

“You have to leave home to find home”

Charismatic Violence and Split Habitus in Ralph Ellison’s Second Unfinished Novel

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SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE IN THE FORM OF CHARISMA

In his essay “Tell It Like It Is, Baby” (1965), Ralph Ellison asks: “*what quality of love sustains us in our orphan’s loneliness; and how much is thus required of fatherly love to give us strength for all our life thereafter?*” (Collected Essays 35) With regard to his father’s early death Ellison has the feeling that he “*only perished, he did not pass away*” (36). Moreover, he identifies his mother Ida as a passionate bearer of the paternal values and norms, which she passes on to her sons and which make Ralph and his brother Herbert “*confused, sometimes bitter, but most often proud, recipients of their values and their love....*” The mother “*cherished his memory until she died, apotheosized his vital years*” (36, original emphases). While “Tell It Like It Is, Baby” addresses the author’s relation to his father Lewis Alfred Ellison and even, in a kind of dream-like apparition, fuses the narration of his loss with the assassination of the ‘historical father,’ Abraham Lincoln, Ellison recognized that the essay was not the appropriate genre to deal with the theme of father-son relations:

So I confess defeat; it is too complex for me to ‘tell it like it is.’ [...] For a writer who depends upon the imagination for his insights and his judgments, perhaps this is usually the way. Current events and events from the past, both personal and historical, ever collide within his interior life—either to be jumbled in the chaos of dream,

or brought to ordered significance through the forms and techniques of his art. Following my defeat with the essay, I returned to my novel—which, by the way, has as its central incident the assassination of a Senator. (46)¹

Ellison then turns back to his novel in progress because, as he writes in his 1946 essay “Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity,” fiction permits to combine social reality and individual experience:

Perhaps the ideal approach to the work of literature would be one allowing for insight into the deepest psychological motives of the writer at the same time that it examined all external sociological factors operating within a given milieu. For while objectively a social reality, the work of art is, in its genesis, a projection of a deeply personal process, and any approach that ignores the personal at the expense of the social is necessarily incomplete. (84)

Thus, to approach Ellison’s oeuvre with concepts of relational sociology seems particularly apt, since Pierre Bourdieu, aiming to overcome the long-established dichotomy between agent and structure in the social sciences, provides important conceptual tools for the disclosure of the interrelation of psychological and social factors that are not only involved in the genesis of the work of art, as Ellison suggests, but also in the representation of the fictional reality.² In the case of Ellison’s novel, its social reality juxtaposes normativity in the form of laws with an intimidating perfection of authoritative figures on the individual level.

1 In many ways, “Tell It Like It Is, Baby” can be read as a telescoped version of Ellison’s unfinished novel, which sometimes resembles a collection of essays, whereas the essay shows fictional traits. As Timothy Parrish argues, Ellison – regardless of the form in which he was writing – “was always telling a version of the same story” (194).

2 On the interdependency of these two levels, see Bourdieu’s profound analysis of Gustave Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education*, in which he identifies “the generative formula which is the basis of [the author’s] own novelistic creation” (*Rules of Art* 28-29) and claims that Flaubert’s novel “reconstitutes in an extraordinarily exact manner the structure of the social world in which it was produced and even the mental structures which, fashioned by these social structures, form the generative principle of the work in which these structures are revealed” (31-32).

Even before the publication of *Invisible Man* in 1952, Ellison began to work on his second novel, and when he died in 1994 he left behind several thousand pages, of which Ellison's literary executor, John F. Callahan, and Adam Bradley published about one thousand under the title *Three Days Before the Shooting...* in 2010. The unfinished novel centers on the story of Bliss, an orphan of indeterminate race, who is raised by his foster father, Reverend Alonzo Zuber Hickman, in an African American community in the Deep South. After decades as a shapeshifter,³ Bliss finally fashions himself into a powerful politician, who is assassinated by his own son, Severen, on the floor of the U.S. Senate. Undoubtedly, Ellison's second novel is about "fathers and sons" (Bradley 11).⁴

One of the most powerful father figures in *Three Days* is Reverend Hickman. He trains his foster son to become a child preacher and at one time even makes him reenact Jesus, which is one reason for Bliss's eloping. The chapter "Bliss's Birth" reveals that Hickman's father was a preacher as well. Hickman also left the religious field (for some time), but in contrast to Bliss he turned into a jazzman. As Ellison asserts,

the story goes back into earlier experiences, too, even to some of the childhood experiences of Hickman, who is an elderly man in time present. It's just a matter of the past being active in the present—or of the characters becoming aware of the manner in which the past operates on their present lives. Of course this gets into the general history, because one of the characters is a senator. He, too, is a trickster. (*Collected Essays* 820)

In each generation of fathers and sons, Ellison seems to suggest, history repeats itself. Why is it, Bourdieu asks, "that the established order, with its relations of domination [...], ultimately perpetuates itself so easily, apart from a few historical accidents, and that the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural" (*Masculine Domination* 1)? Bourdieu's methodological answer is his concept of

3 See Eric J. Sundquist's systematic derivation of this term for Bliss/Mr. Movie-man/Sunraider from Joseph Campbell in his seminal essay.

4 On the prominence of father-son relationships in Ellison's unfinished novel, see also Callahan and Bradley in the general introduction to *Three Days* as well as the articles by Marc Conner and Lena Hill.

