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Allegory in The Black Ball: A Literary Analysis of Cultural Representation of African Americans in US

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Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to:

My beloved mother and father for their endless support, patience and encouragement. May Allah give them a long life.

My highly respected supervisor for her encouragement and guidance.

My lovely sisters and dear brothers for pushing me forward and being there for me.

My dear teachers and cheerful friends in the Literature and Civilization class of 2024 at Hamma Lakhder University of El-Oued, for their love and generous companionship which made me safe to learn and exchange knowledge.

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From the depth of my heart, I dedicate this work to

The memory of my father.

My beloved mother, for pushing me forward and encouraging me to keep striving for success.

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All my relatives, my closest friends and my dearest classmates for their love.

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Abstract

The present research aims to investigate the use of allegory in Ralph Waldo Ellison's short story "The Black Ball" to mirror the cultural background of Afro-Americans in the United States. Ellison is best known for his extensive use of figurative language and symbolic way of representation. Through this skilful craft, he succeeded to project the main cultural aspects and highlight the sensitive issues that used to heavily oppress the African Americans while living in the US under Jim Crow laws. In "The Black Ball", Ellison concentrates primarily on themes of racism, discrimination, oppression, displacement, exploitation and marginalization, which the African American people have experienced in the mid of the twentieth century. Figurative language is observed from the very beginning of the story and allegories are present in each scene, assisting the writer to challenge the cultural norms and fulfil his duty in a perfect manner. Thus, this topic will be analysed by using the theories of literary analysis and symbolism to investigate the key allegorical representations of the story.

Keywords: Allegory, cultural representation, discrimination, racism,

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

US	United States of America
NNR	The New Negro Renaissance
NNM	The New Negro Movement
UNIA	The Universal Negro Improvement Association
NAACP	The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People

List of Tables

Table 2.2 Types of Symbols used in The Black Ball	36
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Table of contents

Dedication.....	I
Acknowledgements	II
Abstract	III
List of Abbreviations.....	IV
List of Tables.....	V
Table of contents.....	VI
General Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Allegory and African American Literature.....	0
Introduction	2
1.1. Defining the concept of Allegory	2
1.2. Origins of Allegory	3
1.3. Kinds of Allegory.....	5
1.3.1. Allegory and Fable:	5
1.3.2 Allegory and Parable:	6
1.4. African American Literature	7
1.4.1. Harlem Renaissance	8
1.4.2. Literature in Harlem Renaissance:	11
1.4.3. Main Themes and Figures:	13
1.5. The Use and Importance of Allegory in African American Literature:	16
Conclusion	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter two: Allegory in The Black Ball	21
Introduction	23
2.1. Biography of Ralph Ellison	23
2.2. Historical Context of The Black Ball.....	25
2.3. The Black Ball Summary.....	25

2.4. Analysis of The Black Ball	26
2.4. 1 Main themes in The Black Ball	29
2.4.3.2. The Relationship between Allegory and Symbolism.....	35
2.5. Cultural Representation in The Black Ball	44
<i>Conclusion</i>	51
General Conclusion	52
References.....	53
ملخص	55

General Introduction

African American literature refers to the literary works written by authors of African origins in the United States (Eversley, 2014). It includes multiple genres that tackle various themes reflecting the social issues and the psychological struggles of African Americans in an injustice society highlighting their achievements to bring back realities to the surface (Sharif, 2018). Indeed, African American writers use literary devices and techniques to exemplify their mastery in writing. Allegory is one of the main tools that is frequently used in African American literature to convey deeper cultural meanings and portray an accurate and realistic image of the Black experiences (Dieke, 2010).

Ralph Waldo Ellison's short story "The Black Ball" serves as an allegorical representation for racial invisibility and marginalization which face the African Americans in America, each item of this story has a significant meaning. Throughout the allegorical elements used in the story, Ellison seeks to highlight the challenges that encountered the African Americans at that time. Ellison focuses mainly on themes of racism, discrimination, displacement, and social injustice to portray the oppression that Black people have experienced during Jim Crow segregation.

1. Background of The Study

As stated earlier, Ralph Waldo Ellison is an influential African American writer and scholar who was born on March 1st, 1914, in Oklahoma. He belongs to a working-class family. He lost his father during his early childhood due to an industrial accident. Thus, his mother moved with him and his brother to Gary, Indiana, seeking better life opportunities (Herchenroether & Powell, 2023). Ellison's early life has greatly influenced his writing and worldview. Ellison initially pursued music but then shifted his focus to writing as he was influenced by prominent figures of the Harlem Renaissance such as Langston Hughes, Richard Wright and Saul Bellow.

In fact, Ralph Waldo Ellison is best known for his masterpiece *Invisible Man* (1952), an allegorical novel which delves into the complexities of an unnamed protagonist perspectives when he was struggling to find his identity in a racist society during Jim Crow era. The novel addresses themes of invisibility, blindness, double consciousness and self-determination. Despite this success, Ellison was never fully satisfied with his accomplishment and spent the rest of his life writing another novel that he has never finished, so his name remains up to these days synonymous with *Invisible Man*.

Similar to *Invisible Man*, Ellison wrote a posthumous collection of short stories entitled *Flying Home and Others* during the Jim Crow discrimination and the oppressive practices of white supremacist that suppress the African Americans' civil rights primarily in the Southern States. "The Black Ball" (1996) is one of them.

Ralph Ellison's short story "The Black Ball" is an allegorical work which revolves around a typical day of an African American single father who grapples to bring up his four-year-old son in a racist society which exercises its power to restrict the opportunities and devalue the dignity of the other without any consideration to the sense of humanity. The story holds a significant cultural background because it represents various elements in a symbolic way to convey deeper meanings. The colour, the business card, and the burned hands are all symbols, besides the black ball itself.

Ellison's use of these allegories among others depicts the harsh conditions Black people were experiencing between 1920s and 1940. Throughout the story, he uses his critical craft to symbolize the presence of racism, displacement, struggle for equality and human complex relationships, while skilfully portraying their psychological impact on individuals and on the collective memory of the Black community.

2. Statement of the Argument

Allegory is usually used as a vital technique in African American narratives due to its magic ability to offer vivid meanings to abstract ideas and to represent complex concepts in

concrete symbols. It invites the reader to delve deeply within the text exploring lasting impact themes. The present research studies the significance of allegory in African American literature and analyses different allegorical elements in the short story.

The study establishes the cultural context that reveals, through the lens of allegories, certain socio-political circumstances which forced the African Americans to live through hard times in the US under Jim Crow Laws. Therefore, it adds to knowledge by examining several allegories, symbols and metaphors. It represents the way how they were used to embody the cultural atmosphere in US in the twentieth century, notably during Jim Crow time period.

3. Research Questions

This dissertation attempts to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How is allegory used in "The Black Ball"?

RQ2: What is the cultural background of the allegories employed in "The Black Ball"?

4. Literature Review

Numerous African American authors use allegory in their works to convey their thematic preoccupation to depict day life struggles of Blacks living among whites in the US and to speak the unspeakable. Hence, scholars, essayists and critics have always been curious to study such interesting issues.

Gibbs (2020) indicates that allegory is a literary device employed by authors over centuries across a wide range of cultures to convey symbolic messages, hidden meanings and major themes about daily life, "Allegory is something we live! [...] a freedom of the imagination" (p. 30). Machosky (2013) argues that allegory is a means of expressing or illustrating one thing while denoting another. It is something that appears in language and visuals; something that brings in "other" and this "other" is conventionally referred to as "meaning" (Machosky, 2013, p. I). Allegory has long been understood as a part of a system of representation with a metaphorical structure.

Dieke (2010) delves into the historical, cultural, and political settings that portray allegorical events, characters, space and time in selected African American and Caribbean literary works. In her book, Dieke highlights the artistic techniques used to address complex themes of self-determination and alienation.

In a recent study, Zulfikar (2019) analysed the representation of whiteness in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. The concept of whiteness symbolizes how white Americans overlook the struggles of African Americans, and how they deny their existence in a society where ethnicity, beliefs, behaviours, and values of whites serve as the standards and that is whatever non-white is non-visible.

Sasirekha and Prabhakaran (2019) examined the narrative techniques used in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. They argue that it is highly allegorical and symbolic as it deeply explores Black social concerns through metaphorical narratives. They refer that Morrison was once asked about her extensive use of allegory, she replied that language has only 26 letters and few punctuation and these are not enough to convey messages; accordingly, the only available way by which one can do everything is allegory.

Studies have proved that allegory has an ambiguous nature, and its understanding relies on the interpretation of symbols and on the personal interpretations readers develop while reading a literary product; accordingly, the meaning of any allegory remains always an interesting source of examination. This study aims to contribute in the sphere of literary writings through the examination of allegory and the analysis of culture representation in Ralph Ellison's short story, "The Black Ball."

5. Aim of the Study

This study aims to explore how allegory is utilized by Ralph Ellison in his story as a literary device to represent different cultural aspects, shedding light on the main social and political issues within African Americans experiences in the United States. The researchers attempt to

investigate the key symbols in the chosen short story that are employed to convey stronger, better and deeper themes in the work.

