting a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and retains, an intention of its own.... In one discourse, two semantic intentions appear, two voices.^[11]

Bakhtin adds that [s]tylization stylizes another's style in the direction of that style's own particular tasks. It merely renders those tasks conventional.^[12] In stylization, the author adopts another's thought and words in the same orientation. Bakhtin argues that [in] parody ... as in stylization, the author again speaks in someone else's discourse, but in contrast to stylization parody introduces into that discourse a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one.... In parody, therefore, there cannot be that fusion of voices possible in stylization.^[13] Unlike stylization, parody does not follow the same orientation as the original discourse since the author infuses to it an intention which contrasts sharply with the original one. In reference to hidden polemic, Bakhtin says:

In every style, strictly speaking, there is an element of hidden polemic, the difference being merely one of degree and character. Every literary discourse more or less sharply senses its own listener, reader, critic, and reflects in itself their anticipated objections, evaluations, points of view. In addition, literary discourse senses alongside itself another literary discourse, another style. An element of so-called reaction to the preceding literary style, present in every new style, is an example of that same internal polemic; it is, so to speak, a hidden anti-stylization of someone else's style, often combining with a clear parodying of that style.^[14]

This quote shows that literary texts come as a response to other texts. They manifest a hidden polemic by reflecting the different points of view and oppositions of the listener or the reader by relying on someone else's style to parody it. For Bakhtin, parody can be seen as a particular mode of writing or a reduced literary text imitating some famous serious model by subverting its meaning in the aim of ridiculing the original topic or model.

2-Materials:

This comparative study, as it has been already mentioned, is based on Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Laye's *The Radiance of the King*. Before going into detail in the analysis of this work, we think it is necessary to provide the reader with the summary of the novels.

A/ Ellison's *Invisible Man*:

Invisible Man (1952) recounts the experiences of an anonymous black narrator as a remarkable high school student in the South. It begins with a prologue where the narrator acknowledges his cultural and racial invisibility in the American society. Because of the narrator's successful oration at his graduation, he is asked to deliver the same speech at a social gathering of the white big shots of an unnamed town in order to be handed a scholarship. Before the narrator receives that scholarship to a black college modeled on Tuskegee Institute, he was submitted to a harsh humiliation in the ballroom where he was asked to fight his black fellows to please the whites.

The nameless black narrator is eventually expelled by Mr. Bledsoe the dean of the southern "negro" college he attends after having driven the wealthy white philanthropist Mr.

Norton to the dirty and repulsive quarters where the miserable Negroes live. Following this misfortune incident, the narrator starts his journey North to Harlem. Indeed, this journey is a quest for identity and self-discovery. His life is characterized by several racial and individual conflicts of identity, but it is due to these experiences that the narrator eventually achieves self-consciousness. He discovers that black skin in America renders one “invisible” to white eyes.

The unnamed narrator is first hired as a factory worker in New York and before becoming a rising figure in left-wing politics. He is integrated as a member of the Brotherhood (Communist Party) in which he is given a position as an orator and spokesman in Harlem. A race riot in Harlem marks the climax of the novel. The invisible man discovers both the destructiveness of Black Nationalism and the betrayal of the Brotherhood. In fact, the failure of the Communists’ attempts to reform society and his disillusionment with the Brotherhood lead him to retreat from society to an underground sewer which he lights up with stolen electricity in while writing his book.

Ellison’s novel ends with an epilogue where the narrator decides to confront his invisibility and face the external world by taking profit from the offered opportunities for free personal actions. Ellison shows that his protagonist has reached individual consciousness and became aware of the necessity of confronting the other in order to uplift the Negro race.

B/ Laye’s *The Radiance of the King*:

Laye’s *The Radiance of the King* tells the story of a European man named Clarence who finds himself powerless without hope or support in an African land where he is rejected by his countrymen. Clarence loses all his money in gambling. Then, he understands that in order to survive in the alien environment he has to conform himself to the African world.

Clarence lives in a caravanserai in Adramé – a northern African city- after being shunned by his white compatriots. He becomes obsessed with the great desire to see the African king who would offer him a job simply because he is a white man. At the beginning of the novel, Clarence's eagerness to meet the king increases as he hears that the king is coming to the town. However, there is a huge crowd of people on the esplanade where the king is supposed to appear. Clarence tries to push the people from his way in order to reach the front where there is a group of dancers dancing.

In the middle of the crowd, Clarence encounters a beggar and two dancing boys Naoga and Nagoa who offer to help him to get access to the king. Apparently, the beggar can really gain access to him. After a while, he informs Clarence that the king does not have any available job to the white man. At night, the beggar and the black boys accompany Clarence to the caravanserai where they have asked for food and wine. Since Clarence goes bankrupt, the owner of the caravanserai asks him to hand over his jacket in payment.

After a long argument, Clarence accepts the request of the owner who accuses him the next day of stealing back the jacket. After this incident, Clarence is arrested and sentenced to trial. At this stage, the beggar and the boys persuade him to travel to the south where the king often goes. After a long journey in the impenetrable forest, the travelers reach the village of Aziana. There, the beggar disappears after having bartered him for a woman and a donkey. The rest of the novel deals with the life of the protagonist in the south where he is cared for by a black woman Akissi.

Indeed, Clarence is involved in the social and political life of the Africans. He even succeeded in inventing a new showering system that became well used by the Africans. During his stay in Aziana, Clarence without being aware impregnates the women of the Naba's harem to give birth to mulatto children. At the end of the novel and after years of waiting, Clarence meets the king who welcomes him very warmly.

Endnotes:

- ^[1] Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. J Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 302.
- ^[2] Henry Louis Gates Jr, *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the Racial Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 246-247.
- ^[3] Elliot Butler-Evans, *The Politics of Carnival and Heteroglossia in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man: Dialogic Criticism and African American Literature in The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions and Interventions*, ed. David Palumbo-Liu (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota ,1995), 117- 139 .
- ^[4] Toni Morrison, *On The Radiance of the king*, New York Review of books, 2001, 18.
- ^[5] Charles R. Larson, 'Assimilated Negritude: Camara Laye's *Le Regard du roi*', in *The Emergence of African Fiction* (Indiana University Press, 1971), 167-226.
- ^[6] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 05.
- ^[7] *Ibid.*, 303
- ^[8] *Ibid.*, 91
- ^[9] *Ibid.*, 255
- ^[10] *Ibid.*, 187
- ^[11] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, trans, and ed. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota P, 1984) 189.
- ^[12] *Ibid.*,193.
- ^[13] *Ibid.*
- ^[14] *Ibid.*, 196-97.

III-Results and Discussion: Results:

Our analysis of Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Laye's *The Radiance of the King* has shown that both works were written from the carnivalesque perspective. The result has been achieved after having applied Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque expounded in his book *Rabelais and his World*.

The first chapter of our dissertation has shed light the carnivalesque forms in Ellison's and Laye's novels. We have demonstrated that the novelists relied on comic and humor to discuss some serious themes in their works such as alienation and self-affirmation within colonial societies. For us, America as well as Guinea were colonies, one of them internal and the other classical. As we have also shown the grotesque and the images of exaggeration that cover the whole narratives of Ellison's and Laye's works. The carnivalesque forms are related to the theme of invisibility and the picaresque journeys undertaken by the protagonists of *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King*.

The second chapter has sorted out the parodic dimension of the carnivalesque forms in Ellison's and Laye's novels. After the analysis, we have come to the result that these novelists wrote their works to respond to some writers and leaders with whom they entered in a hidden polemic to show their opposing points of view. In doing so, they borrowed some of the discourses and thoughts of their predecessors to undermine and parody them.

Chapter One: Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Laye's *The Radiance of the King*: An Analysis of the Carnavalesque Forms and Themes.

Though they do not belong to the same country, Ellison and Laye share some similarities and differences in *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King*. Our aim is to highlight these convergences and divergences. From the first reading, one can notice that *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King* are narrated from a carnivalesque perspective. In this chapter, we shall apply the theory of the carnivalesque expounded by Mikhail Bakhtin by uncovering its most elaborated elements in both novels.

However, before studying the important ideas of this chapter in detail, we believe it is necessary to specify that the comparative study between Ellison and Laye is based on the order of affinity rather than influence. That is to say, the authors were influenced by two similar cultural contexts. The cultural context is that of the Negro Renaissance that emerged in America which coupled with the movement of Negritude created by the black intellectuals living in France. Both movements celebrated the blacks' identity and culture, in opposition to the whites' oppression and racism in Africa and America. The writers who advocated the ideologies of these movements aimed to break down the clichés cultivated by the white men who imprisoned the Blacks in a stereotyped frame. The philosophies held by these movements are evident in Ellison's and Laye's works based on the literary process of carnivalization as one way to celebrate their African and afro-American folk culture.

Ellison and Laye belong to the black race enduring the atrocities of the white man in Africa and America. Their personal experiences of alienation and segregation were determining factors in shaping their writings. Accordingly, they engaged themselves directly or indirectly in awakening the consciousness of their black communities by assuming the role of discussing racial relations in Africa and America.

Ellison and Laye hold different artistic intentions in their narratives. To be more explicit, Ellison tried to portray authentically the blacks' experience in his fiction. He chose to build up his narrative around a victimized black protagonist denouncing racial segregation in America. However, Laye gave much freedom to his imagination and favored the reversal of the traditional representation of the oppressed African in a Western land by substituting the main character by a European wandering in the African world.

1/ Laughter, Anarchy and the Marketplace in *The Radiance of the King* and *Invisible Man*:

Grotesque imagery –to which we will turn- is deeply connected with laughter, the second aspect of the carnivalesque. Laughter which is loud and universal is manifested at two distinct levels: individual and collective. It can express the individual's joy and amusement as it can express a communal phenomenon. When speaking about the carnivalesque, one cannot avoid making reference to the marketplace where grotesquery and laughter are shared and revealed. Laughter and anarchy find expression in *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King*. From the very opening of the novels, the reader discerns the chaotic and comic atmosphere that envelops diverse scenes in the novels.

In *Invisible Man*, the narrator gives a detailed description of the Battle Royal in which he takes part. The confrontation, indeed, occurs in a large ballroom that symbolises the “marketplace”. Almost all the white representatives of the different social classes of the Southern states met in this public place. In this respect, the narrator states: “ I was shocked to see some of the most important men of the town quite tipsy. They were all there-bankers, judges, doctors, fire chiefs, teachers, merchants. Even one of the more fashionable pastors”.^[1]

Moreover, crude laughter is stressed in the disordered ballroom where everything is turned upside down. It is there that people express themselves and show their fantasies. It is a temporary break of order that offers the individuals humour and relief. The protagonist

depicts clearly the rowdy laughter that characterizes the ballroom by saying: “chairs went crashing, drinks were spilt, as they ran laughing and howling after her”.^[2] He adds: “then the men began to push us onto the rug. Laughing embarrassedly, we struggled out of their hands and kept after the coins”.^[3]

Ellison succeeded in drawing out a realistic picture of the blacks’ denigration through the significant episode of the Battle Royal. The Negro boys are obliged to fight each other to entertain the whites. Symbolically, the Battle Royal can be seen as a kind of rite of passage through which the protagonist has to go to get access to higher education. Thus, it is very important to the invisible man to overcome this step successfully and bear the abuse of the whites to fulfil his studies.