“symbolic violence,” a non-physical and therefore “gentle and invisible violence” (*Pascalian Meditations* 169), which is the more powerful as it works through emotions:

One of the effects of symbolic violence is the transfiguration of relations of domination and submission into affective relations, the transformation of power into charisma or into the charm suited to evoke affective enchantment [...]. The acknowledgment of debt becomes recognition, a durable *feeling* toward the author of the generous act, which can extend to affection or love, as can be seen particularly well in relations between generations. (*Practical Reason* 102, original emphasis)

In Ellison’s father-son relationships, it is the father who exerts symbolic violence upon the son in the form of charisma. Although the sons are under the spell of this ‘enchantment,’ they struggle to distance themselves from their fathers so that we repeatedly see desperate attempts by the sons to overcome the overwhelmingly superior father. No son is really successful, but rather turns into a charismatic father figure himself, so that the generational chain results in a form of repetition of history.

“THE ORDER OF SUCCESSION”⁵

Hickman has high expectations for little Bliss whose changing roles within the father’s religious project are mirrored in his various names. In one of Ellison’s drafts, Hickman summarizes the first stations in Bliss’s life as follows:

5 In “The Contradictions of Inheritance,” Bourdieu defines the paternal inheritance as “the *order of succession*,” which is founded on “the tendency to perpetuate in one’s very being” the father’s “*social position*” (507, original emphasis). According to Bourdieu, however, “it is frequently necessary to distinguish oneself from him, to go beyond him and, in a sense, deny him” (507). This, in turn, results in a feeling of guilt and “of *being torn* that comes from experiencing success as failure or [even] transgression” (510). Bourdieu writes: “The more you succeed (meaning the more you fulfill the paternal will to have you succeed), the more you fail, since the closer you come to killing your father, the farther you are from him” (510).

In Waycross: 'Blessed Boy.' [...] 'The Holy Baby'; in Birmingham, 'The Little Shepard': Rockymont [sic]; 'The Leader Child' Yes, 'The Lord's Littlest Lyric' that was Atlanta. 'The Golden Voiced Lamb' Tulsa. 'His Promise Affirmed' Pueblo; but to all the old ones, the close ones, he was Bliss. (Ralph Ellison Archive, Library of Congress, ms. box I:119, folder 9, n.p. [hereafter box and folder information only]).

Just as God was willing to sacrifice his son, Hickman is willing to sacrifice Bliss for the greater good. Hickman even aims to surpass God himself when he tells Bliss: "You're just a little over six and even Jesus Christ didn't get started until he was twelve" (*Three Days* 253). In contrast to his father's wishes, Bliss is not willing to sacrifice himself for the congregation. Instead, he transforms himself from God's son Jesus into the first human being Adam.⁶

Adam is willing to sin: In his first incarnation, Mr. Movie-man, Bliss seduces not only a whole community in the "territory" but also a woman named Lavatrice and becomes a father of a son himself. Yet with Adam's first son Cain, the first murder comes into the world; in contrast to the biblical story, Bliss's son does not commit fratricide but patricide. Unlike Hickman who "changes" from jazzman to minister to take over responsibility for his orphan son, Bliss himself rejects the responsibility of the father role. Thus, Severen becomes a fatherless son who has to search for a substitute father. As Bliss had accepted a father substitute in Hickman, Severen chooses Love New, the half-Indian, half-black shaman – another charismatic father figure.

And there are even more relations of 'fathers' and 'sons' in *Three Days*. As in "Tell It Like It Is, Baby," Ellison relates the father-son story to the political field, alluding to Abraham Lincoln as the father of the nation and to (African) Americans as his sons. In the presence of the "hero-father," as Ellison calls Lincoln (*Collected Essays* 46), the inner division of the dominant father figure Hickman is revealed.⁷ In his speech at the Lincoln Memorial, where Hickman leads his congregation members in an attempt to prevent the assassination of his son, the Reverend praises Lincoln as "one of the few who ever earned the right to be called 'Father'" (*Three Days*

6 The subchapters [Adam and Eve] and [Bliss and "snake"] seem to suggest that Ellison meant to develop the biblical analogy even further.

7 For a further discussion of Hickman and Lincoln, see Hill.

576). To Hickman, “perfection is reserved to God the Father,” but Lincoln comes close to perfection as “*the man who did the best he could for us and came out the winner*” (582). This perfection, which is based on symbolic violence in the form of charisma, stands for the normative, standard-setting power of the father, which the son has to work through.

In *Three Days* Reverend Hickman is presented almost invariably as an immaculate father figure – both as the perfect charismatic leader of his congregation and as a loving foster father to Bliss. In the very first scene of the chapter “Hickman in Washington, D.C.,” he is singled out from the congregation by his height, his elegant dress, and his gold watch and thus is identifiable as “HNIC,” which “means the ‘Head Negro in charge’; in other words, their leader” (505). Hickman stands out through his calm voice and his ability to lead the huge group just with “slight nods and gestures” (504). Through his charisma, and in his double function as leader and priest, Hickman exerts an exceptional amount of power over the congregation. In the scene at the Lincoln Memorial, however, Ellison also reveals the part in Hickman that once made him leave his religious family and turn into the rebellious jazzman. The confrontation with the heroic national father uncovers an internal combat hidden in the old Reverend. It is first uttered in a dispute between Hickman and his best friend Wilhite on whether Lincoln is the “man who changed history” or merely “*a creature of politics*” (582). Wilhite focuses on the ‘father part’ of Abraham Lincoln, i.e., on the politician, the old order. Hickman does not want to accept this image, because it shows him a truth about himself that he suppresses. Therefore, he underlines the ‘son part’ of the charismatic politician, characterizing Lincoln as the man who was brave enough to *revolt* against the old order. In denying the hypocrisy of this image he denies his own. He wants the congregation members to see in Lincoln as well as in himself an immaculate leader.

