



Ralph Ellison in 1973



Adam Bradley outside the Library of Congress, where he did research for the second Ellison novel. (Matthew Girard)

# The Invisible Manuscript

*By Wil Haygood*

Sunday, August 19, 2007

On April 16, 1994, a writer famous for a singular and bone-deep literary accomplishment died in his Riverside Drive apartment in Manhattan, his sweet and elegant wife, Fanny, by his side. It was pancreatic cancer that laid him low, then silenced him. He was 80. Because fame had found Ralph Waldo Ellison upon publication of *Invisible Man* in 1952, because that novel -- about the terrible and bewitching pain heaped upon its Negro (Ellison loved that word) protagonist -- had changed the literary landscape of the nation, touching millions, there was, of course, a moving

public tribute. Literary lions and common folk converged at the American Academy of Arts and Letters in Manhattan six weeks after Ellison's death. Musicians pulled out their instruments. Ellison had long been into music, particularly jazz. Years earlier, when he was traipsing around Manhattan in long tweed coat and fedora, he sat in on gigs with some known hepcats. At the tribute after Ellison's death, Wynton Marsalis played "Stardust," made popular by Louis Armstrong. Ellison loved Armstrong.

But there was a notable absence: Ellison's long-rumored second novel. In the 41 years since *Invisible Man* won the National Book Award, the author had made it clear to all that he was working on something that would be grander, more ambitious even, than his acknowledged masterpiece. In 1967, 14 years into his struggle, Ellison lost pieces of the manuscript in a New England house fire. Scholars have since largely dismissed the significance of the loss, about 200 pages, mostly revisions, most of which Ellison was able to retrieve. But he allowed the fire to take on psychological weight through the years and would talk of the loss as if it had caused an ever-deepening wound upon his artistic focus. More years passed, then decades. Ellison wrote essays, gave speeches and got invited to the White House. Medals were draped around his neck. He was praised in multiple languages. Biographies and dissertations were written. Seminars organized, conferences held.

But no second novel emerged.

IN THE 1960S, WHEN ACADEMIC INTEREST IN RACE HEATED UP, SCHOLARS REALLY BEGAN TO BUZZ AROUND RALPH ELLISON. They wrote him letters, tried to get him to come to the telephone. His *Invisible Man*, the story of the many levels of Hell faced by a black man trying to make good on the promise of America, had made Ellison that rarest of writers -- not unlike Harper Lee of *To Kill a Mockingbird* fame -- in that his one novel sold so well that the royalty checks provided a welcome cushion for the rest of his life. The book found a permanent place in the literary canon, embedded in countless college reading lists and constantly debated. But Ellison remained elusive, prickly and somewhat shy. Try as they might, none got close to him.

Then, in 1977, John Callahan, a 36-year-old professor at Oregon's Lewis & Clark College, published an essay titled "Chaos, Complexity and Possibility: The Historical Frequencies of Ralph Waldo Ellison." He mailed it to the man he had admired ever since staying up one night in 1960, unable to stop reading *Invisible Man*. Callahan's piece, which riffed on the way Ellison challenged narrow, "official" views of American history, caught the author's attention. Soon Callahan found himself invited to the Ellisons' home in New York City.

Ralph and Fanny -- poet Langston Hughes had introduced the couple -- took to Callahan. The white, Irish professor struck Ellison as earthy and open. There was much laughter and dining during the visits. And there was something else: "I was one of many people . . . estranged from my own father," says Callahan. In Ellison, who had never had children himself, Callahan had found a father figure.

Callahan remained close to the Ellisons over the next 17 years. As Ellison's death approached, Callahan says, his friend seemed so thunderstruck by the prospect of leaving this world that he couldn't bring himself to discuss matters of literary executorship. Ellison thought of his wife and her well-being. He thought of his unfinished novel. He was worried and afraid. "His final days," says Callahan, "were given over to brooding about death, trying to understand what was happening to him. The practicality of his literary legacy was not on his mind."