6. Significance of the Study

Through the analysis of the metaphorical devices present in the story, the researchers seek to contribute to the understanding of the role of allegory as a powerful medium in mirroring society struggles and individual's hardships, highlighting the vibrant relationship between storytelling, symbolism and cultural representation. A comprehensive analysis of these elements might provide valuable insights into the broader implication of allegory in the realm of literature.

7. Research Methodology

This study is conducted through the theories of literary analysis and symbolism. The former refers to an extended examination of a literary works (Cuddon, 2012), while the latter denotes the use of a concrete object as a symbol that transmits an abstract meaning (Qadri, 2017). This approach is used as a roadmap to direct the investigation to the analysis of the significant themes conveyed by Ralph Waldo Ellison short story "The Black Ball". This involves depicting feelings of loss, inferiority, lack of confidence, double consciousness and all psychological traumas that Black Americans endure during Jim Crow segregation.

8. Structure of the Study

This study is divided into two chapters. The first chapter is mainly theoretical that explains the concepts of allegory, its origins and its kinds and defines African American literature through the Harlem Renaissance era. Moreover, it highlights its main figures and themes, together with manifesting the vitality of allegory in African-American literature. The second chapter is devoted to the analysis of the allegories used in "The Black Ball." It also examines their cultural significance, while shedding light on both used theories, symbolism and literary analysis.

CHAPTER ONE

Allegory and African American Literature

Chapter One: Allegory and African American Literature.....	0
Introduction	2
1.1. Defining the concept of Allegory.....	2
1.2. Origins of Allegory	3
1.3. Kinds of Allegory.....	5
1.3.1. Allegory and Fable:.....	5
1.3.2 Allegory and Parable:	6
1.4. African American Literature	7
1.4.1. Harlem Renaissance.....	8
1.4.2. Literature in Harlem Renaissance:	11
1.4.3. Main Themes and Figures:.....	13
1.5. The Use and Importance of Allegory in African American Literature: 16	
Conclusion.....	
Error! Bookmark not defined.	

Introduction

African American literature encompasses a rich and diverse body of literary works created by African American writers in the US. Throughout history, African American authors have employed figurative modes of representation including allegory and symbolism to convey their complex ideas and transmit their sensitive issues using an artistic style which allows the reader to uncover, among many other important themes, the painful impact of slavery, the psychological traumas, the on-going struggle for freedom and the search for self-identity by the Black community.

1.1. Defining the Concept of Allegory

Before we delve into defining the concept of allegory, it is worth to mention that there are countless definitions of this term due to its debatable nature. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines allegory as “a story, a play, a picture in which each character or event, is a symbol representing an idea or a quality, such as truth, evil, death” (Hornby, 2005, p.38). Similarly, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defines allegory as a narrative where the characters, events, and often the setting are purposely crafted by the writer to form a logical connection on the surface or primary level of meaning (Abrahams, 1999).

Lakhadive (2018) argues that allegories stand for broad symbols and metaphors. Technically, any literary piece of writing which uses wide range of symbols is described allegorical. In the same vein, Johnson (2012) points out that allegory is a type of rhetorical trope like synecdoche, metonym, simile, and metaphor which characterized by substitution as they express a thing and artfully mean another. Meanwhile, Padmalochana, Adhisakthi and Pushpalatha (2023) comment that allegory

might be a suitable literary device which relies on the use of symbols to reveal a hidden significance that conveys the comprehensive moral of the narrative.

In conclusion, allegory is an expanded symbolic literary work where characters, events, objects and settings are symbolized metaphorically to deliver deeper meanings behind their literal interpretations. The use of allegory helps the reader grasp moral, political or philosophical messages in a striking and imaginative way.

1.2. Origins of Allegory

The emergence of allegory can be dated back to early times. The term "allegory" is adapted from Latin which is etymologically derived from the Greek word "*allegoria*", meaning "veiled language" (Mansour, 2005, p. 66).

Gibbs (2020) also agrees with Mansour (2005) that allegory has Latin and Greek roots and it is traditionally used as an extended metaphor to make an entire story or book allegorical. For many centuries, numerous skilful authors have incorporated allegory in their works as a distinctive literary tool that goes beyond the level of metaphors to evoke readers' imaginations perceive moral, religious, spiritual, or political symbolic messages about daily life events.

Meeks (2020) points out that the tradition of allegory as a comprehensive literary form of expression and interpretation is tied with the history of Greek philosophy. Actually, its beginning is credited to the first Greek philosophers who used allegorical elements in their poetry and speech. Yet, it is embraced by Christian, Jewish, and Islamic thinkers to become one of the most significant philosophical and literary devices of Medieval thought.

One of the ancient instances of allegory can be encountered with the works of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato. Plato's discourses have been most of the time allegorical to reveal his philosophical perspectives.

Allegory also became popular in ancient literature and mythology. The old epic poem *The Iliad* (1488) by Homer is often interpreted allegorically, with its characters, events, and objects representing broader lessons and ideas. For instance, the shields which are often viewed as a microcosm of the universe and human existence, symbolizing the complexity and diversity of human life are used by Homer as allegories. Throughout the entire epic, shields serve as a metaphor for the contrast between the beauty and the harmony of peace and the horror and chaos of war. The various scenes depicted on the shields can be interpreted as reflecting the themes and discrepancies present in the entire epic (Kotin, 2001).

The allegorical interpretation of sacred books, like the Bible, became widespread during the Middle Ages. It allowed medieval scholars to discover moral and spiritual themes in biblical stories that went beyond their literal meanings which provided diverse layers that reinforced Christian beliefs (Ice, 2009). The most famous example of this is Dante Alighieri's poem the *Divine Comedy*(1472), where the journey of the protagonist through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven is interpreted allegorically to represent the fate of the soul toward God (Gibbs, 2020).

During the Renaissance, allegory attained elaboration and development and witnessed universal recognition among writers, poets and artists "in large part due to the classicist tendencies of the time, and it persists well into the early modern era" (Meeks, 2020, p. 9). For example, Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*(1678) is a Christian allegory that follows the journey of the protagonist "Christian" who represents the

everyman believer. Christian embarks on a pilgrimage from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, which allegorizes Heaven. Similarly, Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*(1590), used allegory to explore moral, political, and religious themes (Gibbs, 2020).

In sum, allegory has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy, and it has been utilized by writers and thinkers across human cultures and time periods to convey deeper meanings, moral messages, or symbolic representations of ideas and objects through figurative language.

1.3. Kinds of Allegory

Since the early past, people have told and record allegorical stories that say something and hide another. In their stories, they usually deal with human vices and virtues in a way that makes the audience excited and motivated to discover the events of the entire narrative, urging them to learn indirect lessons and implicit morals through a metaphorical language and symbolic characters. Historically, allegory have always been a useful teaching technique and a practical educative method across the existence of nations and civilizations.

1.3.1. Allegory and Fable

Fable is not a contemporary or new genre of literature. The Latin word *fibula*, which means "story" or "discourse," is where the term "fable" originates. There are numerous definitions that have been attached to tale. One of these is "a short narrative in prose or verse which points a moral." It is "an ancient type of short fiction, in verse or prose, illustrating a moral, or satirizing human beings" (Mays, 2021, p. 2052). In fable, characters might be either non-human or inanimate (Cuddon, 2012).

Likewise, Childs and Fowler (2006) described a fable as a short lesson, in verse or prose, in which human situations and behaviours are mainly represented through gods, animals, or objects. It is believed that the fable is originated in Greece in the sixth century BCE as a way to draw attention to human follies and shortcomings. The mythological person Aesop supported it, and it was recorded that the Greek Babrius and the Roman Phaedrus were his main heirs (Cuddon, 2012). The flourishing of this literary type occurred during the mediaeval century. A well-respected and noteworthy compilation of fables was credited to the 12th-century author Marie De France. The beast epic which is originated as an enlarged version is a very famous genre in literatures. It composes of a long cycle of narratives that uses different species of animals to mock human actions and society policies. Hence, the beast epic differs from the fable in terms of both the length and the emphasis on a moral. Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) is an example of a modern well-known beast tale (Lotha, 2016).

1.3.2. Allegory and Parable

A literary device known as a parable is related to allegory, and it has been given several definitions that are related to or comparable to one another. The term "parable" comes from the Greek word *parabole*, which means "comparison." Similarly, the Greek noun *parabole* comes from the verb "to compare." A parable is a brief fictional story that serves as an example of a moral attitude or a religious idea, according to the Merriam Webster Dictionary.

A parable is a brief, straightforward story that serves as a moral metaphor or fable (Cuddon, 2012). It is a brief work of fiction without fantastical or anthropomorphic characters, but it does show a clear lesson. This is not a fable. Characters in fables are animals personified, but characters in a conventional narrative

are people. Furthermore, parables are supposed to convey a mystery tone, impart moral lessons, and teach spiritual concepts rather than just presenting a story.

1.4. African American Literature

A vast corpus of literary works written by American authors of African origins is known as African American Literature. It is an essential part of American literature as a whole, and it records the rich tradition of Black people who were forcibly moved to a new continent as slaves and brought with them their own stories, songs and folklore. Moreover, African American literature captures the experiences, the struggles, and the victories of Blacks throughout their history in the New World. African American literature emerged out of the unique social, cultural, and historical context of slavery, racism, segregation, and the on-going fight for civil rights (Sharif, 2018).