This controversial double portrait of Lincoln mirrors a conflict in Hickman that Ellison exposes through introspection: Approaching the Memorial, Hickman remembers “his own mixed emotions and conflict of mind which had left him shaken during his first visit to where they were headed [and] he had an impulse to draw Wilhite aside and suggest that they find an excuse for returning to the hotel” (574). Yet Hickman suppresses this impulse, focuses on the spell of the place, and stresses how “an old, restricted part of himself seemed to fall away, giving him a sense of moving from the familiar world of the given into the misty sphere of the possible” (575).

Thus, in the encounter between the national father and the national son, Ellison brings to light Hickman's son part fighting against the father part in him or, in Bourdieu's terms, Hickman's split habitus.⁸

In Hickman's case, the split derives from initially having rejected the father's trajectory, or inheritance, which led him from the religious to the cultural and eventually back to the religious field. "Such experiences tend to produce a habitus divided against itself, [...] doomed of a kind of duplication, to a double perception of self, to successive allegiances and multiple identities." (Bourdieu, "The Contradictions" 511) Later we learn that "increasingly such flashbacks were accompanied by interior dialogues in which a voice from his life as irreverent young bluesman mocked his present role of spiritual leader and reminded him of his lingering worldliness. Marked by a conflict between his past and his present, it was an ongoing dialogue in which the younger self badgered and teased while his older self stubbornly asserted its spiritual authority" (*Three Days* 715). The narrated monologue, occurring when Hickman is faced with the idealized father figure Lincoln, elucidates his internal combat between the normative, standard-setting father and the rebellious son.⁹

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- 8 Hickman reveals a *habitus clivé*, a split habitus, as Bourdieu defines it in retrospect of his own development. What Bourdieu describes in *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*, however, is the split habitus of the 'climber.' The tension Bourdieu experiences before his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France indicates that he is not able to hold his authority and that his former habitus adheres to him (108). For a famous example of split habitus in African American history, see Buschendorf's analysis of Frederick Douglass's transition from slave to famous orator.
- 9 See also Bradley's discussion of Hickman's "duality." Quoting Ellison's statement about Hickman as being of "'two minds'—one doubtful, the other hopeful; one blues-toned, the other sanctified," Bradley argues: "Unifying voice while complicating perspective, Ellison has made Hickman [in the computer files] a richer and deeper character than in the typescripts, albeit at the cost of his antiphonal relationship with Bliss/Sunraider. Through Hickman, Ellison explores the contrasts and the connections in a *bifurcated* voice" (50, my emphasis). Bradley then gives an example of what he calls Hickman's "doubling of vision" referencing a "tradition in African-American expression balancing the faith of the spirituals with the tragicomic sensibility of jazz and the blues" (50-51). This

In contrast to the dominating father-leader image of Hickman in *Three Days* the Ellison Papers contain scenes about his childhood experiences and his relationship to his own preacher father; most importantly, they comprise numerous versions of a scene called “Hickman Reminiscing” including a passage marked with the subtitle “[clock and church],” in which Hickman remembers a fateful Sunday in his father’s church, describing in detail the charismatic father preaching from the pulpit and his own feelings and thoughts while listening to the sermon that eventually result in an epiphany.¹⁰ These drafts open up a new image of Hickman as revolting son as well as charismatic preacher father. Both the drafts of “Hickman Reminiscing” and the two following notes reveal that Ellison aimed at a pattern of repetition: “Hickman’s fall and Bliss’s fall, each others doubles” and “1 runaway jazz / 2 runaway – politics / taken (send) away – murder” (ms. box I:138, folder 5).

A close reading of “Hickman Reminiscing” and especially “[clock and church]” uncovers the moment in Hickman’s childhood when he hears the second inner voice for the first time and when through introspection he captures the starting point of the “ongoing dialogue in which the [son] badgered and teased while [the father] stubbornly asserted [his] spiritual authority” (*Three Days* 715). These drafts, then, not only illuminate the genesis of both Hickman’s and Bliss’s primary and split habitus, they also reveal how Ellison, by emphasizing father-son relationships, writes history against history-book history.

evokes *The Souls of Black Folk*, notably the chapter “Of the Faith of the Fathers,” in which Du Bois defines the preacher as “the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American Soil. A leader, a politician, an orator, a ‘boss,’ an intriguer, an idealist” (116) and highlights “two great and hardly reconcilable streams of thought and ethical strivings [in two “types” or “groups of Negroes”]; the danger of the one lies in anarchy, that of the other in hypocrisy” (123).

10 Besides “[clock and church],” the three folders entitled “Hickman Reminiscing” (ms. box I:123, folders 5-7) contain “[Music dance hall],” “[Adam and Eve],” and “[Bliss and the “Snake”].” Some of these titles have different spellings in some versions; they are listed with “Jack Johnson” and “Other” on a folder page in ms. box I:123, folder 6.

“HICKMAN REMINISCING”

“Hickman Reminiscing” displays yet another overwhelmingly superior, charismatic, and powerful father figure who represents the old order, i.e., the normative order in the shape of religious *doxa* with its elements of the censorious, punitive father representing God(’s will) and the concept of sin and punishment. In Alonzo Hickman, we find yet another anxious son, who finally revolts in the form of escape. The drafts present a pivotal moment in Hickman’s childhood, which captures in an experience of epiphany *his* decision of turning away from his family. Here we have the origin of Ellison’s fictional chain of fathers and sons outlined in his note which marks Hickman as “1 runaway—jazz.”