It was only after Ellison's death that Fanny Ellison chose Callahan to become literary executor. This was an honor, but it soon became clear it was also a Herculean task. Manuscript pages, computer disks and scribbled notes lay helter-skelter, everywhere in his home. Ellison had not suffered from writer's block, after all. He had writer's fury. He had written and written and written. A gush of words, and chapters and notes about the chapters. There were background notes -- musings on writing and America and fiction -- much of it also beautifully written; notes about plot outlines and more characters, built word by word, then buried under more notes. It was a spouting gusher of artistic creation, fat manuscripts covering other fat manuscripts, almost all related to that second novel.

And Fanny had hoarded it all. The one thing she didn't save, because it had never existed, was any instruction about what to do with it.

Callahan returned to Oregon. Soon, boxes and boxes of the Ellison work began arriving.

Between teaching duties, he aimed to sort through the materials. When Callahan believed the last of the papers had arrived, another shipment was set down before him. So many words, so many plots, so many chapters. It smacked of mania, but Ellison had never struck Callahan as unhinged. "I think a lot of what was going on with Ralph were writerly issues," he says, "not psychological issues."

*Invisible Man* was relatively simple structurally, having a single narrator, a single perspective from which the entire book sprang forth. Even so, at a time when Ellison was barely scraping by as a freelance writer and living primarily on Fanny's secretary's salary, he still went about writing that novel with either admirable or damnable irreverence for time. He described that period as "an obscurity in which I had worked for five years undisturbed by thoughts of future sales or reviewers notices, and in which the possibility of winning prizes was utterly undreamed. My sole preoccupation had been with transforming a body of seemingly intractable material into a work of art."

If his first novel seemed "intractable material," the second verged on impossible -- a sprawling plot, with multiple protag-onists and points of view. Callahan knew that with *Invisible Man*, Ellison had felt like he was moving a mountain with a teaspoon. Callahan saw that Ellison had been attempting the same process here, only with a much bigger mountain.

Now it was Callahan's mountain to move. But how to begin? He looked at the notes, at the scribbles; he talked to Fanny. She, too, was daunted by the mounds and mounds of paper. But she made it clear she believed the second novel was publishable.

Ellison was sometimes compared to Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner or Saul Bellow, great writers of his generation. (He befriended Bellow.) But they had all produced much more. The public came to expect the arrival of their books at regular intervals. Callahan was keenly aware that Ellison's public, who had already waited through Vietnam and Watergate, the black power movement and the women's movement, would have limited patience with his own delays. So, Callahan quickly edited *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, which was published in 1995. A year later, another volume from Ellison's manuscripts, *Flying Home and Other Stories*, was published. Both collections were met with fine reviews. Yet they hardly sated the appetite for the second novel.

Callahan zeroed in on one section of manuscript -- about one-quarter of the pages relating to the second novel -- that had been most refined by Ellison. Callahan was flat-out charmed by the tone and texture of the work, of the back-and-forth dialogue between Adam Sunraider, the pass-for-white, race-baiting senator, and Alonzo Hickman, the black preacher who, unknown to the world at large, had raised Sunraider as a son.

Callahan used some of the notes about that section to bring order to those pages, and then a few pieces from the rest of the huge pile of the embryonic book to give the resulting story some context. In 1999, he published that portion as Ellison's *Juneteenth*. Readers clamored for the book, and just as quickly, many started voicing disenchantment. They wanted more; they couldn't imagine that 40 years of labor could result in only one 348-page novel. There were criticisms about disjointedness.

Condemnation of *Juneteenth* was far from universal. It reached the top 20 on the New York Times bestseller list and continued to sell respectably for a long time. There was high praise from various corners as well. Said critic Henry Louis Gates Jr. of *Juneteenth*: "Ellison sought no less than to create a book of Blackness, a literary representation of the tradition at its most sublime and fundamental." The Los Angeles Times expressed ecstasy, claiming that the novel "threatens to come as close as any since *Huckleberry Finn* to grabbing the ring of the great American novel."

