

## Invisible Fathers: Investigating Percival Everett's "Lower Frequencies"

Clément-Alexandre ULFF  
Université de Versailles-Saint-Quentin

The unnamed "invisible" narrator of Ralph Ellison's masterpiece *Invisible Man* (1952) famously concludes with these lines: "Being invisible and without substance, a disembodied voice, as it were, what else could I do? What else but try to tell you what was really happening when your eyes were looking through? And it is this which frightens me: Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (Ellison 572) What if we understood this invisible man as an ancestor, a long-gone father figure to many characters in Percival Everett's novels? Transposed as the haunting voice of fathers, this "disembodied voice" on "lower frequencies" becomes crucial to lost sons and daughters. In this paper, I propose to study the idiosyncratic characterization of father figures in Percival Everett's *Zulus* (1990), *erasure* (2001), and *Assumption* (2011), from the angle of a long-gone father's message.

From *Suder* (1983), the author's first novel, to *Percival Everett* by Virgin Russell (2013), fatherhood has arguably played a central role in the author's oeuvre. Surprisingly, it has been virtually absent from any criticism on the author. We shall try to find patterns in Everett's characterization of fathers and establish an intimate literary kinship with Ellison's masterpiece. A recurrent trope of the oxymoronic invisible presence of the father can be found in Everett's *Zulus* (1990), *erasure* (2001), and *Assumption* (2011). Far from the sentimentalizing American platitude about relatives "living on within our heart", the orphaned characters' connections with their fathers in those novels are based on a more ironic and problematic, albeit spiritual bond. Whether it be Alice Achitophel in *Zulus*, Thelonius Ellison in *Erasure* or Ogden Walker in *Assumption*, extreme solitude and alienation seem to be compensated by a nearly supernatural access to or reception of the late father's voice.

In *Zulus*, the main character struggles in a radioactive and alienating world in which her bond to her late father is perhaps the only thing she can still hold on to. This creates a poetics of remembrance in direct contrast with the bleak narrative of Alice's journey—in anything but a wonderland. In *Assumption*, from page one, the father's "disembodied voice" (to use Ellison's narrator's expression) resounds throughout the vastness of the desert in which Ogden tries to find solace: "His father spoke to him, a dead voice telling Ogden that he was a fool, a fool to love the desert, a fool to have left school, a fool to have joined the army, a fool to have no answers, and a fool to expect answers to questions he was foolish enough to ask." (*Assumption*, 1) With originality, Ogden's doubts are further reinforced by an unresolved *lack* of conflict, instilling in the son after his father's death a feeling of moral ambiguity and disrupted identity. In *erasure*, Thelonius Ellison's plight seems to be articulated around a patrimonial conflict vis-à-vis opposing demands and allegiances, in relation to dead—but all too present—fathers and father figures.

### What would father do? (Not) Moving on in *Zulus*.

*Zulus* follows the life and eerie adventures of Alice Achitophel, a morbidly obese woman who is apparently the last woman not to have been made sterile by a devastating chemical and nuclear war, followed by the mysterious government's decision to sterilize all women. Working for this same government in a dreadfully boring clerk job, and keeping to herself as much as she can, Alice never really garners the reader's empathy. This problem is deliberately perpetuated by the fact that the narrator avoids referring to Alice Achitophel with the expected pronoun 'she' or with her first name only, which leads to paragraphs of a treacherously over-simple style starting with: "Alice Achitophel" followed by predicate. This creates for the reader a strange feeling of artificially preserved emotional distance from the protagonist (a sterilization of sorts). In variance with the "Alice Achitophel" beginning is the very tersely descriptive "the fat woman".

Indeed, the narrator mostly focuses on Alice's body, bodily functions, and Alice's very awkward relation to her body. Most of the narrator's description of both the characters' physical appearance and the environment they inhabit elicits the reader's disgust because the descriptions focus on dirt, repulsion, imbalance and barrenness. Living beings and inanimate matter alike are sad, depressed and depressing.