The chaotic atmosphere, disorder and amusement are also well painted in the other scene depicting the arrival of the black narrator and Mr. Norton at the Golden Day which is a kind of sporting and gambling house where blacks are catered for. There, everything is turned upside down. When the narrator paused at the door of the Golden Day, he found “the place was already full, jammed with vets in loose grey shirts and trousers and women in short, tight-fitting, stiffly starched gingham aprons. The stale beer smell struck like a club through the noise of voices and the juke box.”^[4]

He describes its people as “Half-dressed women appeared from the rooms off the balcony. Men hooted and yelled as at a football game.”^[5] These two quotes suggest that the customers of this house break the social norms of order and transgress the social hierarchies since they created an opportunity to oppose the official life with the popular one. In this respect, Bakhtin explains that

The serious aspects of class culture are official and authoritarian; they are combined with violence, prohibitions, limitations, and always contain an element of fear and of intimidation.... Laughter, on the other hand, overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations.^[6]

Thus, the official world is subverted through laughter which emphasises the shifting from the rigid life that controls the individuals. Indeed, this idea is sustained in *Invisible Man*. When the protagonist came in the Golden Day, he encountered a large crowd and realized that

Many of the men had been doctors, lawyers, teachers, Civil Service workers; there were several cooks, a preacher, a politician, and artist. One very nutty one had been a psychiatrist. Whenever I saw them I felt uncomfortable. They were supposed to be members of the professions towards which at various times I vaguely aspired myself, and even though they never seemed to see me I could never believe that they were really patients. ^[7]

In this respect, the narrator shows that the rowdy celebrations of the Golden Day provided the occasion and the field for workers, landowners, blacks, whites, priests and fools to break down and overstep the social barriers in order to allow a free interaction with the lower social classes with other individuals belonging to various ethnic and social groups.

Ellison deliberately makes reference to images of disorder and situations of confusion to present various views and intentions. When the narrator goes into the Golden Day to get some whisky to Mr. Norton who is sick, the black attendant refuses to sell him drinks, and he tells him that it would be better to the white man to come in if he wishes to have some alcoholic drinks, “you can drink till you blue in the face in here, but I wouldn’t sell you enough to spit through your teeth to take outside [...] tell him that we don’t Jimcrow nobody.”^[8] This scene breaks the separate but equal to which Mr Norton belongs.

In other words, it is in this disordered life that the powerless Negroes could find temporary possibilities to assume power over the white man. In a way, the people of the Golden Day transgressed their fear. Chaos and laughter give opportunity for a multiplicity of voices to emerge and enable the blacks of the Golden Day to revolt and dethrone the white master (Mr. Norton) who is mocked and debased. The patients inform Mr Norton that the building “was a church, then a bank, then it was a restaurant and a fancy gambling house [...] it used to be a jail-house too.”^[9] The Golden Day -which is a place of entertainment- reflects

the idea of degradation. After being a place of worship, it is debased to become a gambling house and a place for prostitution. The idea of degradation is also associated with Mr Norton- the Northern philanthropist- who represents the humanitarian ideal. In the Golden Day, he encounters the vets who tell him the reality of the white men and their misdeeds. However, Mr Norton's pride prevents him from listening to them. This reaction goes in opposition with the moral meaning referred to in T.S. Elliot's poem *Burn Norton* in which he points "the virtue of humility: a submission to the truth of experience, an acceptance of what is, that involves the acceptance of ignorance".^[10] Thus, Mr Norton demonstrates that humankind cannot bear the truth whatever it is.

Likewise in *The Radiance of the King*, the spirit of humour and laughter prevails nearly in the whole novel. After his arrival in Africa, the innocent protagonist Clarence was initiated to large mass of people. Indeed, the narrative opens with the depiction of the crowd that confronted him when he first set foot in Adramé. People came from different social classes: the poor, beggars, dancers. They melted together to form a single unity in a significant milieu. The members of the African society are singing and dancing. The town's streets are bursting with life and laughter. The whole community is enjoying the celebration of their festivities and rituals in an open public square where they are waiting for the king. Henceforward, Clarence starts his adventure and struggles to pave his way towards the understanding of the African world. The crowd, in fact, symbolizes the complexity of the African society and culture.

The public square where the rituals are celebrated is the "marketplace" where all people free themselves from the social restraints and find refuge to express themselves through dancing and singing. On the esplanade, Clarence is astonished by the disorderly crowd of black people that seem to be a serious obstacle. The narrator describes the mob saying: "when Clarence reached the esplanade he found his way blocked by such a vast, dense

crowd that at first he felt it would be impossible to get through.”^[11] This gathering of people stands as a barrier preventing Clarence from approaching the center of the esplanade. This barrier is an irony to keep the white man away from the Africans as long as he holds stereotyped ideas in mind and denies the African realities and values. In this context, we can draw a contrast between Clarence and Kurtz in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Unlike Kurtz, Clarence is not a God like who is worshiped by the Africans in the black continent. However, he is the humiliated other reduced to a status of slave.

The Africans who are waiting for the king in the marketplace organized themselves in the people’s unofficial manner, and Laye describes the festival by saying:

This great roar was followed almost at once by piercing cries: the young dancers, that the royal guards were driving along in front of them with whips, surged forward rapidly towards the edge of the esplanade. It did not seem as if their tragic cries were to be taken seriously: it was partly the lash of the whips that caused them, and partly the primitive delight in uttering them. Besides, the dancers had no sooner joined the crowd than they became part of it, adhering to it and falling silent. They were drenched in sweat, their naked bodies were steaming with sweat and spattered with red earth from head to foot.^[12]

This description of the Africans reveals their joyful life celebrated through singing and dancing. There is disorder in the way the blacks’ rituals and carnivals are celebrated, but there is no reference to any kind of ethnic, class, and gender exclusion or marginalization.

Popular festive and carnival practices are of central importance in the African culture. Laye’s close attachment to his culture explains the recurrence of images of folk rituals which he transposes in many scenes in *The Radiance of the King*. When Clarence left the caravanserai, he “was not surprised to find that the whole town was in a turmoil.... the whole place was throbbing with noisy life, filled with a tumultuous clamor of the street, and what a street! It was the most animated, the most crowded of all streets: the streets of Africa”.^[13] The quotation above shows that the European Clarence became familiar with the

African festivals which are part of the blacks' daily life. Despite this, he still ignores the significance of the drums on which Laye puts emphasis by stating,

Everywhere the drums were rolling and rumbling, sending out their throbbing notes to the reeds and the bamboos of the palisades, to the mud walls, to the very earth and sky, and above all to the crowd which was moving to the rhythm, swaying their bodies even when standing still, crying, clapping their hands, and uttering loud cries [...] There were raucous cries from the men, and piercing cries from the women, above all there were piercing cries from the women who would sway forward, frankly offering their naked breasts and rushing, flinging themselves into the dance, where they would abandon themselves naked to an orgy of shaking that should have left them exhausted but that on the contrary seemed to spur them on to wilder and wilder and even more extravagant deliriums of energy, and brought them at last to a pitch of frenzy which transformed the brazier-crossroads into scenes from a witches' Sabbath. ^[14]

This description of the disorder and uproar that characterize the town's square is a vivid representation of the carnival life. The folk and popular life is celebrated to contrast the seriousness of the official world that sets restraints on the individuals' behaviours and discourses. Through folklore, Laye tries to restore the distorted image of the Africans and Africa given by the travel writers amongst André Gide who wrote his journal *Voyage au Congo* and *Retour du Tchad* in 1927. Gide's work -that was written after his voyage to the Congo- is inscribed in exotic literature. Laye's *The Radiance of the King* contrasts the peaceful image of Africa to the primitive perception projected by Gide who brings the Africans down to the level of animals by saying: "I do not wish to make the Black man more intelligent than he is. But his supposed dumbness can only be similar to that of the animal-natural". [15] Like Gide, Clarence wants to encounter the African king. However, while Gide was welcomed enthusiastically when he reached the esplanade of Rafai, in Oubangui-Chari, where the Sultan was holding court, Clarence was rejected by the crowd on the esplanade of Adramé, when he came to see the king. Through this significant echo, Laye wants to demonstrate that Clarence is the antithesis of Gide. He is clearly not the civilized European who deserves to be appreciated and worshiped by the Africans.

2/ Grotesque imagery in the *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King*

Bakhtin gives great importance to grotesque realism in his theory. The grotesque images indeed underlie the whole novels where the body becomes a subject of ridicule. According to Bakhtin's description, the body goes beyond its limited confines to undergo continuous metamorphosis in its process of growth and it never reaches completeness.^[16] From this definition, we can assume that Ellison carnivalized his novel. This assumption finds substantiation in the stress he puts on bodily deformity when portraying almost all his characters. Fritz Gysin who has studied the grotesque in *Invisible Man* states: "almost all the persons in *Invisible Man* assume grotesque traits; several of them are portrayed as actual grotesque figures."^[17] Gysin notes: "the deviations from the normal human figures consist in the concentration on-or stressing-of physical deformity, the surface distortions frequently suggesting an inner incongruity ..."^[18] The techniques of physical and psychological distortion of characters are peculiar to expressionism.

To illustrate, in chapter four, Ellison draws a very distorted picture of Dr Bledsoe by saying "broad globular face that seems to take its form from the fat pressing from the inside, which as air pressing against the membrane of a balloon, gave it its buoyancy".^[19] The falsified description is not restricted only to Dr Bledsoe. To illustrate more, Ellison depicts Homer Barbee by saying: "He stood before us relaxed, his white collar gleaming like a band between his black face and his dark garments, dividing his head from his body; his short arms crossed before his barrel; like a black Buddha's."^[20] The description combines praise and abuse. On the one hand, Homer Barbee is seen as a religious man and a preacher. On the other hand, the separation of his black head from the rest of his body by the gleaming band reminds us of slave chains that were put around the necks of the enslaved Negroes in America. Through the orator Homer Barbee, Ellison refers to the Greek poet Homer who wrote *Iliad*. In this famous poem, Homer preaches morality, values and good conduct. In *Invisible Man*,

Homer Barbee preaches his race especially the college students to follow the Founders noble deeds. It is worth mentioning that like the Greek poet-Homer- Reverendt Barbee is also blind. Despite his blindness, Barbee shows the right path to follow in order to reach recognition. Therefore, Barbee's blindness does not imply a lack of vision since he succeeded to see the truth that the others refuse to see.