But, perhaps inevitably, it's the sting of critics that Callahan recalls most vividly. The New York Times had this to say: "The book provides the reader with intimations of the grand vision animating Ellison's 40-year project, but it also feels disappointingly provisional and incomplete .

..

Instead of the symphonic work Ellison envisioned, Callahan has given us a single, tentatively rendered melodic line. Instead of a vast modernist epic about the black experience in America, he has given us a flawed linear novel, focused around one man's emotional and political evolution."

Posthumous works from literary giants often have a difficult terrain to traverse. Ernest Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden* was published in 1986. Because of the Hemingway cachet, sales were brisk. But the ridicule was swift. *Library Journal*, the trade publication, said the novel

was full of "unfleshed caricatures." A piece in the *New Republic* about the book opined that Hemingway's publisher "has committed a literary crime."

In Callahan's case, some of the most cutting critics -- and the public at large -- seemed to have missed the point that Callahan had every intention of producing a fuller Ellison work, the entire symphony Ellison had conceived: a novel about race, miscegenation, America, love, pain. The novel would have jazz; it would have picaresque characters traveling in flight. Ellison aimed for the operatic and the Faulknerian. In doodlings beside some of his notes, he would draw American flags. He wanted the novel to be visionary.

Callahan had gone to lengths to explain his intentions in the book's afterword: The full work, as it stood in all its perplexing glory, would follow. "It was as if they didn't read it," he says now. "Book reviewers, as well. People came after me after *Juneteenth* was published, saying I should have just left the work alone, saying Callahan did Ellison a disservice. Well, in that regard it was Ralph who taught me how to deal with it. He taught me how to be a man. He taught me you have to have a tough skin to be in this business."

He also taught Callahan not to let go of something prematurely. Callahan remembers Bellow talking about 200 pages of manuscript Ellison had shown him. Bellow loved it, gushed over it, told Ellison it was as good -- "if not better," says Callahan -- than *Invisible Man*. "He told Ralph it was marvelous stuff," says Callahan.

But Ellison just smiled and thanked his friend and quietly deemed that no, it wasn't, that those 200 pages needed more work, more revision and maybe even more work after that.

Perhaps in his lifetime Ellison had few friends as close to him as the critic and author Albert Murray. They overlapped as students at Tuskegee Institute, though Murray didn't meet Ellison until 1942 in Manhattan. Over the years, they dined together, exchanged letters, discussed family matters -- and, of course, that polar bear on Ellison's back, the second novel. Murray is 91. He has long lived in Harlem. He says Ellison had somehow persuaded his closest friends not to be concerned about the pace of his writing, that worrying about a deadline was pedestrian, given that he was trying to create something large and enduring: art.

"Friends of Ralph's -- and the critics -- were talking about publication and money in commercial terms," Murray says. "But Ralph was thinking about understanding human beings, the human condition. Ralph was like a painter. He'd need to go back and look at his work over and over. Of course, doing that, it becomes hard to satisfy yourself." He goes on: "The critics have one perception of literary things, a literary life. Writers have different perceptions. Who am I to have said how many times he should or shouldn't have rewritten certain chapters? It was a matter of him having a lot to say. He was dealing with a lot of heavyweight stuff with a certain level of sophistication and profundity. Well, you have to do it the way you do it. Creativity is not manufacturing."

In the Ellison mirror, too, says Murray, was the cascading reception heaped upon *Invisible Man*. "He was challenged by what he had done."