Sharif (2018) also points out that early African American literature primarily consisted of narratives, which were powerful accounts of the experiences of enslaved Africans and their quest for freedom. Notable examples include *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) written by himself and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) by Harriet Jacobs. Graham and Ward (2011) argue that with the abolition of slavery and the start of the Reconstruction era, African American writers began to produce a variety of literary genres, including poetry, novels, drama, and fiction. By the advent of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and 1930s, African American literature experienced a significant surge of creativity, with writers such as Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Countee Cullen leading the movement.

African American authors examine a wide range of issues in their works but many explore social justice, racial identity, discrimination, inequality, and the pursuit of both individual and communal freedom. The products frequently centre on

the preoccupations of racism, oppression, and the complexities of being Black among a white society in the US, while also celebrating the beautiful culture of African Americans.

Prominent African American figures who have made massive achievements in literature include James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, August Wilson, Richard Wright, Ralph Elision and many others. Their works have profound impact on both African American and American literature in general (Graham & Ward, 2011). Despite all society's barriers and obstacles, contemporary African American literature continues to evolve, expanding its rich tradition, "these displaced men and women continued to share these stories and folklore with each other and pass them from one generation to the next" (Sharif, 2018, p. 8).

In brief, African American literature is a cornerstone of American literary tradition that covers multiple voices, viewpoints, and experiences, reflecting the changing social and cultural context of the African American community. It coincides the struggles, triumphs, and aspirations of African Americans while also shedding light on wider issues of race, identity, and social justice. It continues to thrive and flourish, providing readers with compelling narratives that challenge and inspire them.

1.4.1. Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance which was led by Black intellectuals in a New York neighbourhood was a trendy transformation in all scopes of life including politics, literature, drama, music, dance, painting, sculpture, visual arts, and fashion. African and African Caribbean people from different parts of the World like France and Spain influenced by the movement and unified under the neutral mottos of the Harlem movement to assert their identities and secure their rights. They resorted mainly to literature as a sophisticated means to advocate their demands (Wintz, 1996).

Concept of Harlem Renaissance

Most scholars and historians agree on the view that Harlem Renaissance was launched nearly from the beginning of 1920; from the period of World War I and extended well to the 1930s, till the Great Depression, as stated by Wintz (1996), Wall (2016), and Herringshaw (1962) and many others. According to them, this era featured significant artistic, cultural, intellectual, political, and social growth centred in Harlem, New York City. It is also known as the New Negro Renaissance (NNR), Black Renaissance and even the Cullud Renaissance as coined by Langston Hughes (Notten, 2022).

According to Wintz (1996), the period was a crucial station in the African Americans' journey in the US as it reflected a cultural and intellectual awakening for African Americans which coupled by a racial pride associated with the "New Negro" and a conscious struggle for civil rights. Its manifestation touched many aspects of life, literature, art, music, and theatre. Harlem Renaissance is considered as "a moment of hope and confidence, a proclamation of independence, and the celebration of a new spirit exemplified in the New Negro" (Fabre & Feith, 2001). It is an artistic battle which aimed to urge Black Americans to resist peacefully to gain more rights (Chelihi, 2018). This movement was made by a new generation of writers, poets and musicians who revolted against all the conventions that used to devalue the African Americans as being blacks and sneer at whatever belongs to the black colour.

Scholars have always been convinced that, the "New Negroes" ambitious artists have raised their voices aloud embracing their racial identity, celebrating their heritage, and challenging systematic racism through artistic expression. Therefore, one

cannot deny that the Renaissance played a vital role in the development of the African American identity.

1.4.1.1. Historical Background

Chelihi (2018) advocates that the Harlem Renaissance can be traced back to several events. First, after the Civil War (1861-1865), South and North America treated Black people differently; in Southern America, Black people experienced a lasting impact of slavery and racism which made them escape from the harsh segregation laws of the Jim Crow to the Northern States, aspiring for equality, freedom and self-dignity. African Americans sought to assert their cultural identity and challenge racial stereotypes and discrimination through artistic expression. They drew inspiration from their African heritage, incorporating elements such as dialects, music, songs and folklore into their work, like the use of jazz and blue beats by Langston Hughes in his collection of poetry *The Weary Blues* (1925). The promotion of cultural pride and self-expression was a significant driving force behind the Harlem Renaissance.

Additionally, the Great Migration of Blacks which occurred during the early 20th century when there was a mass movement of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North, particularly to cities like New York, Chicago, Detroit and Cleveland in an attempt of making better lives for themselves. This migration was driven by different reasons like the lack of jobs and the search for economic opportunities in a developed country. Harlem became a major destination, a "Black Mecca" for these migrants, leading to a concentration of black culture and creativity Herringshaw (1962).

According to Keller (1968), the period was marked by the influencing role of many organizations, such as the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which aimed to redefine the African American identity and image. Influential individuals and groups, including writers, artists, poets, essayists, and social activists, formed a vibrant community of intellectuals who exchanged ideas and influenced each other's work.

Fabre and Feith (2001), Herringshw (1962) and Keller (1968) provided another important factor that contributed to shaping the cultural background of the Harlem Renaissance. This involves the aftermath of The First World War and the arrival of the African American soldiers, who had proved their loyalty to America as a home and fought for the ideas of freedom and democracy abroad but continued to face racism and prejudice in the US.

Although, The Harlem Renaissance spanned just for a decade as it declined due to economic hardships, its impact extended beyond artistic expressions. Americans think that "the Harlem Renaissance have ended with the Depression of the 1930s. Surely, much changed" (Huggins, 1927, p. 9).

To sum up, the Harlem Renaissance fostered a sense of pride, identity, and solidarity among the African American community challenging prevailing racial discrimination and oppression. The movement also influenced the broader American society by encouraging the on-going fight for civil rights.

1.4.2. Literature in Harlem Renaissance

During the 1920s and 1930s, Harlem became a sanctuary for African Americans, for both men and women seeking refuge from misery and racial discrimination. The neighbourhood provided a supportive social environment where

Black artists, writers, critics, patrons, musicians, and white publishers could gather and collaborate. Magazines such as the *Crisis* and the *Opportunity*, and organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), the New Negro Movement (NNM), and others played a crucial role in fostering intellectual and creative activities. Their publications provided platforms for the African American elite to showcase its work, exchange ideas, and engage in intellectual debates (Fabre & Feith, 2001).

The Harlem Renaissance achieved success across multiple landscapes. Its profound impact on literature was not limited just to America, it extended far beyond to reach a global scale. According to Finzsch (2012), the voice of the literary figures of the movement was heard in France and Spain. In 1920s and 1930s, a group of Black students and scholars from France's colonies met with the writers of the Harlem Renaissance in Paris and founded *La Revue du Monde Noir* (1931-32), a literary journal published in French and English.

Chelihi (2018) advocates that this literary movement had revolutionized African American literature by providing a platform of new expressions, new insights and new ideologies; Americanism and pluralism are two key concepts emphasized by the Renaissance. Keller also goes to the same extreme when he states that "The Harlem Literary Renaissance was a sustained search through the literary medium to discover an image which migrant Negro-Americans could accept and use and which white city Americans would accept and use" (1968, p. 29). Indeed, the movement unmasked the real African Americans through manifesting the diversity of the Black culture and the significance of its rich tradition while highlighting the necessity of the co-existence between Black and white in America.

African American literature gained acclaim and secured its place inside America and outside by the prominence of its literary works that contain all genres, including novels, stories, poems, essays and non-fiction which produced by numerous talented Black authors. New Afro-American writers have used modern experiments and innovative techniques in their writings incorporating their folk music as did Du Bois in *Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Langston Hughes in his poems, and James Weldon Johnson in his poetic sermons (Fabre & Feith, 2001).

As mentioned by Keller (1968), Wintz (1996) and Finzch (2012), the issues addressed by African American writers, such as Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Alice Dunbar Nelson during the 1920s and 1930s varied widely to explore themes of racial discrimination, segregation, self-identity and alienation all while expressing nostalgia to the Black roots and depicting the African American heritage.

In short, the Harlem Literary Renaissance is often believed to be the zenith of literature evolvement in America. It had a lasting influence on subsequent generations of African American writers. Its impact can be seen in the works of many other writers, including Toni Morrison, Brit Bennett, Kiese Laymon and others who followed the footsteps of the movement tenets and continued to capture the attention of a broader audience.

1.4.3. Main Themes and Figures

As Harlem Renaissance was the birthplace of many giant African American authors at the turn of the 20th century, a new generation of writers who continue to build upon the previous achievements and celebrate the Black American culture has emerged.

1.4.3.1. Willam Edward Burghardt Du Bois

(1868- 1963) Du Bois was an influential African American author, sociologist, historian, and civil rights activist. Du Bois emerged as a prominent figurehead of Black nationalism and Reconstruction during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, playing a significant role in advancing the civil rights movement and advocating for racial equality. His pioneering academic work and eloquent writings have strengthened his legacy as a leading intellectual of the Harlem Renaissance, from his ground-breaking dissertation at Harvard University to his influential book *The Souls of Black Folk*, (1903), which explores the on-going struggle for equality, the importance of education in empowering African Americans, and the dualism experienced by African Americans"(Rudwick, 2024), or the "double consciousness" as Du Bois introduced it. This refers to the state of confusion and the clash between two identities, black identity and American identity at one time (Bruce, 1992).