The drafts of “[clock and church]” are dominated by introspection as a means to illuminate how Alonzo Zuber Hickman felt as the son of a charismatic preacher father, how the father’s behavior affected the little boy – including his bodily reactions that reveal the origin of what Hickman describes as “family traits and instincts inherited from the past” (ms. box I:123, folder 5). In other words, the notes disclose aspects of Hickman’s socialization and thus his primary habitus, which, according to relational sociology, is

the set of dispositions one acquires in early childhood, slowly and imperceptibly, through familial osmosis and familiar immersion; it is fashioned by tacit and diffuse “pedagogical labor with no precedent”; it constitutes our baseline social personality as well as “the basis for the ulterior constitution of any other habitus.” (Wacquant 7; cf. Bourdieu and Passeron 42–46)

And as Erica Edwards maintains in her study on black leadership, charisma is “a kind of habitus” (201).

The notes make us aware of the interrelation, the parallel between father and son. The analogy between Hickman and his father clarifies our understanding of Hickman’s own father role and thus in turn allows us to gain insight into Bliss’s son role as well as the process of his transformation. Furthermore, the notes draw attention to Hickman’s renunciation of his father as the representative of the old order and the religious field. That, in turn, illustrates the image of the son in revolt (which will be repeated by Bliss and again by Severen) and enables us to see more clearly the manner

of his revolt and his trajectory: Both sons move into the cultural field, Hickman turns into a jazzman, Bliss into Mr. Movie-man, appropriating the religious charismatic habitus to the position of an entertainer. In the draft “[in the music hall]” Hickman states explicitly how he transposed the pattern he adapted from his father in the church into the music hall, while Bliss does so twice, first as Mr. Movie-man and later as senator in the political field. The parallel underlines the structure of repetition in Ellison’s novel which, in turn, highlights the repetition in (African) American history and, more generally, in the relation of fathers and sons.

[CLOCK AND CHURCH]

In one of the drafts of “Hickman Reminiscing,” the Reverend denotes his childhood memory of his father’s “voice-flung sermon” (ms. box I:123, folder 6). All the variants of “[clock and church]” focus on Hickman’s father as the center of the ceremony and the master of collection. Hickman’s reflections uncover the father’s ability to lead and control the whole congregation solely with his body language. He depicts the father preacher before the start of the sermon as standing in front, staring at the congregation which turns quiet and finally silent.

With the beginning of the sermon Hickman chronicles the preacher’s transformation from “his beloved father” to “a figure of mysterious grace.” Alonzo hears his “preacher father’s voice-flung sermon” and sees “the pattern unfolding.” In one of the drafts, Ellison renders a detailed description of what the boy perceives: “it was nothing more or less than the *connection* between the creeping movement of the church house clock’s hands and roman numerals, the sunlight filtering through the red, blue, green and gold of a stained glass window, and the pattern” (my emphasis). Hickman reflects on the synesthetic quality of his past experience, which leads him to grasping the essence of time itself: “Once as a child being forced to sit quietly in church when I wanted to be outside playing, didn’t I catch time off guard, and wasn’t it made up of the details of familiar scenes and acts/actions and of smells and sounds that fused briefly in my mind before flying apart.”¹¹

11 The various versions of “[Adam and Eve]” contain further elaborations of Hickman’s (respectively Ellison’s) musings about time.

Alonzo watches the church clock as if in a sort of game, a race between his father's voice and the moving pendulum signifying his wish that the sermon would soon be over. "When the clock and his father's voice had come together," Hickman recalls, "the service had approached its end," which meant redemption for the members and "freedom," more precisely, "heathen freedom" for him. The boy distances himself more and more from the congregation, which remains fully under the spell of his father and is represented by his mother who reprimands Alonzo again and again to sit still and listen to his father's sermon. Although he soon begins to see through the game and, thus, the "familiar scenes and acts/actions and [...] smell and sounds [are] flying apart," he nevertheless is still afraid of his father and ascribes superhuman powers to him: He is convinced that his father knows about the game and will punish him for staging the race between pendulum and voice. A feeling of guilt overtakes him since he believes "that now everybody has to suffer the punishment for it."

What is in operation here is what Bourdieu calls *doxa*, in this case, the internalized concept of sin. Hickman is afraid of his vision and describes his father as "frightening." That his childhood self is scared is most clearly exposed by his interior monologue, which brings to light his inner division and its genesis; the two voices in him are dramatized in a dialogue for the first time in Ellison's drafts – and they are fighting:

Pulpit Why do they call it that?

To scair you, man. To make you feel if you don't listen you'll git pulled into the pit, thass why...

No, you're wrong and you better watch out now because what you doing is a sin...

And yet in spite of a sudden feeling of dread he couldn't stop listening for the game. (ms. box I:123, folder 5)

One part of him is obedient and adapts to the rules, which is stressed by the feelings evoked in the boy when he sees his mother crying; it makes him afraid "even when he had not sinned." The other part of him starts to see through the rules of the game, which is reflected in the appearance of Hickman's second voice. With this insight his perception of his father starts to change, but as he is still afraid he succumbs again to the *doxa* of the religious field, which he has internalized during socialization. The beloved father scares him by turning into "the figure on the rostrum [who] caused

judgement day.” Yet, Hickman’s second inner voice becomes more and more dominant – as, for example, in the following draft:

And then it happened. Beneath the roar around him he (=little Hickman) heard a (low) teasing voice (saying). No man, no. This always happens after they took up the collection. You just ain’t paid attention to it before, thass all. But you just watch: when this part is over him and the clock will be caught up with each other and then we can go home and eat and look at the funnies...You just listen and watch that clock.