In 1994, shortly before he died, Ellison was still talking optimistically about finishing the novel. He told the *New Yorker*, "There will be something very soon." But he also revealed his inner struggle. "Letting go of the book is difficult, because I'm so uncertain," he was quoted as saying. "I want it to be of quality . . . When you are younger, you are so eager to be published. I am eager to publish this book." Now that Callahan was responsible for all those pages, he, too, was eager. But, like his mentor, he wanted it to be of quality. The three years that Callahan imagined it would take to produce the most complete version of the novel that he would title, *Three Days Before the Shooting*, came and went. Then another three years, and another three years. To help him move the project along, Callahan had drawn in one of his students, a young scholar-in-training on the Lewis & Clark campus named Adam Bradley. There were not many black students at Lewis & Clark; Callahan seemed to know all by name. He had no idea how much Bradley's background echoed the major themes of Ellison's work, all those questions of uncertain paternity and racial knotting up that has so haunted and identified America.

JANE LOUISE BRADLEY MET JIMMY LEE TERRY IN LOS ANGELES IN THE MID-1970s. She was white, he was black. Falling in love is falling in love. He didn't want children, though. When she became pregnant, the waters roiled. Long silences ensued. The single mother returned to Salt Lake City, her home town, for the child's birth. It was a boy, Adam, and Bradley moved back to Los Angeles with him. Being a painter, she liked L.A., liked being near the Pacific Ocean.

In first grade, a teacher told Bradley that Adam was nice, a child with a sweet disposition -- but that he couldn't read. Bradley was shocked. And she didn't like the tone in the teacher's voice: It had that edge of defeatism in it, as if the child were doomed. So she scooped up Adam and returned to Salt Lake City.

Jane Louise Bradley's mother, Jane Frances Bradley, had begun her own life on the mean side of the racial divide while growing up in Washington. "She came from a narrow-minded family," says the daughter, Jane Louise. But Jane Frances married Iver Bradley, a semiprofessional basketball player who had befriended black ballplayers and who would teach his wife about tolerance. Iver would not allow epithets to fly from the mouth of anyone in a home where he put food on the table.

Jane Frances became a teacher. "She was educated enough to get away from racism," says Jane Louise. Then Jane Frances became an American Civil Liberties Union official in Utah.

When Jane Louise told her mother that her child had been declared nearly illiterate, her mother told her it was nonsense. Jane Frances took the boy into her own arms. And over the next nine years, she home-schooled him.

"She taught me reading and writing," says Adam. "She taught me how to read poetry by introducing me to the Romantic poets and Shakespeare. She'd have me go outside and look at airplanes in the sky and write about the clouds of smoke up there."

His skin, nearly yellow, wasn't white. At a distance, his color didn't stand out. But up close, on the streets of Salt Lake City, it did.

Jane Louise wanted her son to realize he had black blood. They joined the NAACP. She turned her son on to jazz, gave him books written by black authors and by whites who understood racial America. "I gave him *Soul on Ice*," she says, referring to Eldridge Cleaver's book -- considered incendiary by many -- about black-white relations.

In ninth grade, Adam entered an almost all-white public high school. "Adam kept to himself," his mother says. "He'd wake up at 5 in the morning and type out his school notes. He probably doesn't want me saying this, but he really didn't have a social life. At least not until he went to college."

Somewhere out there lurked black America for Adam Bradley; lurked Ellison's Negro America. Somewhere out there, a famous writer was working hard and righteously in New York City against his own impossibly high standards on his new novel.

Jane Louise's boy got himself admitted to Lewis & Clark in 1992. You have to be able to read pretty well to get admitted to Lewis & Clark. There would, however, be no mother-dad weekends for Bradley on the Lewis & Clark campus. He had no memory of meeting his father and no idea of his whereabouts. And sometimes curiosity about the man came rolling in on him. Like fog.

IN THE BEGINNING, THE ELLISON PAPERS WERE MERE DRUDGE WORK, ADAM BRADLEY SAYS. That blizzard of manuscript pages, copying and collating. Everything had to be read, reread, filed. Bradley felt that he and Callahan -- as they looked around the large table on campus where materials were laid out -- were staring at a literary jigsaw puzzle.