Furthermore, Ellison attributes another disagreeable image to Homer Barbee whom he sees as "a man of striking ugliness; fat, with a bullet-head set on short neck, with a nose much too wide for its face, upon which he wore back- lensed glasses".^[21] He adds: "I had the notion that part of Dr Bledsoe had arisen and moved forward, leaving his other part smiling in the chair".^[22] In this overstated description, the nose of Homer Barbee seems to be greater than it really is. This reflects what Bakhtin calls "typical grotesque forms of exaggerated body parts that completely hide the normal members of the body".^[23]

Bakhtin argues that "the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity".^[24] Therefore, Ellison degrades the image of Dr Bledsoe who is the black representative of the white official culture. He is a mere imitator of the whites' behaviour, dress, and philosophy.

Ellison describes Ras the Exhorter/ Destroyer as "a short squat man" "dressed in the costume of an Abyssinian chieftain; a fur cap upon his head, his arm bearing a shield, a cap made of the skin of some wild animal around his shoulders."^[25] Ellison attributes such detailed depiction to Ras the Destroyer who stands for Marcus Garvey to demonstrate the grotesque image of the African fighter who is proud of his origins and whose fundamental end is to engage his black race in violent confrontations rather than lead them to salvation.

A similar picture, with emphasis on clothes, depicts Dr. Bledsoe –the dean of the school- who behaves as "a head waiter". Ellison explains,

His regular dress for such an occasion, yet for all its elegance, he managed to make himself look humble. Somehow, his trousers inevitably bagged at the knees and the coat slouched in the shoulders [...] In spite of the array of important men beside him, and despite the posture of humility and meekness which made him seem smaller than the others (although he was physically larger), Dr. Bledsoe made his presence felt by us with a far great impact.^[26]

What can be deduced from this description is that the narrator shows his ultimate dislike of Bledsoe for his humiliation of the black students and his imitation of white people. The debasement is extremely linked with abuse which Bakhtin interprets as “the superlative of the grotesque: the wrong side, or rather the right side of abuse.”^[27]

Even women are not spared carnivalesque exaggeration peculiar to Ellison’s novel. In the Battle Royal scene, the narrator examines carefully the breasts of the nude dancing girl whom he considers “firm and round as the domes of East Indian temples.”^[28] In this example, Ellison gives prominence to the dancer’s breasts over the rest of the body. Here, the narrator’s description emphasises what Bakhtin defines as “a picture of dismemberment, of separate areas of the body enlarged to gigantic dimension.”^[29] The nude dancer puts the narrator and the white man in an uncomfortable situation. She seduces them and awakens their strong sexual desires.

Similarly, Laye’s *The Radiance of the King* is full of carnivalesque elements. Characters received more grotesque description than any other aspects. The beggar brings down Clarence to the level of animals when he states: “I was wrong when I told you that he was only a man; it seems now that he’s either part goat or part ape, maybe he’s both.”^[30] We can notice from this statement that the beggar creates an unusual and distorting picture of the human body by combining different parts of two distinct animals to build up a new imaginative picture of the human body. The grotesque portrayal of the white man Clarence reverses the Caliban’s picture that Shakespeare gives in *The Tempest*. The character Trinculo mocks on Caliban saying:

What have we here? A man or a fish? Dead or alive? A fish, he smells like a fish; a very ancient fish-like smell ... Legged like a man; and his fins like arms. Warm, o' my troth! I do now let loose my opinion, hold it no longer: this is no fish, but an islander. ^[31]

Laye's intention through attributing an animal like description to Clarence is to reverse the traditional slave and master roles. In *The Tempest*, Caliban is Prospero's slave who is degraded to the level of animal (fish). In *The Radiance of the King*, Clarence is no more the civilized European. However, he becomes the African's slave. Thus, slavery here is not only limited to the black man but it is associated with the white man, too.

To exaggerate further the depiction of his characters, Laye depicts the negroes with whom Clarence met after his arrival on the esplanade as "black men got bigger and bigger, growing imperceptibly to giant size.... it was becoming more and more difficult to squeeze through these giants: in spite of the crush, or perhaps because of it, they remained immovably planted there, as if their great limbs had taken root."^[32] This quote suggests that the body of the Africans is highly magnified to deviate from the determined standard image of the human figure presented in the classical art.

Like Ellison's *Invisible Man*, women in *The Radiance of the King* received a grotesque description. Clarence examines the black girl's breasts which he portrays as "naked and irrepressibly luxuriant"^[33] and he wonders "how on earth does she managed to have such prominent and pointed breasts?"^[34] In this scene, Clarence is deeply attracted by the prettiness of the African dancer that reflects the philosophy of negritude which celebrate the beauty of black women. The attraction of the white man by the black girl implies also the reversal of the Senghorian statement that the Greco-Roman civilisation represents reason while the African one stands for emotion. Therefore, Clarence does not think reasonably as he is supposed to do but he becomes a sensitive man guided only by his emotions.

In grotesque realism, the images of the body never reach completeness, and they are portrayed in an Ovidian manner.

Contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a close, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, and transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the body itself goes out of to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose.^[35]

This unperfected picture of the human body is well reflected in *The Radiance of the King*. Clarence describes the fish women whom he saw in his dream as “a vague female form was slowly emerging. It was only vaguely female, for if the breasts were obviously women’s breasts, the head was very much more like the head of a fish than the head of a woman.... now that the body could be seen, it looked as if it ended in a fish-tail”.^[36] He carries on in his depiction and states that “if the head had displayed any human features, however plain, if there had been the slightest wisp of hair upon it, and even if that hair had only been tangled weeds, one would recognize a siren; but that inhuman head, or that only-too-human head, that bald pate clashed with the conventional idea of a siren”.^[37] Here, Laye combines skilfully human features with those of animals to draw out the image of what he calls fish-women. This description of women enhances the idea that Laye tapped from the African folktales to write his novel. The image of fish-women stands for the mythological figure of Mami Watta. The latter reflects the image of the mermaid goddess praised in the Western and Central African mythology. Like the Greek goddess, Mami Watta is described as the most beautiful woman with her long hair and fair skin. She is the goddess of wealth, beauty, sexuality and fertility.

It is important to point out that the exaggerated description of the body cannot be separated from its vital functions like eating and drinking which are deeply linked to grotesque realism and the carnivalesque spirit. In *Invisible Man*, the events of the Golden Day revolve around central scenes of excessive eating and drinking. The young black protagonist and Mr. Norton arrived in the Golden Day where the banquet imageries are highly

investigated. Ellison describes the scene of indulgent waste of drinks as “a shower of bottles and glasses splashing whiskey crashed against the balcony while Mr Norton, is lying under the stairs”.^[38] Here the extravagant feasting debases the atmosphere of freedom that covers this milieu. Excessive scenes of eating and drinking wine are also reflected in the *Symposium*. The latter is Plato’s philosophical text that describes the meeting of six intellectual Greek men in a drinking party or a banquet to deliver speeches on the significance and nature of love (Eros). The banquet image in Ellison’s novel reverses the platonic banquet because it stresses the bodily functions rather than the intellectual ones.

Feasting and banquet images which have a primary role in conveying the idea of grotesque are also exemplified in the Battle Royal scene in which “ All of the town’s big shots were there in their tuxedos, wolfing down the buffet foods, drinking beer and whisky and smoking black cigars.”^[39] Here, the most representatives of the high social rank have assembled and behaved in a beastly manner to celebrate a kind of ritual that denigrates the blacks who are reduced to mere objects of entertainment.

Excessive waste and images of indulgent consumption are evident in the last chapter of *Invisible Man* where looting, merriment, waste and blood are combined together to paint an utmost ugly picture of Harlem riots that characterize the streets of this symbolic northern city of New York. The narrator depicts the black woman representing the image of waste as “a huge woman in a gingham pinafore sat drinking beer from a barrel which sat before her.”^[40] He goes further in his description and adds “ Then she laughed and drank deeply while reaching over nonchalantly with her free hand to send quart after quart of milk crashing into the street.”^[41] The Harlem riot is a mock celebration of the “Fourth of July” which symbolises the American Day of Independence that implicitly excludes the Negro. In this context, Ellison carnivalizes and laughs at the official American celebration by having it enacted by common folk in the way they see it.

Similarly to Ellison, Laye places emphasis on the images of mass consumption of food and beverage in *The Radiance of the King*. In the inn, Laye makes reference to the pleasure of eating by describing the beggar's greed when he "dug three fingers into the pot and helped himself as skilfully and as plentifully as if he had been using a large spoon."^[42] Then Clarence started to imitate the blacks' way of drinking wine as "He drank deeply. He did not know he could be so thirsty. He felt his whole body given up to the wine as dry earth gives itself to rain. He drained the calabash to the last drop".^[43] Throughout this example, Laye degrades the status of Clarence who is represented as the breaker of the European etiquette.

Degradation which is an important role of grotesque realism is closely related to sexual life and it concerns "oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs".^[44] In the second chapter of *Invisible Man*, Jim Trueblood, who is a sharecropper living in an "unofficial" area, has committed an incest by impregnating both his wife Kate and his daughter Matty Lou. Jim has taken a whole episode to explain to Mr. Norton how the sin has happened in fact.

In the following words, Jim Trueblood depicts in detail his sexual intercourse with his daughter,

But once a man gits hisself in a tight fix like that there ain't much he can do. It ain't up to him no longer. There i was, tryin' to git away with all my might, yet having to move without movin' Then if that ain't bad enough, Matty Lou can't hold out no longer and gits to movin' herself. First she was tryin' to push me away and I'm tryin' to hold her down to keep from sinnin'. Then I'm pullin' away and shushin' her to quiet so's not to wake her Ma, when she grabs holt to me and holds tight. She didn't want me to go then-and to tell the honest-to-God truth I found out that I didn't want to go neither.^[45]

The intercourse between the father and the daughter mixes all what is high and abstract with low vulgarity. In fact, there lies the spirit of the carnivalesque whose essential function is to debase and to turn all the sacred and ideal values upside down. Jim Trueblood is a trickster

figure since he uses the incest story to extort money from white people who are fond of such stories. Mr Norton himself has incestuous inclinations towards his daughter.

The atmosphere of the Battle Royal is another typical representation of the lower bodily stratum. The narrator declares:

Her breasts firm and round as the domes of east Indian temples, and I stood so close as to see the fine skin texture and beads of pearly perspiration glistening like dew around the pink and erected buds of her nipples. I wanted at one and the same time to run from the room, to sink through the floor, or go to her and cover her from my eyes and the eyes of the others with my body; to feel the soft thighs, to caress her and destroy her and murder her, to hide from her, and yet to stroke where below the small American flag tattooed upon her belly her thighs formed a capital V ^[46]

Ralph Ellison borrows the plot of the *Ulysses* to depict the gathering of the black boys (warriors) who are ready to fight each other in the boxing ring where the white men stood as conquerors performing their fantasies. On the stage, the naked blonde woman is seen as a Greek siren with her “firm breasts”. She sings and seduces the men in order to lure them to their death. However, Ellison’s intentional grotesque description of the dancer’s spectacular body-sporting an American flag on her white skin- debases and degrades the “white goddess” who towers over the white male audience. She is reduced to a fetishised object of desire and destruction. Here he laughs at the idea of the black man as a potential abuser of white women. The white woman is often seen as a legitimate tool for the lynching of the black man.

