

How to Draw an Invisible Man

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And then when Ralph Ellison's corpse burst
open, I discovered his body had been hoarding
all these years a luscious slush, a sludge
of arterial words, the raw and unsaid pages
with their plots and propositions, with their arcs
of intention and babbling, with their mumbling
streams and false starts and their love
and misanthropic thrusts, tendons of syntax
unraveled from his bones and intestinal cavities,
the froth of singing, stinging, stinking ink,
reams of script fraught with the demons,
demagogues and demigods of democracy,
demographies of vague landscapes,
passages describing muddy river bottoms
and elaborate protagonists crawling
through a foliage greener than money in America
before America thought to release anyone
from its dream, the water-logged monologues
one who is unseen speaks burst suddenly
from Ralph Ellison's body and because I mean to live

transparently, I am here, bear with me,
describing the contents: the fictions envisioned
by Emerson and immigrants, the dogmas,
aboriginal progeny, scholastic recriminations,
dementia, jubilee, hubris in Ralph Ellison,
Duke Ellington's shadow, a paragraph
on the feathered headdress of Marcus Garvey,
some of it was pornography, some of it alluded
to Negroes who believe educating black kids
means teaching them to help white people feel
comfortable, some of it outlined the perks
of invisibility, how we are obliged to eschew
the zoo, the farm animals, it had something
to do with captivity, flayed in the clinical light
the notes printed on the underside of his flesh
were reversed but readable mirrored in the metal
of the medical table and I wanted to print it all
properly in a posthumous book in the name
of prosperity and proof the genius we believed
he'd wasted had been waiting all these years
for a simple death sentence to break free.