Callahan noticed Bradley's discipline. On Friday evenings, as Callahan watched other students galloping off campus to party, Bradley would be hunched over Ellison. Callahan gained confidence in the student. Bradley's responsibilities grew. Now he reempted boxes, this time looking through what he had first taken to be irrelevant -- backs of envelopes, telephone bills. He realized that Ellison had jotted notes everywhere, so he gathered them all up and studied them like an archaeologist.

That kind of deductive mind-set led to another realization. From the beginning, Callahan and Bradley had been staring at three main forms of Ellison material: the handwritten pages, the pages produced on a typewriter and more than 80 floppy disks. The computer material struck Callahan as bewildering. Bradley, then 19, raised in a computer era, was fascinated by it.

Immediately he wanted to find the make of Ellison's first computer. It was something called an Osborne 1. Ellison bought it in 1982. It weighed about 25 pounds. Bradley searched throughout the country for someone who might still have one, the better to understand how using it may have effected Ellison's writing. Finally, he found a science fiction writer in Canada who still used that model. "He said it was the closest thing to actual writing by hand," explains Bradley.

Callahan had long been mystified by something they discovered going through the endless files of Ellison's work. Scenes written to near perfection in the '50s and '60s would be revisited, and

rewritten, 25 years later. If only Ellison had just gone forward instead of obsessing about sections that had already been polished, Callahan reasoned, "I believe he could have finished the novel in the 1970s. It's really sad."

But Bradley began to think he knew the answer: Ellison -- who had a lifelong fascination with technology and compulsively took apart radios and put them back together -- became seduced by the new machine, by the way he could move paragraphs up and down the screen, insert new words and delete old ones instantaneously. As he transferred his earlier work to the new medium, the words exploded. The shifting and shaping of his second novel became a new kind of mania. Bradley went back over disks containing certain scenes, spreading out the printouts again and even painstakingly color-coding them in comparison with scenes that had been written on a manual typewriter.

In 1960, Ellison wrote: "Three days before the shooting a chartered planeload of Southern Negroes swooped down upon the District of Columbia and attempted to see the Senator."

In 1972, Ellison revisited that sentence and wrote: "Two days before the shooting a chartered planeload of Southern Negroes swooped down upon the District of Columbia and attempted to see the Senator."

In 1993 -- a year before his death -- Ellison, still not content with the texture and shape of the sentence, revisited it again, this time on his computer. The result was considerably more expansive: "Two days before the bewildering incident a chartered plane-load of those who at that time were politely identified as Southern 'Negroes' swooped down upon Washington's National Airport and disembarked in a confusion of paper bags, suitcases, and picnic baskets."

As Ellison's computer use progressed, nearly every paragraph and page underwent a similar inflation. At one point, Ellison was working with three computers. He seemed a man dizzied by technology, a NASA operator in the control room thrilled by the machinery who has lost sight of the mission, of the rockets aloft.

In Ellison's case, of course, it wasn't a rocket's trajectory he lost track of, but his book's.

Bradley says the character of Alonzo Hickman, the jazzman turned preacher, is much fuller on the computer than in the typed manuscript. "He emerges as the governing conscience of the book on the computer," says Bradley. "Hickman really takes over when Ellison is writing in the '80s and '90s."

Callahan was stunned and delighted with Bradley's discoveries. "It's clear," says Callahan, "that the computer changed Ellison's habits. It may have contributed to his difficulties to finish the book. You can play that [rewriting] game on the computer, but not the typewriter."

It could go on forever, but Ellison could not. That was the crucial and grave mystery: how Ellison viewed time. It seemed not to bother him that his novel was taking so long. The historical touchstones of a century -- civil rights, Vietnam, Watergate -- zipped by in a flash compared with the eternal drift of his accumulating manuscript.

"Ellison," says Bradley, "was building a house, and there was rain falling through the roof. He didn't want to fix the roof in a normal way. He wanted to attend to a lot of other smaller details,"



such as the rewriting of scenes, the fuller shaping of characters. Bradley goes on: "By attending to those smaller details, it stopped him from making the novel whole."