In dialogue with his double, Alonzo’s emotions intensify, with the result that he is distancing himself from his father, the reference to whom is now marked by depersonalization: “the voice from the pulpit.” As Alonzo removes himself emotionally first from the other congregation members and then from his family, Ellison emphasizes his growing inner conflict by creating an analogy to his inner conversation on the physical level. First, the boy himself tries to find a way to sneak out of the church by pretending that he needs to run to the restroom. Then, during the father’s sermon on sin, Alonzo observes “a tall, light-skinned man” actually rising and leaving the church, evoking the preacher’s wrath: “As his father watched the man leaving he seemed to be growing taller. And as his body surged and panted with emotion it seemed to swell and fill out the robe and his voice became trumpet-like and threatening” (ms. box I:123, folder 7).

In any case, the boy waits with growing impatience for the sermon to end. In the process of gaining distance from the charisma of the father and the *doxa* of the religious ritual he is able to perceive the final part of the sermon already through ‘new eyes,’ which allows him to see the pattern and thus the truth.

HICKMAN’S APOSTASY

The conflict with the embodied concept of sin and the related fear makes the little boy feel as if “he were being swept away like a leaf in a whirlpool” (ms. box I:123, folder 5). Hickman is indeed swept away – from everything his life had stood for so far. And interestingly, with the ‘death of his old life’ he has a dream-like vision based on imagery of the Old Testament:

[H]e was being pelted by a rush of images he'd learned from the banners in Sunday school. The Hebrew children were dashing toward the blood red sea with Pharaoh's coddiers lashing their horses like cowboys as they tried to head them off, and the bloody bodies of babies killed by King Herod's cutthroat bad men bobbed past like water-soaked dolls with sightless, staring eyes.

It is remarkable that this vision ends with a reference to the Book of Daniel: "And Shadrach, Mesrach, Abenego and Daniel were looking out at him from within a blazing furnace which spun and bobbed in the rush of water...." The prophet Daniel and his three companions represent unshakable faith as they refuse to worship Nebuchadnezzar's image of gold. In the very moment of Hickman's apostasy, they look at him reproachfully, frightening the little boy, who starts screaming and thinks he is about to faint. But despite his fear, he is able to free himself from the symbolic violence of the biblical image. Hickman abandons this vision and turns away – not only from his biological father but also from God, the father, from everything that has dominated his life so far and in which he has believed. Simultaneously, he seems to have gained an outsider's perspective on the scene, when he watches with great distance the screaming and chanting church members – including his mother.

Hickman's initial split from his family and his (first) congregation is effectively symbolized by the flying bird illuminated by a blue tilted beam of sunlight that he perceives in connection to the one o'clock stroke (cf. ms. box I:123, folder 6). The one o'clock strike is an ominous sign. It stands for time in general, and time, as Ellison writes in the draft, "came into the world after the fall" and is generally a "name for regret" (ms. box I:123, folder 5). Accordingly, the clock indicates that it is past twelve, i.e., it is always already too late. The flying bird signifies another rebellious son (Icarus) who tries to surpass the father. His subsequent fall is foreshadowed by color symbolism, the beam of sunlight tilted in blue. This conglomeration of metaphors, combined with the vision from the Book of Daniel foreshadows the end, which is told in the beginning: Sunraider's fall by the hand of his own son. Yet, it also fuses the stories of the sons into one story of sons.

In another draft, Ellison emphasizes the connection between the son's process of apostasy and the *doxa*-inflicted vision even more. He describes the charismatic father literally as "magician" of words who is able to

“pull[...]” the boy, who is “trying to stop the feeling,” “like a fish on a line,” while the mother appears to be “hypnotized” (ms. box I:123, folder 7). As soon as the son sees the above-mentioned “tear roll[ing] down her cheek [sic] [...] an invisible hand had reached out and was dragging him down inside a raging whirlpool of flashing scenes.” This time, the “frightening image [...] of [t]he Hebrew children” is paired with a more dramatically staged fall by a figure illustrating the dangerous state of blindness:

And as the [father’s] voice thundered and rapsed [sic] he [=Hickman] saw a blind man appear, tettering [sic] high on the edge of a cliff. And just as something which glowed like a lump of coal tore from the blind man’s chest and zoomed into the jet black sky he saw the man plunging headlong into space, forever falling. The poor blind man had strayed from the narrow path and seeing him fall made his mouth fly open to scream. But now, looking out through the iron-barred door of a big blazing furnace which tossed and spun past him in solemn retrograde were Meshrach, Shadrach, Abenego and Daniel, and he stared in amazement at the four saved souls who were so holy that they could sit cool and collected in fire so fierce that it burned in rushing water.

Ellison’s drafts of “Hickman Reminiscing” uncover a form of split habitus translated into biblical and mythical images, which reveal the unconscious and internalized *doxa* of the religious field at work in the little boy.

