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Ralph Ellison and a literary “ancestor”: Dostoevsky

by Joseph Frank

On Ralph Ellison and Fyodor Dostoevsky.

When I was invited not long ago to contribute to a volume of essays honoring the achievements of Ralph Ellison, I very much wanted to add my voice to the tributes being assembled for an old friend and a writer of major stature. But I hesitated at first because, in the years since *Invisible Man* had been published, I had lost touch with the new wave of Afro-American literature in which Ellison now takes so prominent a place. But then, remembering his love for, and familiarity with, the writings of Dostoevsky, it occurred to me that I could perhaps combine my knowledge of the Russian author with the desire publicly to express all my admiration of Ellison’s achievement. With this idea in mind, I began to re-read his book, and was delighted to discover (or rediscover what had probably been forgotten) that my choice of subject was not as arbitrary as I had feared it might be. For in focusing on the relation between...

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