The reference to the lower bodily stratum and the interest in sexual life are also evident in *The Radiance of the King*. For instance, Clarence fails to recognize Akissi’s face among the other faces of the black women. She is a sex symbol since Clarence “could only see her face, but in his imagination he suddenly saw Akissi’s naked body, and thought in the way in which their two naked bodies, his own and Akissi’s, would lock together. He felt a dark fire smouldering through his legs, a fire as dark as Akissi’s naked flesh.” ^[47] It follows that Akissi is more of a concept than a vibrant character since one cannot get her definite

picture. She is seen in sexual terms and the author has never given her any physical attributes to distinguish her from the other black women.

In the familiar speech of the marketplace and the folk laughter, mutual mockery, insulting words, curses and abusive language are permitted. These patterns of speech are formally excluded from the official life. Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Laye's *The Radiance of the King* are filled with the "billingsgate" speech that gave a humorous touch to the narratives. The invisible man and the other black boys are incited and involved in a hysterical fighting. The protagonist's great desire to deliver his speech in front of the white men encourages him to bear the humiliating moments and resist the physical and the psychological pain resulted from his bodily confrontation with his fellow Negroes.

During their fighting episode, the black boys set in a confusing situation where they used various abusive words to insult each other. In the boxing ring, everybody fights everybody and the white men started yelling when the protagonist had beaten one of the boys "Oh, no you don't, black bastard! Leave that alone!" ^[48] during the painful struggle, the narrator whispered "I'll break your behind" when he clinched his opponent who does not hesitate to insult him "sonofabitch". ^[49] The narrator is proud of driving Mr Norton outside the college. Accidentally, they find themselves in very poor of log cabins that are reserved to the blacks. There, the philanthropist Mr Norton demands to listen the story of Jim Trueblood who committed an incest. After listening to the story, Mr Norton becomes seriously ill. As a consequence of this incident, the narrator is shunned by Dr Bledsoe from the black college. The narrator regretted the fact of having driven the white man to that undesirable quarter, for he knew that this act would anger Dr Bledsoe. After the visit, Mr. Norton feels uneasy and the young protagonist "sat down again, cursing the farmer silently. To hell with his dream!"^[50] Adding to the cursing words and insults, Mr. Norton is deeply abused and mocked in the Golden Day where one of the prostitutes addresses another girl saying " don't you

know that all these rich ole white men got monkey glands and billy goat balls? These ole bastards don't never git enough. They want to have everything.”^[51]

The white man Clarence always tries to mock and debase the black Africans. However he fails. Throughout his journey, he befriends a beggar and two roguish boys who do not miss any opportunity to scorn him. In Aziana, Samba Baloum laughs at Clarence saying “you're a real fighting-cock!”. Clarence responds “first I'm an old hen, then I'm a fighting-cock... I've already told you often that I don't care for such comparisons. Besides, you ought to make up your minds: I can't be a cock and a hen at one and the same time”.^[52] Samba Baloum furthers his ridiculous tone by responding, “At first, I didn't know whether you were a tup or a ewe: you were all skin and bone, and there was no way of telling. But now you're a different person altogether.”^[53] Clarence is mocked for having failed to comprehend what is going around him. Explicitly, he is no more the master of himself, but he becomes the property of the Africans.

2/ The Study of Themes in Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Laye's *The Radiance of the King*:

a/ Invisibility:

As the titles of the novels suggest, the theme of visibility and its absence are ironically evoked in the whole narratives, and probably it is among the most important motifs in *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King*. Throughout his novel, Ellison demonstrates that his protagonist is immersed in a world of invisibility. He describes himself as

[a]n invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who hunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood- movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fibre and liquids-and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus side-shows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination –indeed, everything and anything except me.^[54]

In this quote, the protagonist argues that his invisibility is not physical but because people refuse to recognize him for what he is. The narrator details how he almost killed a white man whom he accidentally bumped into on the street. The protagonist keeps beating him as long as he refuses to apologize and continues insulting him:

I kicked him repeatedly, in frenzy because he still uttered insults though his lips were frothy with blood. Oh yes, I kicked him! And in my outrage I got out my knife and prepared to slit his throat, right there beneath the lamplight in the deserted street, holding him by the collar with one hand, and opening the knife with my teeth-when it occurred to me that the man had not see me, actually; that he, as far as he knew, was in the midst of a walking nightmare! ^[55]

This reminds us of a similar scene in James Joyce's *A portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Stephen Dedalus remained in darkness in the background of the theatre when he observed :

A broadshouldered student with a moustache was cutting in the letters with a jackknife, seriously. Other students stood or sat near him laughing at his handiwork. One jogged his elbow. The big student turned on him, frowning. He was dressed in loose grey clothes and had tan boots ^[56]

In *Invisible Man*, the narrator then realises that the white man is the victim of his lack of insight since he fails to see the black man as an individual, but he rather sees shadows. The black protagonist is ultimately amused by taking his revenge from the white man whom he treats violently and who is killed by a “figment of his imagination”. In this context, invisibility allows the Negro to exert power over the white man. To be invisible means to be powerful and authoritarian.

The idea of invisibility surfaces the first chapter of Ellison's *Invisible Man* where the narrator describes the blindfolded boys who are prepared for the confrontation in the boxing ring. The blindfold symbolizes the Negroes' weakness and inability to recognize the white men's exploitation. Furthermore, the covering of the eyes of the young blacks reflects the pleasure and the desire of the white men to confine the Negroes in an immense darkness and confusion in order to make them believe that the white man is always right. This is one way to humiliate them and simultaneously to remind them of their inferior status and animal like life.

When the narrator reaches New York, he gets a job in a Liberty paint factory. There, he encounters Brockway, one of the workers, who describes the “Optic White” by stating “Our white is so white you can paint a chunka coal and you’d have to crack it open with a sledge hammer to prove it wasn’t white clear through.”¹⁵⁷¹ This description suggests that the optic white can cover any kind of black stains that can taint the purity of the white. To be explicit, Ellison shows that the realization of an optic white necessitates the mixture of some dark chemical drops with the white color. However, this mixture makes the dark color invisible since it disappears by the gleaming white that hides its real components. Therefore, this is an irony to demonstrate that the pure white stands for the white American society and culture whose intention is to cover the black culture and identity by the process of assimilation.

The motif of invisibility is associated with blindness. The narrator steadily notes that most characters of the novel intentionally refuse to confront the other or to see the truth because they are not capable to see what they do not want to see. If people become invisible it is because the others are blind. For instance, the physical blindness of Homer Barbee -a black preacher who praises the founder- is significant. He preaches the Negroes to open their eyes to see the reality of the racial relations in the American society. However, the paradox is that Homer Barbee himself is blind incapable to see neither himself nor the others. This physical invisibility also symbolizes the blacks’ spiritual blindness and lack of sight to face reality and react against the white atrocities. Instead they try to find refuge in religion by relying on God and money to make an end to their segregation.

While, on the one hand, blindness is portrayed negatively, the invisibility on the other hand is seen as an advantage to the black man. That is to say, though invisibility often suggests lack of vision, it can in some cases bring freedom and mobility. In fact, it is invisibility and anonymity that allowed the protagonist of *Invisible Man* to tell and expose freely his experience to the large audience. One night, while the protagonist was walking in

the streets of Harlem, he saw a large crowd of black people shouting and yelling. When he approaches them, he realizes that the colored people are evicted from their houses by the white man. The narrator, then, takes the opportunity to deliver a speech where he preaches his race to resist the injustice peacefully. Because of the darkness of the night and his anonymity, the policemen fail to recognize him and he succeeds to get out of the black quarter without being harmed or arrested.

Disguise is a form of invisibility. After the funeral of brother Clifton, the narrator buys dark glasses to hide his personality. He is confused with Rineheart who is at the same time a gambler, a briber, a preacher and a con- man. Due to his disguise and invisibility, he manages in fleeing Ras' crowd in which he is stuck. Therefore, the disguise allows him to be the self and the other but the self is always kept invisible. In the end of the novel and in order to escape Ras the Destroyers's violent riots, the narrator falls into a dark hole. In order to give light to the dark manhole, he burns his briefcase and steals electricity. In the underground, the narrator keeps thinking about his invisibility that resulted from the refusal of people to see him as an individual. In fact, Ellison's novel shares the same theme with Richard Wright's novella *The Man Who Lived Underground* published in 1942.

Like the anonymous character in *Invisible Man*, Fred Daniels the protagonist in Wright's work is seen as an outsider in the white society. The oppression and alienation that both characters experience in the upper world push them to feel self-estrangement and descend into the underground to avoid capture. In a way or another, life in the underground serves the protagonists to gain consciousness and self-knowledge about the realities of the racist society in the aboveground. In her article *Black Orpheus: Richard Wright's The Man Who Lived Underground*, Carla Capetti notes:

The discoveries that Fred Daniels makes in the course of his underground journey are significant and multiple. They concern the racist society aboveground, his own status as an exile and an invisible man, and the language available to modern art and to the African

American artist in that society. As s/he accompanies Fred Daniels through the underground sewer, the reader also undertakes a journey to discover the view from “behind the veil” that marks the protagonist’s experience as African American servant and artist in a racist and class society”. [58]

Fred Daniels and the invisible man refuse invisibility and hibernation. Therefore, they choose rebellion against the discrimination of the dominant white society by acting and facing the others in the visible world.

The theme of invisibility finds also expression in *The Radiance of the King*. When Clarence reached the esplanade, he admitted that he sees only crowds and that he is unable to recognize people as individuals, “When Clarence reached the esplanade he found his way blocked by such a vast, dense crowd that at first he felt it would be impossible to get through”. [59] In another scene, he describes a second gathering of the African folk stating, “And suddenly the whole crowd-and it was immense, stretching all along the edge of the esplanade and reaching almost certainly right down to the center of the city; perhaps it had even, like the great cloud, overwhelmed the city itself-the whole crowd suddenly began to shout and jump up and down, though what they were shouting and why they were jumping he had no idea at all”. [60] The narrator deliberately refers to Clarence’s inability to distinguish between the Africans as different persons with distinct faces and characters. This lack of sight reflects the Europeans’ incapacity to see the non-westerners as full human beings. For white people, all black people look the same and this can be seen as a cultural prejudice.

When Clarence approaches the palace of the king, he could recognize some frescoes on the walls. He thinks that the frescoes represent sacrifice scenes. However, he becomes confused as he looks at them more and more for “the frescoes seemed less legible, and represented one could hardly say what [...] sacrificial scenes, no doubt. Perhaps they were simply pastoral scenes, perhaps nothing at all: in other words there was nothing but vaguely interweaving shapes. Everything was gradually becoming blurred, as if night were already beginning to fall.” [61] At the light of this, the white man Clarence becomes a ridiculous

subject for the two black boys. They keep scorning him by telling confusing and paradoxical stories about the significance of the frescoes he saw or maybe he imagined since he is not sure whether the frescoes are part of the reality or they are just illusion.