1.4.3.2. Langston Hughes

Hughes (1902- 1967) is also one of the most prominent figures of the Harlem Literary Movement. He was a poet, a playwright, a novelist and an essayist. His most notable works include *Montage of a Dream Deferred*(1951), *The Weary Blues*(1925), *Not Without Laughter*(1930), and *Mule Bone*(1931) (Lewis, 2020).

Through his works, Hughes portrays the bad living conditions and the class struggle that exercised by Blacks while reviving the African heritage (Keller, 1968).

1.4.3.3. Zora Neal Hurston

(1891- 1960) Hurston is known as a writer, an anthropologist, and a folklorist. She had an important role in the Harlem Renaissance through her several short stories, plays, and essays. In 1937, she published her famous work, *Their Eyes*

Were Watching God which delves into alienation and culture aesthetics (Finzsch, 2012).

1.4.3.4. Countee Cullen

(1903-1946) Countee Cullen was a poet, a novelist, and one of the tenets of Harlem Renaissance. He authored several works among them *Copper Sun* (1927), *The Ballad of the Brown Girl* (1928), and *The Medea and Some Poems* (1935). His novel *One Way to Heaven* (1932) reflects life in Harlem. Cullen was known for his racial themes and his romantic perceptions (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024).

1.4.3.5. Richard Wright

(1908- 1960): Richard Wright is a novelist and a short story writer who experienced racism and segregation in South America which strongly influenced his perspectives. Wright is best known for his novel *Native Son* (1940), and his memoir *Black Boy* (1945). Through his writing, he depicts the effects of poverty, racism, and social injustice on the lives of African Americans in the 1930s (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024).

1.4.3.6. Ralph Ellison

(1914- 1994) Ralph Ellison was a novelist, a short story writer and an essayist. His writing career began in the 1930s when he published reviews, essays, and short stories. However, he gained widespread recognition with the publication of his novel *Invisible Man* (1952), which tackles different issues mainly: identity, racism, white oppression and culture. Apart from *Invisible Man*, Ellison has other notable works, including *Shadow and Act* (1964), and *Going to the Territory* (1986), which are two collections of essays written during his life. *Flying Home and Other Stories* which

includes the short story *The Black Ball* was published posthumously in 1996 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024).

1.4.3.7. James Baldwin

(1924- 1987) James Baldwin was an essayist, a novelist, and playwright. Baldwin's early experiences growing up in Harlem and witnessing racial inequality greatly impacted his writing. He became a prominent voice during the civil rights movement in the US, addressing issues of race, identity, and social segregation in his work. His writings explored themes of identity, queer relationships, sexuality, and the complexities of the African American experience. His works include the novels *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (1953), and *Another Country* (1962), the plays *The Amen Corner*" (1954), and *Blues for Mister Charlie* (1964), and the essay collections *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961) and *The Fire Next Time* (1963) (Ostberg, 2024).

1.4.3.8. Toni Morrison

(1931- 2019) Toni Morrison is considered one of the most influential American authors of the 20th century who carried the torch and continued flourishing the African American literature, known as an essayist, a novelist, an editor and a professor. Morrison's works examine the experiences and hardships of African Americans; particularly female ones. Her novels often tackled themes of race, class struggle, identity, and the continuous trauma of slavery as in her acclaimed novel *Beloved* (1987). Morrison published many other works among them *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), and *Song of Solomon* (1977). Morrison is the first African American woman who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024).

1.5. The Use and Importance of Allegory in African American Literature

Allegory is a powerful literary device that has been employed by African American writers throughout history to address important themes, ideas, and messages. By using allegorical elements, authors can explore complex social, political, and cultural issues in a symbolic and metaphorical way, enabling readers to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and struggles encountered by Black Americans in a white supremacist society.

In her book entitled *Allegory and Meaning*, Dieke (2010) through her examination of the allegories present in a sample of African American and Caribbean literary works, advocates that their writers rely on multiple allegorical elements such as events, characters, space, and time to convey significant messages. Such narratives can be described as "thinly veiled" that is why they necessitate sincere endeavour to uncover their sub meanings in terms of both levels, literary level and context level. In the same context, Hezam (2015, p. 87) asserts: "A work is called allegorical when it says one thing in order to mean something else."

Hezam (2015) also states that allegory serves as an alternative technique which gives the writer "a space" to practise the "Freedom of expression," critiquing social and political systems "with timeless themes", and that the reader of a novel which bears a political theme, will reveal its "under-the-surface meaning." Therefore, many brilliant African American writers prefer using this technique to bring up realities to the surface and make readers more conscious about them being actually experienced by Black people. For example, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), is a socio-political allegorical novel. Through its narrative, Ellison succeeds to symbolize the psychological struggles and the social dilemmas which the unnamed protagonist endures in the segregated American society. Racism, marginalisation, invisibility, potential for betrayal within political movements and the search for identity among

many others aspects are metaphorically addressed within the advancement of the plot to comment on the American society (Miline, 2024).

Likewise, Deepa (2016) mentioned that Amiri Baraka's *The Dutchman* (1964) can be considered a political allegory which "revolutionized the Black theatre in post war America and illustrates the persistence of racial tension in the United States in the 1960s and represents an emerging militant attitude on the part of American Blacks" (2016, p. 558). Despite its short duration, this play delves into diverse themes of racism, identity, culture, and the complexities of black and white relationships among different others.

Additionally, one of the key features which makes allegory important for African American authors is its magic ability as a vehicle carrying experiences of oppression, discrimination, and searching for identity and equality in a racial society. Through allegorical characters, events, and objects, authors can tackle these issues in a beautiful, realistic and indirect manner, allowing readers to connect with the text on a deeper sense. For instance, Baraka in the earlier stated work uses metaphorical dynamic characters as concrete symbols to depict an accurate image of the tension of race and stereotypes.

Moreover, allegory can be functioned to highlight the perseverance, strength, dreams and determination of African Americans in the face of adversity. By creating allegorical narratives that portray characters overcoming obstacles and fighting for justice, authors can inspire readers and offer hope for a better future, and, this is highly reflected in Toni Morrison's masterful novel *Beloved* (1987) which exhibits the power of language used by Morrison to depict the life of the character Sethe, a former slave who escapes from the oppressive conditions imposed on her in the plantation,

determining to create a brighter future free from the horrors of slavery. Throughout the story, the reader can discover significant images and metaphors that "are drawn from nature and the life of the black people" to convey deeper implicit meanings. For example, the image of water serves as a multifaceted symbol stands for "rebirth", "destruction," history, memory, and hope (Sasirekha &Prabhakaran, 2019).

Conclusion

It can be concluded that allegory plays a crucial role in African American literature as it provides a powerful meanings and deeper layers to the narratives through a figurative mode of representation. Allegories offer a vast literary space for African American writers to critique systems of power and oppression without directly confronting them. Allegory offer a refuge to African American writers to express their embarrassing experiences, their on-going struggles and their great aspirations while fighting for equality and better lives. Moreover, utilizing allegory offers an artistic technique for African American writers to promote their historical tradition and their tribal roots while celebrating their suburb and rich culture.

Over the course of history, African American writers used literature to channel their sad memories, their recent preoccupations, and their future hopes. African American literature which is also known as, Black literature is an extensive body of literary genres that have been documented by numerous African American talented authors since the era of slavery to portray the hard times they experienced in the American racist society.

The Harlem Renaissance opened the eyes of Black writers to strive together with all modern techniques to depict contingent social issues that used to oppress them heavily such as racism, segregation, marginalization, alienation, exploitation and

inequality. Symbolism and allegory which are certainly going to be clarified in the next chapter are among the best tools Black writers have always relied on to confront society's power dynamics and to critique political systems without implying interference in any policy.

As it was referred to above, once we talk about allegorical African American literary works, we should mention the name of Ralph Ellison as a brilliant writer who is crafted in using symbolic elements in his writings. Thus, Ellison's allegory in his short story "The Black Ball" is going to be the core study of our practical analytical chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

Allegory in The Black Ball

Chapter two: Allegory in The Black Ball	21
Introduction	23
2.1. Biography of Ralph Ellison	23
2.2. Historical Context of The Black Ball.....	25
2.3. The Black Ball Summary.....	25
2.4. Analysis of The Black Ball	26
2.4.2. Main themes in The Black Ball	29
2.5. Cultural Representation in The Black Ball	44
Conclusion	51

Introduction

Ralph Ellison describes the hard times Black Americans suffered during the turbulent 1920s–1940s in "The Black Ball". Written between 1937 and 1954, this moving story is included in *Flying Home and Other Stories*, a posthumous publication that came out in 1996. Allegory is an outstanding literary device that is widely employed by Ellison to convey his sensitive subjects which delve into racist themes in order to reflect the cultural atmosphere in the US during the 20th century, particularly during Jim Crow era.

This chapter aims to explore the use of allegory in Ellison's "The Black Ball" while highlighting its cultural representations. As the story is rich with metaphorical units, it is worth to say that neither time nor space are enough to examine all the allegories and the representations present in it; accordingly, the study is going to shed light on the prominent ones on the basis of the theories of symbolism and literary analysis.