“THE PRESENCE OF THE PAST”

In the novel, Ellison produces an analogy to Hickman’s apostasy by creating a scene that associates Bliss’s apostasy with the same vision of the blazing furnace. In Bliss’s case, the allusion to the Book of Daniel occurs after the night in Sister Georgia’s house, where the boy “misbehaved” (350), namely, when he lifted Sister Georgia’s nightgown. This suggests that “Bliss’s fall” is connected to his first sexual exploration. In accordance with the biblical story and in contrast to Hickman, Bliss envisions only Daniel’s three companions when in his dream “Sister Georgia was there in the kitchen and was leading him over to the red-hot stove and asking him about Meshack, Shadrach, and old bigheaded Abernathy” (351). The dream of guilt is triggered by Bliss’s innocent musings about the kitchen stove:

When sitting there in the morning, waiting for his father, he sees a kind of synopsis of his old life; he thinks about seasons and food prepared on the hot stove and imagines finally: “That big pot on the back there will be puffing like a steam engine Meshack, Shadrach, and Abednego, and I like black-eyed peas [...]” (350).

In the subsequent scene, Ellison uses the eye metaphor to illustrate the distance between father and son. Hickman’s face is literally behind bandages, and even his eye (“Thy merciful all-seeing eye”), that he shortly before had asked God to “keep us focused in [...] until we reach the living end” (349), is closed. In this scene, Hickman admits that he prayed the wrong prayer and left Bliss out (cf. 350). The night before, which Hickman spent in jail and Bliss in Sister Georgia’s house, they were not only physically separated for the first time but had also lost the religious-based bond between father and son. That night sowed Bliss’s seed of doubt¹²: His first step to transform himself into Adam was the moment he lifted Sister Georgia’s nightgown. As a result, Bliss is no longer willing to reenact Jesus. Hickman lost control of Bliss just as his own father had lost control of his son in the church scene. Hickman announces that he will help Bliss to preach the following week and whispers that he will take him to the movies, but the connection between son and father is broken: “He [Bliss] looked but suddenly the eye was gone—as though someone had turned down the wick on a lamp” (356).

What Hickman sees as a child in his father’s church, according to the draft, is “the scene in which Christ, loaded down with his cross and wearing a crown of thorns, was being driven up the hill by soldiers carrying shields [...]” (ms. box I:123, folder 6). From “his dual perspective” of himself as “reminiscing” adult and experiencing child, Hickman “could see the awe reflected in the eyes of his child self before the mystery of a life beyond death and dying which was depicted in the glass; the timeless agony in ancient dress, the array of figures and forces, political and spiritual, the endless climb.” He would like to protect Alonzo from perceiving suffering at such a young age. He thinks, “listen to the words and leave this until you are older.” The hypocrisy of the father is that Hickman will not save Bliss,

12 At the celebration of Juneteenth, when Bliss, again, reenacts Jesus, a red-haired woman appears and claims him as her son, which is closely connected to the boy’s realization of his own whiteness.

even though he shows the desire to save his own child self. Instead of protecting Bliss from the “awe” that he sees “in the eyes of his child self” he charges him with the burden of his and the congregation members’ high hopes and even makes Bliss reenact Christ the incarnation of suffering.

The repetition of the father’s mistake is summarized in the following notes (ms. box I:138, folder 5) that start with the different ideas Hickman’s parents have of their son’s future occupation:

Hickman’s father wants him to be a preacher,
his mother taught him a little piano [...]

Highlighted on this page, encircled, Ellison drafts the novel’s basic structure of the three generations of father-son relations:

1 runaway jazz
2 runaway – politics
taken (send) away – murder

Further down Hickman reflects on the parallels between his own reaction to his father’s plans and Bliss’s response to himself. The father-son conflicts depicted in Ellison’s notes suggest the ambivalent feelings Bourdieu attributes to the “contradictions of succession,” especially “when the father occupies a dominated position, whether economically, socially [...], or symbolically (as a member of a stigmatized group)”:

He cannot want his son to identify with his own position and its dispositions, and yet all his behavior works continuously to produce that identification, in particular the body language that contributes so powerfully to fashioning the whole manner of being, that is, the habitus. [...] The product of such a contradictory injunction is doomed to be ambivalent about himself and to feel guilty [...]. Guilty of betrayal if he succeeds, he is guilty of disappointing if he fails. (“The Contradictions” 510)

Here is the passage from Ellison’s draft:

Well, I reaped twofold the seeds I sowed.
What I rejected of my father the boy rejected of me

He wanted me to become a preacher and the boy
rejected (the same from me) my desire for him from me. I ran away from home and
the boy ran away from me. (ms. box I:138, folder 5)

In the following variation, especially with the phrase “broke his heart” juxtaposed to “the shadow of his wish” Ellison expresses the ambivalence of the son more explicitly:

Well, I reaped twofold the seeds I sowed.
What I rejected of my father came back to me.
He wanted me to become a minister but I ran away and broke his heart by becoming
a jazz musician. Then after he was long
dead and gone I became both, minister and father out of heartbreak
and I asked of the boy what my father had asked of
me he ran away and now I'm here. Freedom
I ran but the shadow of his wish ran with me. I'd learned
and forgot that¹³

In another draft of “Hickman Reminiscing,” the protagonist recalls an event from his childhood in which he shot his slingshot at the blue glass insulators of the telephone poles. Hickman underlines his relief that he never succeeded, “because now he could recall the color with pleasure that was unspoiled by memory of a boy’s thoughtless action” (ms. box I:123, folder 5). The color blue triggers Hickman’s memories.

In *Three Days*, in the chapter “[FALL],” Hickman draws on this analogy when in a hotel lobby in Washington, D.C. he interprets a tapestry, which (unknown to him) represents Pieter Brueghel’s *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. In this scene, the color of the water of the sea reminds

13 Cf. a slightly different version of this note (ms. box I:123, folder 7), in which, for example, Ellison substitutes “I’d learned and forgot that” with “Even the spirit of his preaching had entered my unknowing flesh and claimed me long before I surrendered and answered its calling...” and adds: “Who says that play is simply play, or idleness mere suspension of action when both can be disciplines? The clock-game was a child’s diversion but through it I sensed that emotion given form brought communion. And later I came to recognize how the pattern of communion was there unfolding even in a low-life public dance.”