In Adramé, no one pays attention to Clarence's presence. The black people are indifferent and behave as if there is no white man among them: "He made very slow progress. The black people whom he was shoving aside made no protest, but neither did they make effort to clear a path for him: they seemed to be unaware of his presence, or pretend to be."^[62] No privilege is accorded to him because of his whiteness. In this context, there is an idea of debasement of the skin pigmentation and the superiority complex related to it. Clarence is not the civilized and the superior white man that he believes himself to be when he says: "I am not just anybody, I am a white man".^[63] Hence, Clarence becomes invisible and his whiteness has no weight or importance in the African environment.

Clarence's invisibility is strengthened more and more during his voyage to the southern village where he hardly tries to penetrate the dense forest that confronts him. He fails to see the separated trees of the forest that seems to be an immense inaccessible darkness, "Here, too, there were shadows, nothing but shadows of a door. It was no more accessible: there was a network of branches and creepers, but there was not, or did not seem to be, any opening large enough to allow a human being to enter"^[64] Unlike the other Africans, Clarence becomes unable to find or to see his paths and he furiously states that they are aimlessly walking and turning in the same place for many days: "And however far one walks, it's always the same path, the same tunnel ...".^[65] He has no sense of direction because he is a foreigner to the black man's environment. He becomes just like a child seeking direction by adults.

The beggar attempts to convince Clarence that "there are paths" and tells him: "if you can't see them- and why should you see them? – you've only got your own eyes to blame".^[66]

Clarence lack of vision can be explained by the fact that he is almost half asleep and they are not responsible for his lack of vision to perceive clearly what his black companions truly see. In Aziana, Clarence succeeds to see human bodies but he fails to identify the faces of the black women with whom he sleeps night after night. All that he managed to recognize are their “buttocks and breasts”. Moreover, Clarence finds difficulty in identifying even the face of Akissi to whom he says: “There are moments when I just don’t understand you [...] no more than I understand the way you change each day. Just now I was watching you going to the fountain and you were a different woman. I sometimes wonder if you are always the same woman.” ^[67] In short, the invisibility of Clarence reflects the limitations of the Europeans’ ability to see the Africans as human beings.

b/ The Picaresque Journey and a Quest for Identity in Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and Laye’s *The Radiance of the King*:

The discussion of the second theme of the novels leads us necessarily to indicate that Ellison and Laye are deeply influenced by the African and African American oral tradition. One way to connect the African American and the African writer to the roots is to go back to their cultural heritage. Indeed, in the 1950s and 1960s, most of the artists tapped from the forms, themes and aesthetics of the oral literature to reinvest them in their novels. The motif of the journey which symbolizes -in oral literature- a return to the ancestors is common in both works the *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King*. The physical and spiritual journeys of the main protagonists interpret their search for identity and reflect their movements from innocence to awareness.

Our analysis of the motif of the journey will be viewed from a picaresque or a picaresque perspective. Our choice to this angle is grounded on the fact that the picaresque novel involves the carnivalesque forms. Therefore, this theme is linked to the carnivalesque aspects expounded above. Stuart Miller notes: “The picaresque novel does not give us the joy

and courage of tragedy, often called the highest genre. The picaresque novel is ugly; it speaks of the possibilities of human degradation rather than human triumph.”^[68] Degradation, indeed, is one of the aims of the humour, chaos and the grotesquery of the carnivalesque novels.

The picaresque is a comic, ironic and satiric narrative built upon the experiences of an alienated outsider’s lack of position in society and the protagonist’s humorous misadventures. The picaresque novels rely on the grotesque, caricature and scatology to depict the disgusting aspects of life while satirising it “First, they question social assumptions and practices to show how reality is often different from appearance. Second, picaresque protagonists occasionally break laws and defy social conventions as means of survival, which is related to their adoption of disguises on occasion and their use of scams and trickery to deceive others.”^[69] Concerning the picaresque narrative, Miller writes: “the discrete fragments into which its events are broken express anything but order.... The picaresque plot expresses an intuition that the world is without order, is chaotic”.^[70] The chaotic atmosphere of the picaresque novel is already referred to in the carnivalesque forms. Life and society seem to be lawless, an arena of total freedom and disorder. In order to face his deceptions, the picaresque protagonist adopts trickery as an important skill to survive in the harmful world.

The protagonists of *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King* can be seen as picaro’s characters. In *The Radiance of the king*, Laye employed a metaphorical language and the same European discourse to reverse the image of the other. The author recounts the white European’s picaresque journey in Africa where he is seeking for new opportunities to make his fortune. Clarence loses all his money in gambling and drinking wine. This fact leads to his abandonment by his compatriots living in the town of Adramé and whose only concern is playing cards and consuming iced alcohol. The latter is one of the characteristics of the picaresque novel that deals with the unpleasant aspects of the society.

Clarence is not only despised by his countrymen but he is also ostracized and seen as the unwelcomed other by the natives whom he keeps reminding of his European origins and superiority that he wants to assert over them. Yet, he ends up by accepting the natives' customs and assimilating their local culture. Therefore, the protagonist's acquirement of a new identity leads us to say that his journey to the South becomes more spiritual than physical, and it helped him to gain consciousness about the world surrounding him.

It is of interest to say that both invisible man and Clarence are portrayed as innocent and naïve figures that emerged from the margins of society. They suffer from humiliation and encounter serious difficulties during their journeys. Besides, farther they go the more their quest becomes complicated. The color of their skins, in fact, is the first obstacle they have to overcome in order to reach their goals. It is proved through these novels that it is not always easy for blacks and whites to be integrated in other communities to which they do not belong racially. Therefore the picaresque dimension here works as a satire to the societies that alienate the others and deprive them of any chance to integrate.

The invisible man and Clarence are mere representatives of their races. The former is just one example of many oppressed black people living in the southern states of America. They still suffer from segregation even after the abolition of slavery almost one century earlier. As for Clarence, he is like most Europeans, proud of his western origins, and believes in his white supremacy. However, this supremacy is mocked and debased by the beggar and the black boys who remind him that the African king does not accept to meet anybody "It's absolutely unheard-of. Young man, do you think the king receives just anybody?"^[71] For his part, Clarence tries to confirm: "I am not just anybody, I am a white man".^[72]

Though he wants to see the king, Clarence never declares his precise motives and objective behind his coming to Africa. When he arrives on the esplanade, he meets a beggar and two black boys whom he trusts naively. Clarence's innocence makes him to believe

almost all what they tell him and to accept with great joy the help of his companions. They even succeed easily in convincing him to travel to the South to meet the king. Another similarity shared by the invisible man and Clarence is that of hopelessness. Clarence comes to Africa aiming to work with the king. Once there, he fails to meet him in Adrame. This failure turns him into a desperate man who sees only the dark side of the world. He even goes further to adopt the existentialist view by questioning the meaning and the worthiness of human existence. The philosophy of existentialism, in fact, resulted from the situation of uncertainties that characterized Europe after the end of World War II. The latter enhanced the collapse of western civilization fundamentally based on reason and materialism. Following this period, most westerners lost morality and suffered from spiritual decadence. Faiths in God were shaken. This reason led to the emergence of a new wave of scholars who put into question the European universal culture and philosophy which brought devastation and despair to humanity.

The young black invisible man lives and studies in the southern part of the United States where he is surrounded by black and white folk. His innocence lies in the fact that he ignores the reality of his society and the hypocrisy of the people with whom he lives. For example, he thought that the aim of Mr. Norton, and Mr. Bledsoe -the head of the college where he studies- is to help the blacks to get access to education in order to improve their conditions. In doing so, the “Negroes” would pave their way to social equality and total freedom in America. However, through the multicity of the story’s events, the invisible man discovers that all his beliefs are nothing but illusion. In other words, they are preoccupied with their personal benefits, and the success of the “Negroes” is their least interest.

This fact leads him to start his journey from the South to New York in search for identity and work that would help him to gain enough money in order to accomplish his education in the southern institute. He expected to enjoy his rights as an educated American

citizen. However, during his journey, he learns to confront the whites who despise and condemn everything associated with Africans and the African tradition as savage. The Europeans as well as the white Americans tried continuously to convince the blacks that they are naturally inferior beings who should be exploited by the civilized race. The result of this colonial mindset is the subjugation of the Negroes.

Political awareness led the black people to claim their civil rights as citizens regardless of their color and ethnicity. They ask continuously to be recognized as rational individuals capable of acting and reacting like white men. Ellison's protagonist struggles to put an end to racism and accept the blacks as full American citizens. The narrator tries to escape stereotypes by attempting to prove that he is an educated black man ready to please the whites if this would help him to gain the whites respect and estimation. However, this adopted approach fails before he reaches his aim. In New York, he joins the Brotherhood that convinces him to resist and fight the whites' racism. He is interested in the affirmation of the colored-people's identity as American citizens. They dream to live side by side with the white Americans who have to accept the blacks' differences and recognize them as individuals.

In Harlem, the invisible man confronts a series of unexpected experiences that would reshape his whole life and change his destiny. The nameless protagonist works as an orator who seeks to assert the Negroes' existence in the American society. However; the brotherhood betrayal prevents him from carrying on his struggle to gain recognition. The invisible man and Clarence consider life absurd and meaningless. They became desperate and hopeless after they are expelled from society. The disillusioned protagonist lost faith in everything. The invisible man's experience with Mr. Norton in the Golden Day causes his rejection and expulsion from his school by his countryman Mr. Bledsoe. Life is turning against him, and he misses his only opportunity to finish his studies. He feels that his great dream to help his black race is falling down. Like him, Clarence's rejection by the whites

creates a great deception. The only aspiration that keeps him conduct as a living creature is his great desire to be the adviser of the king. Clarence gives himself the right to be the counselor of the black king thanks to his western origins. In other words, he believes that he is the most appropriate person to be the companion of the king because he is the descendant of the white European race.

The rejection of the protagonists by Dr Bledsoe awakens the feeling of loneliness and estrangement. The invisible man is isolated from his society to start his journey to Harlem where he wishes to find work. He still keeps hope that money would allow him to return to the South to finish his studies. Like the protagonist of *Invisible Man*, Clarence is alienated from his homeland Europe to find himself miserable and alone in the African mysterious environment. There, everything seems to be the antithesis of the supposed European civilized world.

Adding to their alienation and the feeling of loneliness, the protagonists' understanding of the world is limited. They are submissive individuals devoid of free will. They are powerless figures whose actions and reactions are predetermined by their destiny. In this respect, Laye writes: "He was tempted to turn back, but he had no say in the matter-he seemed to have had no say in anything for some days now!"^[73] For example, in the ballroom, the invisible man is asked to participate in the Battle Royal and he accepts. In *The Radiance of the King*, Clarence who is the emblematic figure for the supposed western "pure" race is degraded and humiliated in Africa. There, he is proved to be deprived of any ability to manage his life without the help of his black companions. Clarence's childish behavior and his superficial thinking reflect the writer's will to destroy the western myth of racial superiority. It is a satire of the colonial discourse that legitimates European colonialism and imperialism under the pretext of civilizing the Africans. Clarence's incapacity to understand what goes around him or to recognize the culture of the other shows the European narrow-

mindful attitudes towards the African world and it proves the limitations of the western civilization.