2.1. Biography of Ralph Ellison

On March 1, 1914, Lewis Alfred and Ida Millsap Ellison welcomed Ralph Waldo Ellison into the world in Oklahoma City. Ellison was named after the author and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson. At that time, Oklahoma was not a state; it was rather regarded as a frontier territory. Both Lewis and Ida Ellison were raised by parents who had been enslaved in the South. The couple moved to Oklahoma in order to give their children a sense of possibility as the state was known for its freedom. Even though the prejudices of Texas and Arkansas soon spread to Oklahoma, Ellison was raised in an unbiased environment surrounded by open spaces and the fierce spirit of people (Jackson, 2007).

After his father died in an industrial accident in 1917 when he was a young boy, his mother decided to move with him and his brother to Gary, Indiana, believing there would be more opportunities there. This action surely served as the model for the opening tales in *The Black Ball*, *Boy on a Train*. Thereafter, they moved back to their motherland, Oklahoma, where the author grew up doing side jobs. He was an accomplished football player when he was a teenager; additionally, he developed a strong love for music, which helped him get a scholarship to the prestigious Black University Tuskegee Institute in 1933.

Though he was even poorer than most of the students and found many aspects of the university unsatisfactory, it was also an opportunity for him to advance his performance talents and start, for the first time, taking literature more seriously. Instead of finishing his degree, he decided to move to New York, the epicentre of the Harlem Renaissance. Following his encounters with numerous prominent figures from the movement, including writers Richard Wright and Langston Hughes, he began publishing book reviews, essays, and short stories. He also joined the Communist Party at around this time and worked on the Federal Writers' Project, a New Deal initiative that offered writers jobs during the Great Depression. Near the end of Second World War, Ellison enlisted in the Merchant Marines as well

He spent the next five years working on his masterpiece, *Invisible Man*, for which he won the National Book Award for Fiction and shot to fame across the globe. For the remainder of his life, he taught and published at various colleges, primarily in the Northeast of the country. Ellison, who was renowned for his attention to detail, spent the rest of his life working on a second book he never finished because he was never really satisfied with *Invisible Man* even though his name is almost always associated with it.

2.2. Historical Context of the Black Ball

Twenty-first-century readers typically approach Ralph Ellison's writings through the prism of the civil rights movement, which got underway shortly after the publication of his well-known book *Invisible Man*. The collection of *Flying Home and Other Stories* (1996) which comprises "The Black Ball" do, in fact, chronicle the harsh conditions that African Americans faced between the 1920s and the 1940s, and they also show why meaningful political change was the only realistic route to their liberation.

The story of "The Black Ball" primarily centres on a man's efforts to create an integrated union in the American South following the American Civil War, which was fought primarily to uphold the institution of slavery due to racism. Topics including conflict, the struggle for equality, friendship, connection, and overcoming adversity are all explored in this short story. In "The Black Ball", for example, John is aware that his boss has the power to fire him at any time and replace him with a white man.

2.3. The Black Ball Summary

The story, "The Black Ball", focuses on one day in the life of a Black single father named John, who works as a janitor at a ritzy apartment building somewhere in the American southwest. In the morning, he cleans the building's lobby, then rushes to his quarters above the garage to make breakfast for his four-year-old son. His son asks if he is Black because the gardener's son, Jackie, is making fun of him. John says that he is actually brown, but that the best thing to be is American. John returns to his work, but while he is honing the brass doorknobs, a stranger who is white approaches him. John assumes that the stranger wants his job, because the manager, Mr. Berry, has been firing his few Black employees and replacing them with white people, but actually, the

stranger is an organizer with a local union. He says he wants to help John and his co-workers win better wages and working conditions, but John thinks unions are only for white people. The man shows John his hands, which are covered in scars and explains that a white mob attacked him back home in Alabama after he defended a Black friend against false rape charges. He invites John to an upcoming union meeting and leaves.

Throughout his break, John has lunch with his son, who informs him he wants to drive a truck whereas playing with a toy truck. John looks out the window and naps at the end of his reading attempt. John tells his son to play with his ball in the back alley and to not go to the front lawn where the white children are playing. When John wakes up from his nap, his son is crying on the front lawn because “a big white boy” stole his ball and threw it through Mr. Berry’s window. Subsequently, Mr. Berry arrives, enraged that the ball has destroyed one of his plants. He threatens to put John “behind the black ball” (i.e., without a job) if his son plays on the grass any longer. After returning inside, John’s son queries Mr. Berry’s meaning because the ball is actually white. John chooses to attend the union meeting after reflecting that his son will play with the black ball his entire life, thereby teaching him how to deal with racism.

2.4. Analysis of The Black Ball

2.4.1 Setting

“The Black Ball”, focuses on one day in the life of a Black single father named John, who works as a janitor at an unnamed ritzy apartment building somewhere in the American Southwest, likely in the 1930s after the U.S. Civil War, which was fought primarily because of racism and the desire to maintain the institution of slavery. The story uses instances of racial consciousness to delve into how the period of Jim Crow

segregation and violence driven by white supremacy influenced Black life and the overarching American identity during Ellison's era.

2.4.2 Point of View

The Black Ball, a short story written in the first-person narrative, focuses on an African-American father as he raises his four-year-old son in a racist society. An intimate account of one's first-hand experience with racism.

2.4.3 Main Characters

John

John is the main character and protagonist of Ellison's short story. Despite his job as a janitor, which largely focuses on his physical abilities, John is an intelligent man capable of complex thought. John is also an incredibly loyal man who deeply loves his one and only son, who he dutifully watches over. When he is not working, John spends the rest of time awake with his son. However, John is deeply worried about the state of the world and how poorly Black people are treated in the United States. As a result, he does his best to insulate his son from many of the same heartbreaks he has experienced in his life.

John's son

John's son is the other major character in Ellison's short story. Though he is only four or five years old, he is a uniquely perceptive kid capable of profoundly complex thought. He frequently asks his father questions about race, its relation to the community, and different people in his life. His father does the best to answer his son's questions, but is occasionally unable to fully satisfy his son's questions. It is the boy's actions that form the central conflict in the story because it was the boy's ball that

bounced into the window of his father's landlord, knocking over John's landlord's plant along the way. It was because of this action that the boy learned about racism, skin colour, and race.

John's landlord (Mr. Berry)

John's landlord is the main antagonist in the short story. He is a cruel, angry, and bitter man capable of doing tremendous harm to the people around him. He chastised John's son for making an innocent, childish mistake with a black ball. He subsequently chastised John for his son's mistake, reminding him that he will evict John and his son if his son made one more mistake.

The mysterious man

The mysterious man that enters the hotel at the start of Ellison's short story initially puzzles John. The mysterious man asks John how many "colored people" work at the hotel. John initially lies, fearing the man's intentions were not pure, but John quickly learns that the man's intentions are pure and that the man hopes to start a union at the hotel to benefit the people of colour so that they will have better working conditions and better pay. The man, as it later turns out, had exhibited such kindness on a number of occasions to people of colour, and on more than one occasion, the man had paid for his kindness and generosity with tremendous physical and mental pain; the scars prove both.

2.4.4 Minor Characters

Jackie

A white young boy, he is the same age as John's son. He is representing the biased, young white American boys who are clearly affected by their parent's racism. Eventually, he is the one who threw the ball on the Mr Berry's window and blamed John's son for it.

Mrs Johnson

She is a nice white woman who lives in the building where John works. She treats his son well. Her kindness extended to her willingness to help John maintaining better life conditions by offering him a book titled *Malraux's Man's Fate*. She is the representation of the unbiased caring white woman.

The playing children

A group of white children, were playing around the neighborhood and were looked after by a white nurse. They represent the privileged children of white people. This is something John's son could never had.

The nurse

A white woman who is looking for the white children; she makes sure that they are well-protected and enjoying their time in the best conditions.

2.4.1.1. Climax

The climax occurs when Mr. Berry's wrongful accusation against John's son for throwing a ball into his window reveals a deeper societal issue. When Mr. Berry uses the term "black ball" to admonish John and his son, the innocence of the child prevents him from comprehending the racial undertones. Instead, he simply relates it to the physical toy ball, questioning why it is called "black" when it is clearly white. John, however, is acutely aware of the implications. He sees this innocent misunderstanding as a poignant reflection of his son's first encounter with racism and discrimination. It is a stark realization that his child is already facing prejudices at such a tender age, hinting at the harsh realities he will inevitably confront in the future.

2.4.2. Main themes in The Black Ball

Thematically, "The Black Ball" explores themes related to racism, the struggle for equality, relationships, the connection between class and race, hope, and how rules apply to black people differently than white people. Although this is a story meant to entertain, it is a deeply emotional story about a topic that is important to Ellison.

2.4.2.1. Racism

The story's theme of racism is first seen when the four-year-old child debates the differences between race and colour. Because of his complexion, he has been the target of verbal abuse. Later, after the white youngster tosses his ball through Berry's office glass, he will be physically abused. Berry tells his father, "Well, if I ever see him around here again, you're going to find yourself behind the black ball. Now get him on round to the back and then come up here and clean up the mess he's made" (Ellison, 1996, p. 95).

The downtrodden themselves have internalized racism because it is deeply embedded in society. Attempting to explain Mr. Berry's danger, John speaks to his son, "He meant, son, that if your ball landed in his office again, Daddy would go after it behind the old black ball" (Ellison, 1996, p. 95). John unintentionally uses the same terminology as his white boss even if his son reminds him that the ball is more of a white colour.