Hickman again of the glass insulators and he remembers that “[s]uch domed, translucent shapes had often served as targets for his slingshot, and though strictly forbidden by both the law and his father, he had found them so irresistible that years later, when coming upon young Bliss trying his hand at the game, he couldn’t help but grin at his own hypocrisy while putting a belt at the little boy’s bottom” (*Three Days* 597). This quote not only links the drafts of “Hickman Reminiscing” and “[clock and church]” to a scene among the computer files, “[FALL],” which establishes an explicit connection between Sunraider’s fall and Icarus’s fall, but associates “the law,” namely, the normative order, with the father who prohibits what the son is particularly tempted to do. The blue glass insulators are irresistible; consequently, the son revolts by overriding the prohibition.

As a father punishing his foster son for something he himself did as a boy, Hickman quickly changes back into a minister and is no longer jazzman. His admission of his own hypocrisy is reminiscent of Ellison’s memory about the common hypocrisy among respectable professionals and the greater sincerity of jazzmen who for this reason were more attractive role models for him, and his fatherless companion:

Looking back, one might say that the jazzmen, some of whom we idolized, were in their own way better examples for youth to follow than were most judges and ministers, legislators and governors [...]. For as we viewed these pillars of society from the confines of our segregated community we almost always saw crooks, clowns or hypocrites. Even the best were revealed by their attitudes toward us as lacking the respectable qualities to which they pretended and for which they were accepted outside by others, while despite the outlaw nature of their art, the jazzmen were less torn and damaged by the moral compromises and insincerities which have so sickened the life of our country. (*Collected Essays* 52)

As jazzman and revolting son, Hickman asks Bliss’s mother when she comes to him for help: “Do you think a man like me is even interested in the idea of trying to be Christlike? Hell, my papa was a preacher while I’m a horn-blowing gambler. Do you think that after being the son of a black preacher in this swamp of a country I’d let you put me in the position of

trying to act like Christ?" (*Three Days* 467-68).¹⁴ Yet, at the very moment when Hickman becomes a father himself, he experiences a change that confuses him the more as it turns him into a father who resembles his own father.

In his philosophical musings about time in "Hickman Reminiscing," Ellison establishes the principle of repetition which is realized in the sequence of generations. History is embodied in the seemingly endless chain of fathers begetting sons who then turn into fathers again. However, the novel's last son, Bliss's son Severen, does not turn into a father but instead kills his father: History stops. By letting *Three Days* begin with the assassination Ellison halts the family story to tell the story about history. It is interesting to note that the sons of the reference stories, Icarus and Jesus, also never become fathers, as they are sacrificed by their fathers for their own purposes. And it is only when Bliss rejects the Jesus identity, that he can turn into a father himself. As Ellison reminds us, "time came into the world after the fall" (ms. box I:123, folder 5). According to the bible, the history of humankind starts, then, with disobedience toward God-the-father causing the fall, and it continues with murder in the next generation. In the Icarus myth, the son also disobeys the father and like Adam and Eve he is punished by a fall. In contrast to the reference myths, in Ellison's narrative the last son, Severen, is able to break the spell of charismatic violence by killing the father and, as his name suggests, thereby also cutting the generational chain. However, the novel's circular structure indicates that Severen's murder will not vanquish once and for all the power of fathers.¹⁵

14 When Bliss's mother comes into the house of Hickman's family and asks him to help her deliver the baby, Hickman is sitting there ready for revenge, because due to the woman's false accusation his brother and mother died shortly before.

15 On repetition and variation in life and history, cf. the following statement Ellison made in an interview with John Hersey ("A Completion of Personality"): "[Y]ou just write for your own time, while trying to write in terms of the density of experience, knowing perfectly well that life repeats itself. Even in this rapidly changing United States it repeats itself. The mystery is that while repeating itself it always manages slightly to change its mask" (*Collected Essays* 810).

“THE END IS IN THE BEGINNING”

Ellison's notes and drafts disclose that he repeatedly changed the sequence of his narrative and even experimented with the function assigned to protagonists. For example, he considered the possibility of having McIntyre, the white reporter who witnesses the shooting of Sunraider in chapter one, travel to Oklahoma to talk to Love New or Hickman.¹⁶ Yet as the fragment “Hickman in Georgia & Oklahoma” documents, Ellison came to the conclusion that it should be Hickman who “meets Love New, a half-black, half-Cherokee medicine man who weaves a mysterious fable [...] of fathers of sons” (247). Confronted with Love New's outsider perspective about past events and his pivotal fable, Hickman begins to “see [his] mistake” (844). In response to Love New's repeated question about his identity, Hickman at first points to his past as a jazzman, and then states, “I'm a father” (851). Only Love New's persistence forces Hickman ultimately to admit that he is “a grown old man who's as confused in his own way as that lost boy of Janey's” (851), confessing that he, too, is a son who suffers “*the orphan's loneliness*.”