Clarence is obsessed with the idea of being recognized and accepted by the black king in the African continent. He is an ego-centric European who shows a strong desire to assert his superiority over the natives whom he considers absurd and inferior. In the beginning, he often reminds them that they have to recognize his supremacy as a white man. Clarence, in fact, is the embodiment of the western mindset. He reproduces the same colonial discourse that considers the so called civilized Europe the center of the world and the non European countries peripheries. However, Laye adopted skillfully the same discourse to reverse the roles of the European and the African. Clarence is rejected by the blacks who consider him inferior and ignorant man. He has to be educated by the Africans if he wishes to be recognized as one of the natives.

After his rejection due to his western attitudes, Clarence decides to absorb the African tradition to insure his redemption and salvation. His quest motivates him to travel to the southern part of Africa and bear the difficulties that he encounters during his stay in this alien land. Therefore, Clarence and the invisible man are outsiders trying to be insiders in the black and white societies. However, they suffer from degradation during their process of integration. In order to overcome this denigration, they try to cope themselves to the new environments by adopting some values and strategies. One of which is to learn treachery and become tricksters. Clarence tries to comprehend the customs and rites of the society in which he is immersed. He steadily learns to change his preconceived ideas about Africa and the Africans and recognize their civilization in order to gain the redemption of the king. In the caravanserai, Clarence and his companions became real tricksters. Though they do not have money, they ask for food and drink. In order to pay the bill, the blacks convince Clarence to give his jacket to the owner of the caravanserai. However, the dancing boys do not waste any

opportunity to steal it back. The beggar, too, becomes a trickster. He befriends Clarence pretending that he wants to help him to meet the king. In Aziana, he barter him with the chief of the southern town for a woman and a donkey.

In *Invisible Man*, the protagonist's first strategy to fight segregation is "yessing" the white man and praising humility as an important key to black progress. For instance, he tries to please and satisfy Mr Norton, a rich white man, who sponsors the black college in the south and prides himself on his generosity. After his journey to Harlem, he accepts to join the Brotherhood and become the spokesman of the oppressed colored- people. In order to carry on his "yessing" approach, he makes them happy when he tells them what they want to hear. To do so, he provides them with fake lists of new members and writes false reports of community support. Moreover, the narrator tricks on the white women to get all what he wishes. For instance, he seduces Sybil just to discover her husband's real job and the objectives of the communist party.

Endnotes:

^[1] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965),19.

^[2] *Ibid.*, 21.

^[3] *Ibid.*,27.

^[4] Ellison, *Invisible Man*,64.

^[5] *Ibid.*,71.

^[6] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984),90.

^[7] Ellison, *Invisible Man*,64.

^[8] *Ibid.*,65.

^[9] *Ibid.*,69.

^[10] Helen Gardner, *The Art of T.S Eliot* (London: Cresset Press, 1949).

^[11] Camara Laye , *The Radiance of the King*, trans. James Kirkup (New York: Nyrb Classics, 2001), 4 .

^[12] *Ibid.*, 13.

^[13] *Ibid.*, 63.

^[14] *Ibid.*, 63-64.

^[15] André Gide, *Voyage au Congo and Retour du Tchad* (Paris : Pléiade, 1954), 752.

^[16] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 5.

^[17] Fritz Gysin, *The Grotesque in American Negro Fiction: Jean Toomer, Richard wright, and Ralph Ellison*(Bern: Frank Verlag, 1975),178.

^[18] *Ibid.*

^[19] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 6.

^[20] *Ibid.*,99.

- [21] Ibid., 7.
- [22] Ibid., 99.
- [23] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 9.
- [24] Ibid., 10.
- [25] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 215.
- [26] Ibid., 103-04.
- [27] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 161.
- [28] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 20.
- [29] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 328.
- [30] Laye , *The Radiance of the King*, 76.
- [31] William Shakespeare *The Tempest* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2004), 61.
- [32] Laye, *The Radiance of the King*, 6.
- [33] Ibid., 81.
- [34] Ibid.
- [35] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 26.
- [36] Laye , *The Radiance of the King*, 214.
- [37] Ibid.
- [38] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 72.
- [39] Ibid., 19.
- [40] Ibid., 337.
- [41] Ibid., 338.
- [42] Laye , *The Radiance of the King*, 44.
- [43] Ibid., 84.
- [44] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 21.
- [45] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 53-54.
- [46] Ibid., 20.
- [47] Laye , *The Radiance of the King*, 164.
- [48] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 22.
- [49] Ibid., 25.
- [50] Ibid., 51.
- [51] Ibid., 76.
- [52] Laye , *The Radiance of the King*, 155 [53] Ibid.
- [54] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 7.
- [55] Ibid., 8.
- [56] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Grafton Books, 1989), 83.
- [57] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 177.
- [58] Carla Capetti, 'Black Orpheus: Richard Wright's "The Man Who Lived Underground"', *Melus* 26, (winter 2001): 41.
- [59] Laye , *The Radiance of the King*, 5.
- [60] Ibid., 16.
- [61] Ibid., 33.
- [62] Ibid., 5.
- [63] Ibid., 8.
- [64] Ibid., 91.
- [65] Ibid., 94.
- [66] Ibid., 92. [67] Laye, *The Radiance of the King*, 146.
- [68] Stuart Miller, *The Picaresque Novel*, (Cleveland: P of Case Western University, 1967), 10.
- [69] Marc V Donadieu, 'American Picaresque: The early Novels of T. Coraghessan Boyle' (PhD diss., University of Louisiana, 2000, 5-6.
- [70] Stuart Miller, *The Picaresque Novel* , 10.

^[71] Laye , *The Radiance of the King*, 8.

^[72] Ibid.

^[73] Ibid., 5.

Chapter two : Parody as the main function of the carnivalesque in *Invisible Man* and

The Radiance of the King

Ellison and Laye incorporated the grotesque, humour and delight in their narratives to lighten the seriousness of the issues they expose in their novels *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King*. We have sorted out in the previous chapter the carnivalesque elements that characterize *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King*. In this chapter, we shall focus on parody as a primary function of carnivalesque literature. In short, we shall show that the real motive in Ellison's and Laye's recourse to the grotesque and exaggeration responds to their predecessors, to criticize and parody some discourses in written texts and some fundamental views and ideologies that were, to some extent, praised by the black and the whites as well for many years.

To start with, Ellison adopted carnivalesque literature to shed light on the blacks' and whites' economic, social and political realities in America in the first half of the twentieth century and even before. Furthermore, it is crucial to notice that thanks to his creative vision, Ellison managed to construct some vibrant characters that allusively represent the well known black figures in America. Thus, *Invisible Man* came as a revisionary narrative to parody the policies and ideologies of some leaders such as: Booker. T Washington, William DuBois and Marcus Garvey. What has been said above sets a smooth transition to analyse the description attributed to Dr Bledsoe who stands for the leader Booker T.Washington. Ellison mocks intentionally Dr Bledsoe at different levels. First, he ridicules him as a person by attributing an inappropriate physical description. Second, Ellison mocks Bledsoe's racial policy of accommodation which is in fact the same as Washington's with which he completely disagrees.

To explain further this issue, Ellison writes: "...in everything social, separate as fingers of the hand".^[11] This statement, in fact, echoes the speech of Washington delivered in the Atlanta Address in 1895 and in which he says: "In all things that are purely social, we can be as separate as the five fingers, yet one hand in all things related to mutual progress".^[12] It follows that Ellison parodies the leader's words to which he infuses an oppositional tone to criticize him. His aim is to show his discontent with Washington's philosophy of accommodation and lack of interest in blacks' social equality. Washington urges his race to accept the whites' humiliation and ignore their struggle for civil rights. Instead, they would work hard and improve their economic conditions as a starting step towards recognition.

The writer shows that blacks in a way or another are reduced into a second-class citizenship. In another instance, Ellison parodies Washington by investigating his statement "A ship lost at sea for many days suddenly sighted a friendly vessel. From the mast of the unfortunate vessel was seen a signal: 'Water, water; we die of thirst!' The answer from the friendly vessel came back: "Cast down your bucket where you are".^[13] Here again, Ellison disagrees with Washington who calls on his community to stay in the South and accept the supremacy of the whites. He counsels his people to accept disfranchisement and reconcile with the whites if they wish to gain social advancement.

This idea is strengthened by Dr Bledsoe who represents Washington. He is attributed an unpleasant depiction to debase him and his system. Bledsoe befriends the whites. His only aim is to secure his place in the white community and to insure their financial aid provided to the school. During a meeting held at school, he sits far from the white members and has dinner alone. Though he imitates and behaves like the whites, he remains always a second-class citizen and his social status as an American citizen never equals that of the white men.

Ellison does not content himself with criticizing Washington but he extends his ridiculous description to parody the black leader and writer William DuBois. The latter being

an intellectual advocating liberal arts education for the blacks. The parody of DuBois is well illustrated in the first chapter of the novel where Ellison degrades and treats with derision the black elitist the “talented tenth”. This idea finds expression in the Battle Royal where ten blindfolded educated Negroes amongst the narrator are fighting each other. This leads us to say that though educated, the boys ridicule themselves and behave awkwardly in order to entertain the whites. The ridiculous spirit reaches its height in the scene where the ten youngsters try to pick up the coins thrown on the electrified rag. Moreover, they are mocked more when they realized that that the coins over which they are fighting are falsified.

DuBois thinks that spiritual striving must be grounded in the black man’s culture. He advises his people to ask for higher education rather than contenting with simple material comfort. By this doctrine, he opposes Washington’s philosophy of economic advancement as a best way to improve the Negroes’ conditions. Furthermore, Ellison mocks and debases DuBois program by bringing down the intellectual combat to bodily confrontation. This confrontation, indeed, leads to the protagonist’s humiliation. Ellison also criticises DuBois’ admiration to the white culture. This idea is implicitly evoked through the blond dancer of the Battle Royal who symbolises the white culture. The invisible man is deeply seduced by the blond girl whom he sees like an angel flying in the air. Ellison shows that DuBois’ approach of acquiring higher education is inadequate since this education is restricted to the handful Negroes, and the great masses of the blacks are neglected.

A second hint to DuBois comes into view in the second chapter where the protagonist gives a detailed description of the founder’s statue by saying: “Above a spacious fireplace an oil portrait of the Founder looked down at me remotely, benign, sad, and in that hot instant, profoundly disillusioned. Then a veil seemed to fall”.^[4] In this quote, Ellison’s interest is centred on the meaning of the veil. The significance of the latter, in fact, is evoked in DuBois’ book *The Souls of Black Folk* in which he wishes to lift the veil ignorance by noting “desire to

tear down that veil, to creep through”.^[5] He explains that the veil of ignorance, in fact, is shadow or a barrier between the blacks’ consciousness and the white world. The function of the veil is articulated in two ways. First, it keeps the blacks hidden and unseen by the whites. Second, it prevents them from seeing the reality and the bitterness of their conditions in an oppressed society. In *Invisible Man*, the protagonist is unable to recognize whether the veil is truly lifted or it still covers the face of the founder. Sarcastically, Ellison mocks DuBois’ will to lift the veil of humiliation that envelops the blacks. In other words, Ellison shows that DuBois’ elitist program has failed to bring the blacks out of oppression.