Mr. Berry's dislike for the "damned educated nigger" is a reflection of both the pervasive prejudice and the animosity toward the means in this case, education that people of colour may use to improve their lot in life. Mr. Berry's interactions with John and his work itself demonstrate the superficial aspect of colour-based evaluations: "I paid particular attention to that brass because, for Berry, the manager, the luster of these

brass panels and door handles was the measure of all my industry" (Ellison, 1996, p. 88).

2.4.2.2. Struggle for equality

The theme of struggle for equality is brought out in John's constant striving to improve his position and ensure a brighter future for his son. This is matched with the Union man's struggle to ensure a fairer and more equitable working condition for the labourers. Thus, one witnesses the struggle for equality in both the social fault lines of colour and class, as well as an individual's personal and public life. The intensity of prejudice that is spawned by such unequal treatment meted out to people by an unjust society is seen in both the perpetrators of racism as well as those affected by it. John has been subject to such a great deal of racism in his life that he cannot help but be suspicious of the intention of the Union man. An aspect of this may be seen in the following exchange:

When they did have something to say to us, they always became familiar.

You are not used to anything like that, are you? `

`Not used to what? `

A little more from this guy and I would see red. 'Fellow like me offering a fellow like you something besides a rope` (Ellison, 1996, p. 88).

2.4.2.3. Relationships

The theme of relationships has been portrayed in "The Black Ball" in both the personal and public lives of the characters. The intimacy of the father-son duo lends a greater depth to the intensity of discriminatory practices that these two individuals face. John is a responsible father who takes care of his son, loves him, and is alarmed when he goes missing although momentarily. Similarly, his relationship with Mrs.

Johnson, who is good to his boy, and the newly forged relationship with the Union man, which rests on a common cause, go on to show that one needs the support of well-wishers to sustain oneself in a wholesome manner. Contrary to this, his relationship with his employer is of a transactional nature, which only aggravates the racial divide between the two.

2.4.3. Allegory in The Black Ball

Allegory is essentially an extended use of symbolism in general. In the literary world, many authors use symbolism to give their story greater complexity, depth and lasting impact (Gibbs, 2020). Thus, one cannot imagine allegory without symbols. Understanding what symbolism is and the various types of symbols that authors use can help readers better appreciate its vitality in literature. In this stage, we define symbolism and list the various types of symbols that authors use in their stories.

2.4.3.1. Definition of Symbolism

In a broader sense, Symbolism is a theory which takes on many forms, whether in literature, painting, design, art or in everyday speech. It refers to the use of an action, a setting, an object or a name to represent an idea or quality. It is essentially the act of taking something that is usually concrete and associating it with a symbol to give it a new or greater significance. Artists use symbolism to explain an idea or a concept to their audience in a poetic manner without saying it outright. The use of symbolism allows artists to make their works more complex. Many people also use symbolism in everyday life. For example, the colour white stands for purity, black represents evil, roses stand for romance, a butterfly symbolizes transformation and a dog can represent loyalty (Chadwick, 2017).

2.4.3.2. The Relationship between Allegory and Symbolism

Allegory and symbolism have always been very tied to each other. The latter is a series of concrete symbols that make abstract ideas easier to be understood. While the former is an extended use of symbols and metaphors. In other words, when an entire literary work relies heavily on the use of symbols to convey specific morals; it is called allegorical: "A story, a poem, or even a whole work can be an allegory and the symbolism will permeate throughout" (Lakhadive, 2018, p. 5). Thus, allegory is a part of symbolism and symbolism is a part of allegory. However, symbolism in its narrower sense is a literary device like metaphor, imagery, allusion and personification.

2.4.3.3. Types of Symbols Used in The Black Ball

In his short story, "The Black Ball", Ellison masterfully blends a net of literary tools and narrative techniques to project the cultural aspects in America in the mid of the twentieth century during Jim Crow segregation. Through the following chart we better present the main symbols that Ellison depends on to allegorize his story:

Allegories	Type of Symbols	Cultural representations
The fried hands	Symbolism	They refer to union and solidarity between Blacks and whites despite all society imposed norms. The activist's man hands get injured when he helped his accused negro friend.
The limp	Symbolism	Alludes to a physical or mental discomfort. The union man's leg may get also injured when he helped his friend. This reflects solidarity and the on-going struggle for equality.
The business card	Symbolism	Alludes to the ray of hope which the white man brought to John's gloomy life. Despite the existing systematic racism, the union man and John will fight together to secure better living opportunities.
The book	Symbolism	Reflects union and solidarity. Mrs. Johnson is an unbiased woman. She offers John a novel that tells the story of a group of revolutionaries in the face of the government who revolted against oppressive systems. The white lady has a good will to help John redefine his image and challenge racism and discrimination.
John's work as a janitor	Symbolism	This illustrates how society as a whole has a tendency to take advantage of African Americans' labour while failing to give them credit and equitable treatment. The janitor's role represents how African Americans upheld different facets of African American culture while still experiencing marginalisation and unequal prospects.
The bond between John and his son	Symbolism	This dynamic bond demonstrates how African American parents are obliged by culture to prepare their kids for a discriminatory society. It demonstrates how cultural qualities

		of love, forbearance, prudence, and dignity are transmitted to their next generation preparing them encounter the harsh realities of life.
The building as a miniature	Symbolism	John's place at the bottom of the hierarchy in this microcosm is a reflection of the larger social system. His dealing with the building's occupants and authorities mirror the broader societal dynamics of racism and power.
The white physical toy vs. blackballed	Metaphor	The ball of the child which was given a racial label by Mr. Berry is drawn from the phrase "behind the eight ball" in a pool refers to being in a challenging situation. Further, the term "blackballed" describes the exclusion from a group or opportunity. Moreover, the story's tone is established by the title which emphasises African Americans' on-going state of vigilance and marginalisation.
The child's involvement in the business of trucking vs. the action of absorption.	Metaphor	It suggests that the child becomes deeply influenced by observing African American men working in the trucking industry. These symbols likely represent the cultural impact of racial stereotypes ; in terms of the types of jobs Afro - American are perceived to be suited for.
The child's dream to become a truck driver.	Foreshadowing	
The severe pain of the burnt hands vs. the hell	Metaphor	The union's man fried hands reflect images of horror, oppression and violence perpetuated against marginalized communities.
The burnt skin vs. the frying action	Simile	

Mr. Berry, the boss vs. the evil queen	Simile	The image of the white wealthy manager admiring himself in the brass handle like the wicked queen and treating his worker harshly implies power, entitlement and superiority. It reflects social hierarchies and racial prejudice.
The nurse's sitting position vs. a picture	Simile	Denotes that white people live in peacefulness and safety in America. And, they have access to better living opportunities, education and employment prospects unlike blacks.
The book over the nurse's knees.	Personification	
The brass door handles "polishing themselves"	Personification	This is a reference to John's labour and the dignity with which he performs it. It illustrates the resilience and the strength of the African American people.
The false perception of John about the union man.	Irony	At the beginning, John thought that the union man wants his job when visited him at work. But, it turns out that he wants to help him better his life. This ironic situation refers that social inequality and labour exploitation had unified the two races to fight together to challenge segregation and promote social change.
The child's question about his colour.	Foreshadowing	It manifests that the child's interaction with white folks suggests that he will likely endure racism, segregation and solitude in the future.
Different scenes from the garden like the flowers and the plants.	Imageries	They are a reflection of the beautiful setting where white children play and grow.
The breakfast that John prepares to his son.	Imagery	Alludes to John's care, nourishment and love to his child.

2.4.3.3.1. Symbolism

Symbolism is a powerful literary device that has a crucial role in literature. It refers to the use of a character, an action, an object or a place as a symbol to enable the writer convey abstract ideas, feelings and complex morals in a more relatable and engaging way (Glatch, 2023). To achieve this, Ellison uses multiple symbols such as:

Hands: "the fried hands" of the union man stand for union and solidarity as they are burned when he helped his friend, and that John is reminded of him when his own hand get injured. Also, the idea of the hands itself can refer to the union between employees working under the same oppressive conditions hoping to better their lives. The physical wound of both hands may also symbolizes the unfair treatment and the price that is paid throughout the journey of fighting for equality.

Hence, one must understand that colour and class are two opposing forces, but they can meet under such circumstances. Two men differing in the social standing having opposite colours but facing the same fate denotes that the status quo of colour and class is a misguided norm and that is all humans are equal since they can encounter the same dolorous experience in their shared setting.

The limp: The statement: "I noticed that he limped as he moved away" (Ellison, 1996, p. 91) means that the character moves painfully or with difficulty which may indicate that he was injured or emotionally discomfort. This represents the mental and the physical burden he bears for the sake of fighting towards individual and public concerns.

The business card: It stands for a new sort of optimism and a ray of hope which are brought to John's gloomy life by the organizer as he finally believes in the idea that the latter proposes. It is amplified when John felt in his pocket searching for this invitation card which suggests that he will attend the meeting. The decision John makes is apparently a reaction towards the last harsh incident he witnessed with his son that he wants to struggle aspiring for an equal life and a brilliant future for him and his son.