Love New not only makes Hickman aware of his position in the chain of individual father-son relationships, but with the Native American fable about the Chief's son that reveals the “great inner division [among the State folks]” (810) he emphasizes the interrelation between individual and national level, again using the parallel to Abraham Lincoln. Moreover, on the narrative level, the fable, which Love New had once told Severen when he returned to the territory to learn more about his father and which he repeats in his conversation with Hickman, strengthens the interdependence of the fates of Hickman, Bliss, and Severen. The Chief's son – so the fable goes – was seized by a bear and brought back to the tribe by a white man who insisted to take the boy with him to educate him. When the son returns after eighteen instead of the promised five years, the village experiences a joyful spring. After a short while, however, the son shows first signs of a change that the elders initially construe as a consequence of his overstepping a taboo. As his behavior changes more and more drastically, he is brought to a

16 Cf. one of the eight excerpts Ellison published during his lifetime, “A Song of Innocence” (1970), in which McIntyre talks to Cliofus about Severen's return to Oklahoma (*Three Days* 1073 ff.).

powerful medicine man in the mountains who tries to cure him. Upon his return, it soon becomes clear that he has turned even wilder, and the tribe finally decides that he has to die. In the fable, the father shoots his son up on the hill. Up on a hill is also where in Ellison's novel the son ultimately shoots his father, thereby revealing the influence of yet another charismatic father figure, Love New, who confesses to Hickman: "So I told the boy what I knew, and even though I went at it at an angle, like when you use a parable to say something that you'd rather not run the risk of saying straight out. So he got something from what I said, and when he finds his man we'll both know the rest" (768).

The tribal story contradicts the common historiography of the United States: The white man does not truly save the Native American from wild nature (the bear) here, nor does he bring 'civilization' to the 'barbarous' tribes; on the contrary, it is the socialization among whites that turns the Native into a beast who even unlearns to honor the taboos of the tribe, and as he comes to endanger the community, the tribe must kill him as it would kill a wild animal. Consequently, as Love New points out, there is no truth in written history, and the "bloody pyramid of bodies" (814) underneath everything – such as Lincoln's – haunt each new generation.¹⁷ Severen argues that he "wasn't even born" when all of that happened, but Love New explains that nevertheless, "its mark is upon you. And just like it haunts the spirits of those who did the murder and those who refused to do the right thing after it was done it haunts their children and their children's children" (815). Love New's Native American fable teaches not only Severen but also Hickman about "the manner in which the past operates on their present lives" (*Collected Essays* 820). However, Love New's history lesson is not limited to the abstract principle of the relevance of past falls and murders in the present. Rather, it also discloses the two concrete major falsehoods of American historiography: the claim of having civilized the Indians (as juxtaposed to their expulsion and extinction) and the allegation of the separation of the races (as juxtaposed to their actual mixture). Love New

17 Cf. Ellison's remark on Lincoln in "Tell It Like It Is, Baby": "the hero-father murdered (for Lincoln is a kind of father of twentieth-century America), his life evilly sacrificed and the fruits of his neglected labors withering some ninety years in the fields; the state fallen into corruption, and the citizens into moral anarchy, with no hero come to set things right" (*Collected Essays* 46).

acknowledges the blending of Native Americans, African Americans and whites by referring to his tribal name, “the black One” and the name he chose for himself, “Part White One,” adding that he and Hickman both “share the blood of a slaver” (829).

In one of his notes, Ellison suggests that the issue of race is at the core of the murder: “Bliss is killed not because he abandoned Severen’s mother nor because of his activities in [the] Senate but because he betrayed his past and thus provided Severen the deepest intellectual motive for murder. He is murdered by way of proving that Severen was full of that acceptance of whiteness which was [the] source of Bliss[’s] confusion” (ms. box I:141, folder 1).

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to Ellison’s “Oklabook,” the editors state that “[p]articularly with Love New, a story leads to another story, circles within circles, relevant to the novel’s theme of fathers and sons [...]” (496). While it emphasizes the circular structure of the novel, the Native American fable also extends the cultural horizon of father-son relations by adding a Native American version to the ancient and Christian stories. Moreover, Love New’s fable highlights the novel’s historical dimension. It reverses American history as written by white historians who exert the symbolic power of definition. Severen’s patricide is a reaction to one of the basic fabrications of American historiography. Enlightened by a Native American, he rejects and ultimately extinguishes his father who owed his success to the denial of his African American heritage and the subsequent internalization of the hypocritical national anxiety of racial mixing. By starting the novel with such a crucial break of the generational chain and ending it with its explanation Ellison argues not only for a fundamental rewriting of American history but also for a radical change in American politics.

Ellison’s notes and drafts provide important clues to the understanding of the novel. First, they contain explicit reflections on the novel’s structure and the protagonists’ relations to each other that confirm the narrative’s design of the generational conflicts and their repetitions. Second, Hickman’s childhood memories offer valuable insights into the bodily effectiveness of charismatic power, as they vividly demonstrate his fierce emotional struggles.

Finally, the scenes from Hickman's childhood provide an extension of the generational chain to include a particularly important link: Hickman's struggling against the influence of his dominant, charismatic father establishes a significant parallel between his and Bliss's early upbringings, thereby reinforcing the central idea of the repetition of father-son relations that ultimately guarantees the perpetuation of existing power structures. Having successfully overcome the symbolic violence of his father, Hickman, the revolting son, later recovers his primary habitus and turns into a charismatic preacher father himself. Bliss, having escaped Hickman's dominating charisma and the *doxa* of the religious field, also later exerts power himself as a charismatic politician father figure. The sons' "primary conditioning," dominated by their fathers, reproduces a habitus that represents the history of which it is the product: "It ensures the active presence of past experiences [...]" (Bourdieu, *Logic* 54). As race-baiting Senator Sunraider Bliss becomes a representative of the dominant political order and thus contributes to the stabilization of white supremacy.

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