Another allusion to DuBois can be noticed in the humiliating scene dealing with the eviction of the black couple from their house by two white men. There is a large crowd of black and white people in the street. The blacks are furious and they almost start a violent confrontation with the two white agents. In order to settle the confusion and avoid any conflict, the protagonist decides to address a speech to his race saying: “No, no ... Black men! Brothers! Black Brothers! That’s not the way. We’re law-abiding, we’re law-abiding people and a slow-to-anger people.”^[6] This peaceful speech reflects DuBois’ conviction that the coloured people should struggle for their rights. However, they should do it peacefully by abiding and respecting laws. However, the black crowd does not seem to be very persuaded or interested with the narrator’s philosophy. Soon after the speech, the masses rush on the agents without any concern with law. Once again, Ellison responds to DuBois by showing his opposition to the merely pacific ideas as an ideal means to gain recognition. The peaceful method remains the utopian philosophy of the intellectuals, but it is not always appropriate to be freed from the racial segregation.

The struggle for full citizenship in America is evoked in the protagonist’s lecture that he delivered to the angry people who thought that the Brotherhood betrayed them. He says:

We acted and we shall always act, I assure you. But in our disciplined ways. And we'll act positively. We refuse to waste our energies and yours in premature and ill –considered actions. We are Americans, all of us, whether black or white, regardless of what the man on the ladder there tells you. ^[7]

Ellison alludes to DuBois who asks for the full citizenship and an equal treatment of the negroes. Ellison criticizes DuBois's great emphasis on the issue of citizenship which vehicules implicitly the idea that the black Americans are not yet viewed as the citizens of the United States.

Another parody which can be clearly noticed is that of Marcus Garvey. He is indirectly represented by the character Ras the Exhorter. The narrator describes his encounter with Ras as follows: “a gathering of people who were almost blocking the walk, while above them, a short man shouted angrily from a ladder.”^[8] This quotation suggests that Ellison is against Garvey's futile violent actions. In addition to this, in chapter seven, Ellison demonstrates his dissatisfaction with Garvey's theory of violence as a best medium to resist and fight the white's segregation. Contrary to DuBois, for Garvey, the coloured people should mobilise in concerted violent movements to liberate themselves from exploitation and obviously gain their self-respect. In the Harlem riot scene, Ellison shows that what Garvey (Ras the Exhorter) calls planned movements deviate to be “suicidal warlike riots”. Thus, Ellison considers Ras' propaganda an act of destroying more than an act of unifying.

Besides his non- pacific policy, Garvey adopts “back to Africa movement” to call his people to go back to their roots and to their land of origin (Africa). This utopian doctrine failed since it was impossible to persuade the blacks to leave America which they consider their only country and of course the land of their ancestors for many generations. This is illustrated in *Invisible Man* when Ras tries hard to persuade Tod Clifton to quit the brotherhood, and work together in order to fight the white's segregation. However, the Blacks

have not ever tried to listen to him because they became aware of the pointlessness of his policy.

In the same way as Ellison, Laye's aim in his recourse to the carnivalesque in *The Radiance of the King* is to write back to some western writers and to parody some European writings and set of beliefs that served the white man for many years. Laye parodies the French policy of cultural assimilation in Africa during the colonial period. The French intention was first to uproot and detach the Africans from their ethnicity and their diverse cultures. Second, they pushed the inhabitants living in large tribal areas to adopt the imperial European language and culture. The aim of the French from this policy is to facilitate their colonialism in African. Moreover, the denial of the African values and the policy of assimilation did not diminish after the French departure from the African continent. To be explicit, the Africans are seen as the inferior others in Europe. They are directly or indirectly pushed to get rid of their identity and native cultural values. Instead, they would better conform themselves to the Western culture to integrate in the European world.

Laye discusses this question in *The Radiance of the King*. For example, the white man Clarence is the reversed image of a Negro in France. Clarence who is full of prejudice and naivety gives an excellent image of a European seen by the Africans. Laye tries to liberate his protagonist Clarence from the French monolithic vision of culture by initiating him to the African world. Clarence, in fact, tries to join the African community. In doing so, he is gradually rejecting the western attributes such as his luggage, jacket and short. Step by step, Clarence succeeds to dissolve the inherited culture to readopt the African one which is completely different from his own. In Adramé, Clarence starts to imitate the beggar's way of drinking wine. He is the antithesis of the civilized European who is supposed to educate the primitive Africans. He is far from being estimated by the blacks who do not miss any occasion to ridicule and humiliate him.

All along the narrative, Clarence tries to understand the African logic and customs which he finds strange and absurd. However, he soon realizes that the only way to be delivered by the black king is to respect their beliefs and values. This conviction leads him to show a great will to integrate the African traditions and values into his personality which he reconstructs in a new world. In Aziana, Clarence becomes familiar with the African way of life. For instance, he willingly lives in a hut with the African woman Akissi at whom he looks with great admiration. Moreover, he rejects almost all his conceived and negative ideas about the blacks. He is no longer interested in the European clothes over which he was arrested and sentenced to trial in Adramé. Much more importantly, he is pleased to wear the African boubou like his companions.

In order to show his great desire to integrate in the African world and to be assimilated, Clarence exposes openly his nakedness in the African town to convince himself and the others that he became more black than the blacks. In this respect, the narrator says:

“no, he never realized he was naked in the early sunlight, that cool, sweet air; nor did it enter his head to cover his nudity. The people of Aziana did not veil their nakedness any more than he did. They never thought about it. They just enjoyed life. Clarence was at that moment enjoying life too.”¹⁹¹

The idea of the white assimilation is accentuated in another context when Clarence went to the fortune teller Dioki to tell him whether the king is coming to the south. This fact demonstrates that Clarence rejects the western rational logic and believes in the African supernaturalism and magic. Furthermore, Clarence’s act explains that he undergoes deep spiritual transformation thanks to his interaction with the Africans.

All that proceeds enhances the assumption that Laye indeed reverses the French policy of assimilation by depicting a French man’s eagerness to assimilate the African values. We can assume that, to some extent, Clarence succeeded to be integrated in the blacks’ society as he says: “I enjoy life ...I filed my teeth like the people of Aziana, no one could see any difference between me and them ...It’s the soul that matters ... and in that respect I am

exactly as they are”.^[10] Clarence’s process of self-transformation is well interpreted by the narrator who reveals that “ his thoughts begun to dwell on his past life. If anyone who had known him in those days could have seen him now, smoking and drinking, crushing in the manner of black men under the arcade and dressed in a boubou like a black man, he would have appeared quite unrecognizable”.^[11] Clarence is assimilated but he does not become a savage like Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*.

From what has been said, we can confirm that Laye criticizes the system of assimilation praised by the French and of which Africa is the victim. He shows the inadequacy of this policy as a solution to the conflict engendered from the meeting of two distinct cultures. As Suret Canale has remarked “assimilation had only a negative meaning: it suppressed or ignored the political structures that were truly African and the African culture, replacing them by colonial structures and colonial education – which were indeed French.”^[12]

It is clear from this statement that the policy of assimilation aimed to turn Africans into French men with black skins. To fulfill this goal, the French rely on the process of education. According to Blair:

This purely French oriented education program was based on two premises: that the negro was a blank page with no inherited personality, cultural values or institutions; or that what he had were barbarous, primitive or puerile, that nevertheless, given the same opportunities, the African ‘child’ could become as ‘civilized’ as the French themselves, at which stage he should enjoy the same civic rights and advantages, including direct representation in French Assembly.^[13]

Clarence is not only rejecting his western culture but he is also in search for a multi-dimensional culture. The latter favors the coexistence of both the European culture summed up in its knowledge and technology, and the African spiritual and human values rooted in history. This view point finds expression in the pact of blood established between the whites and the blacks.

The stranger Clarence becomes the stud of the Naba's harem, and he contributes in making half-caste children with the Naba's women. This blood relationship symbolizes the Senghorian notion of the "mulatto" that Laye introduced into his novel. Without any doubt, the exploration of this notion in *The Radiance of the King* reflects Laye's great influence by the philosophy of Negritude set in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s. This adopted vision is a call to tolerance and the acceptance of the other regardless of his color. In fact, Clarence contributes in the improvement of the Negroes' society by inserting a good toweling material and a new showering system which are widely adopted by the people of Africa. Laye writes :
" Clarence had invented the system and now many people in Aziana washed themselves in this wayyes this invention of his wasn't bad at all, though of course it didn't need a genius to discover it. "^[14]

What Laye seeks from this parody is not to substitute the French assimilation by the African one. However, he offers an alternative which lies in the culture of "marronnage" involving the fusion of the African and the French worlds. The concept of "marronnage", indeed, reflects the view point suggested by Césaire. According to this view "each ethnic group has its own genius, and therefore something original to offer to world civilization, andthe solution to the world's problems resides more in the creation of a harmonious mosaic of universe cultures than in the attempt to create one monolithic system, which would necessarily be repressive and totalitarian". ^[15]

It is valid to assert that Laye does not only challenge the French assimilation by depicting Clarence's eagerness to become African. However, he is deeply engaged in another issue that of slave trade which had a great negative impact on Africa and the Africans. The latter are dehumanized and reduced to irrational beings unable to manage themselves properly. Laye's significant imagination in *The Radiance of the King* lies in his innovative investigation of the question of slave trade and the reversal of master and slave dialectic.

Forging from this ground, the writer's task is to ridicule and parody the western received ideas that confined the Africans in a stereotyped frame.

In doing so, Laye degrades the status of the French white man-Clarence- to that of slave in Africa. Aziana becomes a place of humiliation and shame. During his stay in the South, and without being aware, Clarence becomes a stud in the harem of the Naba. He had been sold to the chief of the town. By this fact, Laye ironically reverses the European clichés and fantasy of the male Africans' sexual prowess. The beggar succeeded in setting an arrangement with the Naba. Consequently, he barter Clarence for a woman and a donkey. Thus, Clarence is immersed in a new confusing situation which has a symbolic function. He is no more the free European individual who is proud of his supposed racial superiority but rather the slave and the private property of the black beggar and the town's chief after him.