He was a man drowning in his own words.

Another mystery for Bradley involved the pre-computer chronology. Absent any directions from Ellison, Bradley and Callahan had to decide which versions, and which notes, were the most recent and superseded the others. "There were hundreds, thousands, of pages not dated," says Bradley. "The only thing we had to go on was the color of paper he wrote on at a certain time and the typeface he used at a certain time."

If he found a letter that had been written in 1957 with a certain typeface, Bradley would pull out stacks of paper with that typeface and conclude Ellison was at least working during the period of ownership of that particular typewriter. It was not an exact science, but, he says, it was the best proposition he could work from.

Bradley says that Ellison wrote enough words "for 10 novels." But Ellison hardly seemed to be measuring volume. The sword that he lay against was one of exactitude, flawlessness, grandness. The man in the apartment on Riverside Drive in Manhattan wrote as the leaves were falling, the snow was piling up, the wind was blowing, inflation was rising, night was falling, friends were dying. "We're not talking a Walter Mosley book, where it wraps up nice and pretty at the end," says Bradley of *Three Days*. "But readers will find something here that will blow their minds." And soon, they'll have a chance to see for themselves. The complete work, co-edited by Callahan and Bradley, will be published early next year by Modern Library. The page count has not been finalized.

It is an eagerly anticipated work. Ellison scholars who have gotten word of the publication are excited. "We rarely get to see all of the practice that leads to the game-winning shot. What we see is the outcome, and that robs us of all that went into it," says Lucas Morel, associate professor of politics at Washington and Lee University, who has taught about Ellison and befriended Bradley. "I'm fascinated about the work that goes into that which produces genius." RALPH ELLISON WAS A WRITER, WHO WAS A NEGRO, WHO WAS A BLACK MAN, WHOSE FATHER DIED IN HIS YOUTH. Which haunted him.

Adam Bradley was a student, who became a scholar, a half-white and half-black man, whose father abandoned him in his youth. Which haunted him.

Bradley, now 33, completed graduate school at Harvard, earning a doctorate in literature in 2003. He continued to carry his Ellison research with him on his laptop. He studied the Ellison materials while traveling around Rome and London, while vacationing in Rio de Janeiro. He has walked the streets of Washington, envisioning where Ellison's "Negroes" and his U.S. senator might have walked. For years, in a real sense, he lived inside Ellison's grand unfinished novel, an experience all the more engulfing because the novel wasn't just a story about race and paternity to him, but because race and paternity could not have been more personal. The more he read into the pages -- about Bliss, a man of "indeterminate race" who never knew his father -- the more Bradley thought of his own father.

It was his pain being rubbed by Ellison's pain.

At Lewis & Clark, Bradley wrote a paper about his father, Jimmy Lee Terry, and Ralph Ellison -- or at least the ghost of Jimmy Lee and how that ghost tugged at him as the leaves were falling and snow was piling high through the years. He is shy about showing the paper all these years later, belittling it even. But it is a heartbreakingly revealing piece of work for anyone to have written, much less a college undergraduate. The young Bradley wrote: "For my father did not die, but willed to leave. And because he is black, my mother white, and I am somewhere in between, I have guarded his image as a complex source of my identity. As the years went by, he lost his flesh and blood, and became an incongruous combination of devilish thief and godlike creator of my race, my face. Are you my God? Yet, somewhere in the images of my father, and in Ellison's search for identity that began with his father, there is something invaluable for my own search for identity. I imagine my father is Hickman and I am Bliss . . ."

The following exchange takes place in Ellison's second novel, and when Bradley came across it, it stopped him cold:

Bliss: "So are you my father?"

Hickman: "What?"

Bliss: "Are you my father?"

Hickman: "That's what I thought you said. But Bliss how could I be, black as I am?"