The book: Malraux's *Man's Fate* novel which was offered by Mrs Johnson to John is closely relatable to the situation of African Americans in the US in terms of experiences and goals; Mrs Johnson no doubt motivates John indirectly to question his existence, identity and status through investigating the intersections of race, power, revolution and resistance in the face colonial legacies implied in the book. The good action she made can interpret a kind of encouragement, empowerment and solidarity. Therefore, it can represent a call for struggle towards one's rights and communal justice.

The role of John as a janitor: Symbolizes the lowly and submissive duties frequently placed upon African Americans. Although his work is unseen and of a little value, it is crucial in the building.

The protective bond between John and his son: Reflects the African American households, the sharing of traditional information and survival techniques is represented through John's protective relationship with his child.

The building as a miniature: The apartment where John works is a reflection for the American culture. Racial hierarchies and power dynamics are distinctly defined in this confined setting.

Ellison crafts in using these symbols as he engaged the reader critically within the text and made him emotionally evoked to connect with the deeper narrative highlighting its complex themes. The use of symbols in the story is important as it enhances the meaning and enriches the writing by creating vivid portraits that add a literary beauty.

2.4.3.3.2. Metaphor

Metaphor refers to one thing by directly mentioning another. It essentially compares two dissimilar things while showing that they have something in common. Therefore, while a metaphor can provide clarity, it can also show the similarities between the two things or ideas despite their obvious dissimilarities (Abrahams,1999).

The instance of the boy's physical toy is a metaphor-to-object representation. The ball which John's son plays with is very referential; it indicates his childhood and identity that is first used by a white bully and is then given a racial label by Berry when he told John that he will lose his job, saying: "you're going to find yourself behind the black ball" (Ellison, 1996 p. 95). This means that black will always play inferior, powerless and defeated in the game of life like an unlucky billiard player.

Furthermore, the naivety of John's son and his wonder why Berry gives his ball a black colour although its whiteness obviously strengthens the figurative meaning and add new layers to the physical toy and the endless game of racism duo.

Another metaphor can be found in the statement: "The business of trucking soon absorbed him." Here John uses the term absorbed him to express his son's strong love to this job which alludes to his mental absorption- much like a sponge soaking up

liquid- by drawing a comparison between it and the boy's intense involvement in the trucking industry.

The sentence " I felt terrible when I looked closely at his hands for the first time. It must have been hell" (Ellison, 1996, p. 90) contains another nice metaphor where the agony or the sensation of having a burnt hand to "hell". It implies that the agony was so severe and intolerable that it seemed like a plunge into a realm of excruciating torment.

The use of metaphors in the story is important as it enhances the meaning and enriches the writing by creating vivid portraits that add a literary gorgeousness. Through this metaphor, Ellison goes beyond all literal surfaces and succeeds to stimulate the reader's imagination and evoke his emotions creating a sense of sorrow and empathy within the protagonists in the story.

2.4.3.3.3. Simile

Rather than implying a comparison like a metaphor, a simile explicitly denotes comparison between two things. Similes often use the word "like" or "as." The two things you compare with a simile are essentially dissimilar. Unlike metaphors, similes are much more direct comparisons (Glatch, 2023).

Ellison weaves a beautiful simile in his story when he states: "He stood gazing into the brass like the wicked queen into her looking glass in the story which the boy liked so well" (Ellison, 1996, p. 91). Through this simile the narrator compares Mr Berry, a white bourgeois man who is well dressed to the wicked queen from the lovely story of children *Snow White*, who often looked into her magic mirror to seek validation

and reassurance. Just like the queen, Mr Berry, John's boss is portrayed as someone who is focused on his appearance and seeking approval or confirmation of his authority.

The statement "The skin was drawn and puckered and looked as though it had been fried. Fried hands" (Ellison, 1996, p. 90) includes a powerful simile since the narrator compare the appearance of the charred skin to something that has been fried by using the word "as though".

Another simile is used by the narrator when he describes the nurse of the children saying: "Their nurse, dressed completely in white except for her dark glasses, which I saw when she raised her head, sat still as a picture" (Ellison, 1996, p.93), here the nurse appears to have been extremely calm and quiet, akin to a static image, based on the comparison of her sitting position to a picture.

The phrase "as a picture" conjures up a clear mental image of the nurse's composure and calm for the reader.

2.4.3.3.4. Personification

This type of symbols applies human attributes to something that is not alive or human. For example, personification gives human form and sensibilities to various objects such as a chair, nature, a book or an abstract concept like love or hate. Writers use personification to help their readers better relate to non-human things or objects (Glatch, 2023).

In *The Black Ball*, the personification of the brass door handles as "polishing themselves" is very obvious when the narrator said: "Usually his face was reflected there" (Ellison, 1996, p.88). This personification really creates a beautiful

imaginative picture which highlights an impactful message on how well John accomplishes his work adding a sense of pride and care to John's work.

Another personification can be interpreted when the nurse appeared in the garden reading a book "bent over a book on her knees" (Ellison, 1996, p.93), the book is put on the nurse's knees, which personify the latter by implying that it is connected to her in some way, almost a companion or a part of her.

2.4.3.3.5 Irony

Irony is an impactful technique in literature that adds depth, complexity and layers of meaning to the work, highlighting a discrepancy between what is really occurring and what is expected to occur. There are various types of irony including dramatic and verbal irony. Irony helps engage readers and adds another layer to a fictional tale (Abrahams, 1999).

In the narrative, the situation of John serves as an irony. John is a diligent and conscientious father who takes pride in his job as a janitor at a ritzy apartment building although he is constantly mistreated by his manager and endures racism and exploitation.

John felt afraid and frustrated when a white man visits him at work as he assumes the later wants his job because the boss has been firing few of his Black employees and replacing them with white others. However, it turns out that the stranger is a union representative who supports Black people and defends their rights, and he offers John a job in his union. Thus, this contrast between John's initial assumption that he is being threatened with job loss and the unexpected opportunity the organizer brings is a situational irony.

Overall, the use of irony in literary works has a significant purpose as it makes readers more engaged to delve in the narrative, questioning their first thoughts and rethinking their initial assumptions about characters and events which may make them surprised later.

2. 4.3.3.6. Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is an important literary tool in which authors give hints and clues about subsequent events in the story either implicitly or explicitly to draw attention about the interconnectedness of incidents and characters in the plot (Sturm, 2024).

In *The Black Ball*, Ellison explicitly foreshadows the on-going horror of racism and prejudice in the question of John's son "Daddy, am I black?" (Ellison, 1996, p.87) because a white child had pointed it to him. This indicates that the child's innocence will soon fade as he will experience more oppression and segregation in his discriminatory society when he grows up.

Another explicit foreshadowing appears when the child said: "When I grow up I think I'll drive a truck" (Ellison, 1996, p. 92) which hints at future expectation and a desired goal originated from the living negro's conditions as the child have seen black men working as trucks drivers in the neighbourhood. So, the little Afro-American's straightforward declaration of his dream career alludes to a possible future state.

Indeed, the use of foreshadowing is not random, it rather builds tension and fosters suspense within the reader while creating a sense of realism and subtle hints at the future of the child as well.

2.4.3.3.7. Imagery

Imagery is an artistic literary device which can be either literal or figurative that gives detailed information about the element being portrayed and provides mental images about it by using visualized scenes and evocative descriptions which help motivate readers and stimulate their minds (Glatch, 2023).

In "The Black Ball", the scene of the breakfast that John prepares to his son, and the portrait of the garden, the flowers, the plants and the flaming sword in the sky serve as suburb imageries that evoke a high sense of beauty and divine. These well-crafted imageries that Ellison employs in the narrative play an effective role as they enhance the storytelling and create an immersive description that adds an aesthetic appeal to the story and fosters the reader's imagination to form memorable scenes about it.

2.5. Cultural Representation in The Black Ball

As clarified earlier, Ralph Ellison's "The Black Ball" is an allegorical short story which engages with various cultural representations, mainly those related to race, segregation, identity, injustice, and power dynamics. It reflects the genuine realities in the very segregated Southern American society, particularly between 1930s and 1950s when the story was written.

One can notice how the issue of racism is allegorized in the early beginning of the narrative. The story starts with a very painful scene when the four-year-old child debates the differences between race and colour questioning his identity: "Daddy, am I black?" (Ellison, 1996, p.87), but the father assures him that it is important to be American above all. John does not want his son to grow in powerlessness and

disorientation due to society's-imposed stereotypes and biases, and that is colour does not determine an individual's identity; the only standard which determines identity is to own a good citizenship in your country.

Because of his complexion, the boy has been the target of verbal abuse as the gardener's son, Jackie, was making fun of him. Later on, he would be physically bullied when the white boy throws his ball inside the window of Mr Berry's office, the white manager, for whom John is working who says to his father, "Well, if I ever see him around here again, you're going to find yourself behind the black ball. Now get him on round to the back and then come up here and clean up his mess he' s made" (Ellison,1996, p.95). This phrase has multiple layers of meanings; it is a good reference for the suspicion, the bias and the misconception of Black individuals under Jim Crow period. The manager threatens that John will be " behind the black ball" if he finds his son playing in the front again which refers to the common slang " behind the eight ball" that is used in the early 20th century which means to be in a difficult or unfavourable position. The idiom is likely originated from the game of pool or billiards, where the eight ball is the black ball that needs to be pocketed last, and being behind it can hinder a player's chance to win the game (Olsen, 2017).

