

# Ralph ellison's invisible man: the motif of eyes assignment

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The spell breaks and I try to re-see the rabbits, so tame through having never been hunted, that played in the hedges and along the road. " (Pig 35)

In the novel *Invisible Man*, by Ralph Ellison, the motif eyes reoccur constantly, the first time being In this quote. Throughout the novel eyes come to resemble many different things such as the ability and Inability to Judge, the taking in of surroundings, and many other things. The above quote is taken from *Invisible Man's* remembrance of his college.

At first *Invisible Man* feels as though life is great because he has been given the opportunity to attend an all black college at no cost to him. When *Invisible man* states that when he opens his eyes and the spell breaks he is referring to the fact that outside the boundaries of the college, life is rough. In this quote, the opening of *Invisible Man's* eyes stands for the realization of hardship and suffering outside of his own life. Though he may have it easy at the time, others of his race are still living all around him fighting against segregation every day.

This realization, although unpleasant and unwanted at this point in the novel is *invisible mans* first step to understanding the way the world truly works around him. After *Invisible Man* takes Mr.. Norton to Jim Truelove's cabin, Blessed asks *invisible man* to see him but first he must stop at the chapel. This is when the word eyes reappear with a significant meaning. Once In the chapel *Invisible man* comes across a man giving a beautiful speech and does not realize until the end an important detail. " I saw the blinking of sightless eyes. Homer A. Barber was blind" (Pig 133) .

The fact the Barber is blind is a very important detail to factor into his speech. Barber is giving his speech to a chapel full of white men of high importance, and the fact that he is blind sets them apart in more ways than just the obvious. The blindness of Barber makes it impossible for him to judge others based solely on their race. Though others may judge him because he is black, Barber is unable to tell races apart only by hearing their voices, giving him the ability to listen first and then judge on what they have to say and not their physical appearance.

The fact that Barber is blind comes as a huge shock to Invisible Man but helps him to understand how a black man can go up in front of a crowd of white men and not worry about saying what they want to hear rather than what he wants to say. This is Invisible Man's first step towards becoming independent and making his own choices. After being expelled by Mr. Ewell, Invisible man is given letters that he must give to what he thinks are possible employers.

When Invisible Man realizes that this is not the case, he is given a job at a paint factory that starts off bad from the very start. When Invisible Man is asked to add a black substance to a white paint, he questions whether the white man in charge of him is right and asks the man if he knows what is in the paint. "His eyes snapped, you damn right I know" (Peggy) This quote taken is wrong by a black man. The eyes and the emotion shown in them shows the anger the man feels after being questioned by someone he considers to be less important than him.

The anger Invisible Man sees in his eyes is Invisible Man's first wakeup call that even though he is living in the north now, white men will still always regard him as lower than them and value him less than others. Although he is living in a place that even in the past had less slavery than where he was born, he still has to treat white men better than he feels he deserves. After Invisible Man's incident in the paint factory, he goes through a kind of rebirth. The first place Invisible Man arrives in after getting out of a subway is a street called Lenox Avenue.

When he emerges from the subway he claims he "focused upon the teetering scene with wild, infant's eyes" (pg 251). The infant's eyes are a very straight forward resemblance to the eyes of a new born taking everything in for the first time. Although this is not Invisible Man's first time to lay eyes on the world, or even New York, this is his first time walking around with the new identity he has now. This scene has now become Invisible Man's new beginning in this world and a chance to do what he wants and live a different life than he used to.

The infant's eyes are his way of adjusting to the new life and understanding what is happening to him and around him. Eyes are yet again mentioned when Invisible Man imagines confronting Blessed for leading him to a life of hardship. This is also the very hardship he realized existed outside the bounds of the college he thought he loved so much. "I accuse you before the eyes of the world" (pg 265). Invisible Man accuses Blessed of committing an act he feels is disgusting and full of sham.

HE accuses Blessed of eating Hog Maw which is the insides of a pig's stomach. This eyes that Invisible man refers to in the above quote refers to the witnesses he is accusing Blessed in front of. The fact that Invisible man Feels as though he needs witnesses leads the reader to feel as though the witnesses help to set the event in stone and make it undeniable. By doing this, Invisible Man is compelling Blessed to a life of humiliation and suffering. The final time that the motif eyes makes itself known is upon Invisible mans arrival at the Brotherhood.

Invisible Man meets a man named Jack who wants to employ him s a speaker for their group that claims to fight for the rights of black men and women. When they arrive at the entrance Jack stops. " I saw a bronze door-knocker in the shape of a large-eyed owl. Now he hesitated a moment... " Claims Invisible man (pig 319). The large owl eyes can be seen as the eyes of someone watching them. The way that brother hesitates at the eyes can also lead the reader to believe that the eyes are the eyes of God watching and Judging the actions of the Brotherhood.

This foreshadows that Invisible Man may be being mislead by the brother hood. Invisible man may take from this that he is always being watched, even when he does not wish to be, and that his actions may come back to harm him in the future. The motif of eyes consistently appears throughout the novel. It comes to resemble things such as the realization of hardships, second chances, and the ability and inability to Judge others. Each time the motif is present, there is a lesson that Invisible Man takes from it in order to become the man he is at the end of the story. An independent man.