Bradley couldn't stop thinking of his attempt, a few years earlier, to contact his father. He had gotten hold of a California phone number. The conversation was stilted and awkward. Jimmy Lee Terry even uttered something about doubting paternity.

"It was very painful for Adam," Callahan says.

In 2003, Bradley was interviewing for a position with Claremont McKenna College in Claremont, Calif. He carried his Ellison research with him. (In recent years, he has spent long bouts at the Library of Congress, where a trove of Ellison papers are stored.) Not long after Bradley arrived in Claremont, he got into his car. He had an address in hand, which he had tracked down. He drove in the direction of Encino, in search of Jimmy Lee Terry.

As he rolled down the street, he started squinting at house numbers, slowing. His chest tightened when he came upon the house. It was quiet, he remembers. He parked and got out of his car. He walked up to the house. Then the quiet was broken. "I just heard a German shepherd, barking and barking." He twisted on his heels; the barking continued. "So I left."

He was driving, he didn't know where, very slowly. It was as if a gator were around his ankle, pulling him back to that street, that house. He turned the car around.

He found himself at the front door, again. "I looked into the house," he says. "And I saw a man standing there. A shadow. I waited. I heard a side door outside. So I go around the side of the house. I saw a man. I said, 'Are you Jim Terry?' He said, 'Yes.' I said, 'I'm Adam Bradley.'"

It was awkward, he says, standing there, a couple yards between them.

Terry invited him inside. The dog stopped barking.

And for hours, two men talked. Two men, father and son. Then they went out to get something to eat. Terry had a lot of questions: about Bradley's wife, Anna, about Harvard, about his career. And he had some answers, too: He had worked many years in an administrative capacity with the Screen Actors Guild and was married. Also, he had cancer.

He asked Bradley to come back. And Bradley did, many times, over a period of two years. There they'd be, at some nice California restaurant, chowing down, across the divide, across the years. At Terry's funeral in 2005, Jimmy Lee's sisters hugged Bradley. They wouldn't let him go. They told him he had family in California; they told him their home was his home; their eyes welled up. During the funeral, dozens told Bradley that his father had been one of the most generous people they'd ever met. He loved hearing those words. People whom Bradley -- now an assistant professor of literature at Claremont -- had never laid eyes on saying such beautiful and sweet things about his father.

Sitting there, alongside the man in the coffin, he thought of Ellison. "Ellison helped me to see that all of us are flawed," he says.

ANY GREAT WRITER FACES DEMONS: ARTISTIC ROADBLOCKS, PERFORMANCE ANXIETIES, the jazz vibrations suddenly pitching so low that silence seems to be taking the place of music. Judged by production, Ellison faced them more than most: one novel during his lifetime, then the light recedes.

But what of the cache of manuscripts? So much of it was beautiful, but Ellison was that creature who didn't depend on the judgment of others. He kept his own time clock. He wrote and wrote and listened to Louis Armstrong blowing "Stardust."

"This is where Ellison will triumph," Bradley says of the forthcoming Ellison work.

He is standing in the Washington sunshine. He has just finished lunch. Earlier, he was inside the Library of Congress, wrapping up some final touches on the Ellison work. He is the boy who became the man who found the ghost.

Who found Jimmy Lee Terry.

Who found Ralph Waldo Ellison.

Bradley says he hopes he and Anna have children soon. He wants to shoot basketball with them and listen to music with them. He wants to tell them about Iver, his grandfather, who shot hoops with those Negro basketball players a long time ago and learned so much from them. He wants to tell them about the afternoon when a man came around the side of a house in Encino, how his lost father was lost no longer. And he wants to tell them about Ralph Ellison, who fought like a hero to get his battle of a second novel finished.

The great writer -- who loved words, who loved his nation -- had passed away listening to Louis Armstrong in that Manhattan apartment. Fanny, exhausted, red-eyed, was right there, caressing him. Ellison died with willpower still, as his unpublished words were destined to be borne aloft -- as if by his own stardust.

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