Laye's *The Radiance of the King* came to correct some previous writings. This novel is a response to some western anthropologists who depicted the Africans as primitive creatures possessing a backward system of belief. Marcel Griaule and Father R.P Placide Tempels are among the anthropologists who expounded a vision that "was presumed to be discoverable in specific modes of traditional African thought".¹¹⁶¹

These anthropologists wrote their works during the colonial period. Nevertheless, no one of them made any reference to the colonial context or the colonial system under which the African people were living. Marcel Griaule and Placide Tempels tried to demonstrate that the Africans have a philosophy of their own. However, many writers criticized such works amongst Van Beek whose

Article raises a serious problem in French anthropology (...). The work of Griaule and his school since *Dieu d'eau* is based on a field approach that fails to meet all the requirements that he himself formulated in his *Méthode de l'éthnographie* (1957). (...) At a scientific level ... the research group often seemed to me more an initiatory school than a research laboratory." [17]

The methodological process they adopted failed due to the fact that their research studies were not based on any scientific inquiry. They contented themselves with the observation of facts and interviewing the indigenous Africans to construct their evidence on the African philosophical truth.

Thus, the anthropologists Griaule and Tempels wrote that the Africans possess a philosophy. However, it is mystic and opposes completely the western philosophy based on rational principles and reason. Indeed, their ideas enhance the assumption that the Africans are still primitive and uncivilized. These official writings, in fact, can be seen as an “authoritative discourse” that demands to acknowledge such texts and accept them as one side of the truth. Furthermore, the conclusions drawn out from this study are part of the colonial discourse that legitimates the spreading of colonialism over the African lands under the pretext of civilization.

Since Laye lived in France, we suppose that he read Griaule’s and Tempels’ works or at least heard about them. Our assumption finds substantiation in the likeness of some descriptions, structures and ideas developed in the texts of Griaule, Tempels and Laye. Marcel Griaule studied the Dogon society in his book *Dieu d’eau* published in 1948 just some years before the publication of *The Radiance of the King*. The book has been written after his interview with the Dogon hunter Ogotemmelé who reveals to him the philosophical secrets and the complex mythology of the Dogon.

In the second chapter of *Dieu d’eau*, Griaule speaks about the Dogon’s myth of creation. Ogotemmelé explains that Amma created the earth with whom he had intercourse, thus creating the fox. The following intercourse, however, engendered the original Nommo twins. Griaule writes: “ dieu les a créés comme de l’eau. Ils étaient de couleur verte, en forme de personne et de serpent. De la tête aux reins ils étaient humains ; le bas était serpent”.^[18]

After our reading for *The Radiance of the King* and Griaule's *Dieu d'eau*, we think that Laye borrowed intentionally Griaule's description which he eventually reshapes to paint a creative picture of the fish-women in *The Radiance of the King*. Laye's reproduced structure functions as a literary parody to Griaule's writing. To make it clear, Marcel Griaule shows that the upper part of the Nommo's body is human whereas the lower part is in a form of snake. Here the Nommo symbolizes the Good and the Evil at the same time.

Being inspired by this depiction, Laye presents his imaginative fish-women as strange creatures combining both the human and animal features. In this respect, Clarence describes them as having: "breasts, the head was very much more like the head of a fish than the head of a woman".^[19] He adds: "...it looked as if it ended in a fish tail".^[20] In this example, Laye mocks at Griaule's description by attributing the shape of fish to the lower part of the women whom Clarence saw in his dream.

In another chapter entitled 'The Sacrifice', Griaule speaks about the animals that are sacrificed in the altar to purify the African's body and spirit. The indigenous Africans believe that the liver of the animal should be consumed by the impurs of the society. In their view, these people are neither dead nor alive. Therefore, the impur is the abler to receive the force that would be extracted from the liver of the victim.

Laye refers to the idea of sacrifice in his novel when Clarence saw the frescoes on the wall of the king's palace. Clarence depicts them as "a series of sacrifices, a long procession of captives being led to altars where priests –perhaps kings- were cutting their victims' throats."^[21] The dancing boys provide Clarence with ambiguous explanation of the sacrifice. One of them says that the king is punishing the unfaithful vassals whereas the other boy contradicts his brother by stating that the king kills only his devoted vassals. These contradictory interpretations of the significance of the sacrifice came to mock the white men's incapacity to understand the African values and the African sense of right and logic.

As for the liver of the victim, Laye implicitly refers to this in the last chapter of the radiance of the king. Baloum tells Clarence that the Naba always sends him livers because they are of great delicacy, “when the naba used to send you, as a special delicacy, some of their liver, you didn’t turn up your nose at it. Now did you?”^[22] This reference to the liver can be understood as a means of purification of the white man’s spirit to fill it with the African ancestral principles that would replace the European moral decadence.

Placide Tempels wrote his book *La Philosophie bantoue*, in 1946. The whole book turns around the notion of “vital force”. The later is introduced in every aspect of the African life. The Africans believe that each behavior and every phenomenon is controlled by a vital force. It can be helpful and a source of power for people as it can also be harmful and a source of weakness if individuals become devilish and deviate from the conventions set by their ancestors for many generations. In chapter five entitled “Ethique des Bantoue”, Tempels speaks about the Bantou’s notions of goodness and badness by saying “ Il est fréquent d’entendre dire que les Noirs ne distinguent pas le bien du mal, ou du moins qu’ils ont à ce sujet des conceptions de sauvages, heurtant de plein fouet nos conceptions de la morale.”^[23] He explains that blacks do not distinguish between what is good and what is bad. Tempels argues that blacks do not see any harm in stealing, lying or betraying,

En matière de vol, on dit généralement que le Noir n’y voit pas le moindre mal, que pour lui il s’agit seulement de ne pas se faire prendre. Le mensonge et la tromperie seraient, dit-on, aux yeux des Noirs, un signe de finesse d’esprit, à l’abri de toute appréciation morale. L’adultère ne serait pas pour eux une infraction à la morale, mais il suffit que celui qui s’y fait pincer accepte de payer l’indemnité.^[24]

For them, it is a sign of cleverness and since adultery does not cause any moral offense, the blacks have just to accept to pay indemnity to the concerned person. For indemnity, it is not up to the judges to determine the amount that should be paid. However, the person hurt has the total right to ask for the amount he wishes and the judges have only to confirm the requirement of the strongest.

This idea is well elaborated in *The Radiance of the King*. The sense of right, justice, good, bad, money and sex are nothing like what Clarence expects, for they have no weight in Africa. Before starting his journey to Aziana, Clarence was arrested and sentenced to trial at the request of the owner of the caravanserai. In the trial scene, all the rules and norms of evidence are put upside down. The judge condemns Clarence, and he sides with the inn owner who claims Clarence's jacket as an indemnity for his freedom. Before the judge settles the conflict, he falls asleep and Clarence escapes from the court.

The paradox is that when Clarence gets out of the strange court, he meets an attractive girl who would introduce him to her father. The latter is the judge who is supposed to punish him. Moreover, he invites him to have meal with the beggar who was already there. This comic scene creates a kind of confusion in Clarence's mind. Laye intended to ridicule and revise western thinking and system of justice which assume that Europe is the best model of the universal justice and all what comes from the non European sphere is local and inappropriate.

Endnotes:

^[1] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965),17.

^[2] Booker.T Washington, *Up from Slavery* (New York: Discuss Books, 1965),148.

^[3] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 29.

^[4] *Ibid.*, 87.

^[5] William E. B.DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. (New York : Discuss Books, 1965), 214.

^[6] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 223.

^[7] *Ibid.*, 386.

^[8] *Ibid.*, 132.

^[9] Camara Laye , *The Radiance of the King*, trans. James Kirkup (New York: Nyrb Classics, 2001), 164 .

^[10] *Ibid.*, 165.

^[11] *Ibid.*, 156.

^[12] Suret- Canale, *French Colonialism in Tropical Africa 1900-1945* (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1971), 83.

^[13] Dorothy Blair, *African Literature in French* (London : Cambridge University Press, 1976), 11.

^[14] Laye , *The Radiance of the King*, 149.

^[15] Henry Wylie, 'Negritude and Beyond: The quest for identity and meaning'. In *Interdisciplinary Dimensions of African Literature*(Washington DC: ALA and Continent Press, 1985), 48.

^[16] Irele F. Abiola, *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

^[17] Van Beek, 'Dogon Restudied – A Field Evaluation of the Work of Marcel Griaule', *Current Anthropology*, April 1991, 163.

^[18] Marcel Griaule, *Dieu d'eau, entretiens avec Ogotemmel* (Quebec: Chicoutimi, 2006), 21

^[19] Laye, *The Radiance of the King*, 214.

^[20] Ibid.

^[21] Ibid., 28.

^[22] Ibid., 227.

^[23] R. P Placide Tempels, *La Philosophie bantoue* (Edition de l'Evidence, 2009), 71.

^[24] Ibid., 72.

IV- Conclusion:

This modest work inscribes in the domain of comparative literature which goes beyond geographical and linguistic differences. We have attempted to propose a new reading of Ellison's *Invisible Man* by comparing it to Laye's *The Radiance of the King*. We have tried to look closely at the literary relationship that links Ralph Ellison and Camara Laye by focusing on the deployment of the carnivalesque and its implications.

In fact, the parallel social and cultural contexts in which the authors wrote their works led them in a way or another to produce carnivalesque novels in which they put emphasis on the richness of the African and African- American folk cultures. Both *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King* were written nearly in the same period corresponding to the growing interest in blacks and whites' racial relations in Africa and America. Blacks' alienation and segregation in both continents became a stimulus for the non white writers to engage themselves in defending the rights of their races.

At the surface level, *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King* can be read as narratives of the protagonists' adventures. However, the underlying level shows that the novelists adopted the carnivalesque forms to shape their novels. The comic and anarchic episodes reflecting the grotesque images cover the whole narratives. Ellison and Laye believe that the seriousness of the issues tackled in their works could be discussed through a carnivalesque perspective. Therefore, they painted their novels with humorous scenes to

portray some ugly and unpleasant aspects of the human and social realities. Grotesque, laughter and exaggeration are used as tools to parody and to respond to some preceding writers and discourses that did not fit the aspirations of the novelists.

In their novels, Ellison and Laye made extensive use of the carnivalesque forms particularly its humorous spirit and grotesquery. These novelists show the continuing relevance and creativity of the carnivalesque in modern African and African American literature. In *Invisible Man* and *The Radiance of the King*, the carnivalesque moved away from the entertaining aim to focus on more critical themes. This shift demonstrates the novelists' desire to absorb the folkloric elements in their artistic works while satirizing the fragmented American society and culture and while criticizing the European narrow mindset denigrating the African culture.

Carnavalesque themes and characters serve as useful vehicles to humorously expose and parody other characters, idealistic beliefs and ideologies, as well as the individual's behaviors within the society. As an example, Ellison's protagonist tries hard to find his identity in racial America by keeping in touch with various groups espousing idealistic beliefs and causes. His picaresque journey allows him to discover the difference between appearance and reality and gives a new meaning to his existence. From his part, the alienated outsider Clarence succeeded finally, thanks to his confusing experience, in gaining a more insightful understanding of his reality as a white man. He rejects completely his western identity while he is in the African milieu in search for new horizons to find the meaning of his self. All in all, this dissertation deals with the carnivalesque dimension in Ellison's and Laye's novels belonging to the African and American contexts. However, the scope of this comparative literature can be extended to include other writers from other continents and languages whose literary works directed in the same carnivalesque perspective.

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