Accordingly, John recognizes that his son is learning the rules of the game as he is playing with the black ball although he does not understand them, implying facing racial injustice and suppression "He was learning the rules of the game already, but didn't know it. Yes, he would play with the ball. Indeed, poor little rascal, he would play until he grew sick of playing " (Ellison, 1996, p.95).

Through the storytelling, Ellison depicts vivid portraits of racial identity and social prejudice which the African American face in the early 20th century. The

story explores the complexities of being Black within a white neighbourhood in an inherently racist society that denies the identity of the and neglects their belonging.

Throughout the advancement of the plot, the protagonist John navigates harsh living conditions as he strives to raise his son who seems to be a clever boy although he is just four years old. The boy is alert about the limitations imposed on him as being Black. The unnamed building serves as a microcosm that allegorizes the American society. The disparities in status and opportunities between white and black children in the ritzy apartment are starkly portrayed representing the systematic inequalities that exist.

Another important scene which conveys sorrow feelings of isolation, alienation and social injustice is when John saw the children playing in groups in the front while he forbids his son to play with them to avoid any sort of conflicts and misconceptions, "You stay in the back out of everybody's way, and you mustn't ask anyone a lot of questions" (Ellison, 1996, p. 93). This illustrates that the lasting impact of racism and inferiority has never been theoretical, but it is rather a lived experience.

In addition, through the allegorical character of the protagonist John and his son the story portrays pictures of social class, labour exploitation and hierarchies within the African American community showing how social belonging and economic status can shape individuals' lives and relationships. John is a working class father, living in the garage of the apartment with his little son among white rich neighbours, works hard along the day for a low wage to feed his son and faces exploitative treatments at work. Mr Berry is a very rigid man who cares only about the labour and how was the brass polished not for the human "I gave special attention to that brass because for Mr Berry, the manager, the luster of this brass panels and door handles was the measure of all my

industry" (Ellison, 1996, p.88). Mr Berry never looks at John when greeting but rather he looks at the brass: "Good morning, John. He would say, looking not at me but at the brass" (Ellison, 1996, p. 88). The building, which John maintains but the white owners control, represents how African Americans are exploited and marginalised despite their enormous achievements.

Indeed, the African American worker encounters betrayal and deception from creativity and agency leading to a deep sense of alienation and emotional turmoil. Further, the narrator represents images of struggling for equality, mistrust towards white folks, unemployment fear, and job insecurity felt by Blacks especially after the Great Depression.

Hence, John distrusts the union man when came to open the conversation with him and shows hostility as he thought the latter will take his job because Mr Berry has fired some of his Black employees and replaced them with white workers: "two fellows had already been dismissed because Whites had demanded their jobs" (Ellison, 1996, p. 88). John makes reference to the fact that his boss, Mr Berry despises him suggesting that he is fighting against discrimination in society.

Thus, John gives a false answer to the visitor when asks him: " Any other colored folks working here?"(Ellison, 1996, p. 89), which reflects a deep cultural context on how the long impact of past slavery and oppression and the on-going fate of racism and violence destroy good relationships between white and Black communities. The instance when John reacts frustrated towards the white man when he offers him a job in his union is very significant. John responds to the white man only when he shows him his burned hand and told him the story behind it. The union's man fried hand is a very symbolic event in the story. It denotes that the Black community has no tie with

the American society and that is any one supports the African American citizen will be ostracized as well.

All those incidents, the little boy who blamed for the fault of white bully, the father who was threatened with being fired by another white bully, and the union man and his friend who was blamed for a crime he did not commit, symbolize the society's outlook and treatment towards the marginalized African Americans. Accordingly, two different generations flounder in the same racial discriminatory dilemma, paying the price of the crimes committed by the powerful groups.

Consequently, the struggle for equality and the aspiration for a better future seem to be a shared objective where John and the activist man can meet. The internal monologue of John exemplifies this:

There must be no flaws this morning. Two fellows who worked at the building across the street had already been dismissed because whites had demanded their jobs, and with the boy at that age needing special foods and me planning to enter school again next term, I couldn't afford to allow something like that out on the sidewalk to spoil my chances. (Ellison, 1996, p. 88)

Besides, the struggle of the union man to ensure better wages for the proletariat citizen is another referential example for the struggle for equality. Optimism is a power that is held by both men, motivating them to strive for economic prospect and brilliant future. John needs the union man and the union man needs him. The union man's appearance in the life of John is very symbolic. The latter brings a soft sort of hope and sympathy to the dark world of John and his child who witnesses oppression and racism in his bloom age. Therefore, John decides at the end to accept the activist's

man invitation and attend the meeting," I thought of the fellow's fried hands, and I felt in my pocket to make sure I still had the card he had given me. Maybe there was a colour other than white on the old ball" (Ellison, 1996, p. 96).

Consequently, despite the difference in colour and class, hope, labour exploitation, educational disparities, wealth gaps, oppression and violence had unified people to fight together for individuals' rights and public concerns towards better lives in a more just and equitable society for all. Unity is an obvious moral in the story as the narrator and the protagonist aim to link both binary relationships North and South, and African Americans and Americans. Otherwise, people can never achieve their full potential and can never be equal and happy.

The story also draws attention to the complexities of relationships between the protagonist and the people around him. The father-son intimate relationship is central, highlighting the challenges they face due to societal prejudice and marginalization. John, a devoted father, loves his son, cares deeply for him, and he is distraught when his son goes missing. Likewise, his bond with Mrs Johnson, who treats his son kindly and his new alliance with the union man based on a shared cause demonstrate the importance of having supportive individuals for a fulfilling life.

By contrast, his relationship with his boss is purely transactional, further exacerbating the racial discord that exists between the two. This kind of interaction provides a profound social context on how the behaviour of whites towards coloured people is stemmed from an overwhelming misguiding history of racism and discrimination imposed on blacks by an oppressive society that has always viewed white people as superiors and Black people as inferiors.

In the end, it is worthy to state that Ellison crafts through "The Black Ball" symbolic representations to explore the nuanced and the multifaceted cultural features that impact every aspect of lives in America in the middle of the 20th century. The story is an impactful commentary on race, prejudice, segregation, marginalization and alienation. It is a vivid reflection of the on-going struggle for equality and the self-assertion. It is a powerful representation of the resilience and the optimism of the African-American people who keep fighting for a better future despite all society's attempts to silence their voices, destroy their characters and erase their belonging.

Conclusion

African American literature is featured by its masterful style and its figurative representations. Ralph Ellison's short story "The Black Ball" is highly allegorical piece of writing example. Despite the shortness of this story, Ellison mastered in expressing his ideas and emotions using an artistic language that depends on plentiful symbols in order to assist him depict his intended themes and make his reader enjoy the act of reading.

General Conclusion

As a distinguished post Harlem African American writer, Ralph Waldo Ellison's writings have always been an important source of reading, investigation, creativity and inspiration. Throughout the course of his life, Ellison devoted his time, pen and efforts to his Black community. Through his literary skills and deep insights, he captures the embracing memories, the painful experiences and the hard moments that face the African Americans in the American racist society.

Twenty- first- century readers often encounter Ralph Ellison works through the lens of the civil rights movement. His posthumous short story "The Black Ball" (1996), was written between 1930s and 1950s, at those hard days. The story focuses on a day of a coloured father who strives to raise his little son in a very racist society where they suffer from oppression, discrimination, alienation and prejudice under Jim Crow supremacy.

"The Black Ball" is endowed with symbolic components and allegorical representations which offer the narrative a distinctive portrait and an underlying tone. Ellison paints them to artfully portray the cultural aspects of the twentieth century in the African American context. Allegorically, Ellison captures the reader's mind and spirit to empathize with the African American character and share with him feelings of sorrow, frustration and aspiration.

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ملخص

يهدف البحث الحالي إلى التحقيق في استخدام المجاز في القصة القصيرة "الكرة السوداء" لرالف والدو إليسون لتعكس الخلفية الثقافية للأفارقة السود في الولايات المتحدة. إن إليسون، بوصفه كاتباً أمريكياً من أصل أفريقي، معروف على أفضل وجه باستخدامه الواسع للغة المجازية وطريقة التمثيل الرمزية. من خلال هذا الأسلوب الماهر، نجح في عرض الجوانب الثقافية الرئيسية وتسليط الضوء على القضايا الحساسة التي كانت تضطهد بشدة الأمريكيين الأفارقة بينما يعيشون في الولايات المتحدة بموجب قوانين جيم كرو. وفي "الكرة السوداء"، يركز إليسون في المقام الأول على مواضيع العنصرية والتمييز والاضطهاد والتشريد والاستغلال والتهميش، التي شهدتها الشعب الأمريكي الأفريقي في منتصف القرن العشرين. وتُلاحظ اللغة التعبيرية منذ بداية القصة، وتوجد المفردات في كل مشهد، مما يساعد الكاتب على تحدي المعايير الثقافية والوفاء بواجبه على نحو كامل. وقد تمت الدراسة وفق نظريتي التحليل الأدبي و الرمزية لاكتشاف التمثيلات المجازية في القصة.

الكلمات الرئيسية: المجاز، الخلفية الثقافية، التمييز، العنصرية، رالف والدو إليسون "الكرة السوداء"