A sense of distress reigns when the narrator acknowledges that the cycle of life has been broken:

There were no children now, a sadness that most had learned to live with, a sadness which had been initially swallowed by outrage and disbelief. Now the outrage had faded into slogans and the routines of comics on the network entertainment show, and the sadness remained like an insidious muck floating along the banks of a pond, one believing that something in the pond needed the scum for food and camouflage. (*Zulus*, 9)

Within the very first pages of the novel, Alice is the victim of a rape. The rapist is described as awkward, ridiculous and stinky. Alice becomes pregnant and starts worrying about the fate of her yet unborn baby, if her pregnancy were to be discovered by her Orwellian government:

[S]he perhaps would have to find an underground doctor, one of the rebels in the mountains, to deliver her baby by caesarean section. [...] She began to grow fearful, wondering how she could hide the child, this special child, this Messiah child, yes, say it, just say it, the Messiah child, a little girl, the only success in a failed planet. From the seed of trash would come the promise of light, from the body of the forgotten would come the light and God had nothing to do with it, nothing. God must have died in the war, Alice Achitophel thought, or have been fired, [...] in a world festering with incurable diseases and pathetically empty of resources. (17)

But if the world of *Zulus* is a world in which the symbolical order generated by society has been overturned after the catastrophe—which makes some desperate and confused people in the novel change religion three times a week, and opens the door to various cults and sects—Alice's life is not entirely without spirituality, for she maintains a special connection with her dead father. Her father committed suicide before the end of the war, but is still very much present in her thoughts—a theme of the suicide parent escaping external annihilation by self-termination that runs through Everett's fiction and appears prominently in *erasure*.

*Zulus'* first reference to Alice's father reads: "Alice Achitophel went down into her basement and found the tools her father had used before he shot himself just before the conclusion of the war. She looked at the ratchet set, lifted the handle and felt its weight, the smell of it reminding her of her father." (29) The same investment of objects as

spiritual reminders of the dead father (here, the tools) appears in *erasure* for example with the protagonist's father's typewriter on which the protagonist types an ironic ghetto novel, as we shall see later. Alice's seeing the tools instantly reminds her of her father's voice and her father's message: "He had always kept them spotless, saying, 'A man with filthy tools is hardly a man at all.'" (29) Alice later uses her father's tools to fell the ugly and interfering radio antenna—a "filthy tool", as it were—of her obnoxiously conformist and sanctimonious neighbour, Mrs. Landers. This act of rebellion and vandalism triggers her being pursued by the police, and her having to run away with the help of the rebels, a group of people who refuse to follow the government's arbitrary, hyper-bureaucratic decisions.

Throughout the novel, Alice repeatedly leans on the memory of her invisible yet all too present father, and his speech, thus warding off feelings of intense confusion and loneliness:

Alice Achitophel wondered if any of the older men felt as her father had, betrayed by time, let down by their dreams, wondered if they wanted to put bullets in their brains or whether they considered this their punishment for having failed the planet. Then she remembered some words of her father: 'Humans are not likely to feel anything, much less responsible.' He had said it after a clerk at Spigot-World had refused to replace a faulty fixture, but the words had stayed with her nonetheless. (43)

Ambiguously, this quite depressing view of life is something that *helps* Alice. Throughout her journey, her father's memory is always present, like a beacon for a character who recalls what her father said, until the very last pages of the novel, in which Alice recollects what follows:

People used to talk about escaping into space. Her father had talked about it so much, but space never opened up to them, to anyone, just hovered over there eternally, fat and teasing. Her father had said that humans had tried to abuse space and that the earth had whispered a warning upward. 'Humans are rapists,' her father had said more than once. (241)

Thus, Alice's father seems to be gifted with a vision which shall unfortunately come true. And just like the books he had left after his death, he "filled [Alice's] brain with twisted and macabre possibilities." (70) The possibility of self-termination makes a definitive thematic return at the end of the novel when Alice realizes that humans have irrevocably damaged the planet eco-system and made human survival impossible. In a post-apocalyptic setting, she decides—or does she?—to release the "Agent", a chemical which only kills humans and spares the environment and animals, now free to slowly regenerate without the destructive and parasitic presence of greedy, warmongering humans incapable of reaching balance. Everett himself explains he prefers a bold, original reading, identifying hope in that macabre ending: "Alice wanders but she finds her way to the event that will end it all. A happy ending, maybe: you get rid of the pestilence. I'm an environmentalist! (*laughs*). I remember working the end of the novel. It is an environmentalist statement."<sup>1</sup>

### **Voices from the desert: *Assumption*.**

Percival Everett's New Mexico detective novel, *Assumption*, features patterns in the characterization of fathers that actually recall *Zulus*. Structurally a very sneaky

<sup>1</sup> Sylvie Bauer, « Percival Everett: An Abecedary. », *Transatlantica* n°1 | 2013 [Web], 27 March 2014. <<http://transatlantica.revues.org/6369>>

narrative, *Assumption* follows the investigations of Ogden Walker, an African-American Deputy Sheriff in the very uneventful Plata county—uneventful at least until a murder forces Ogden out of his bouts of brooding introspection and solitary fly-fishing.

In the novel, which plays on the established literary conventions of the detective novel the better to give them a twist, Ogden is a bachelor whose few "love interests" turn out to be manipulating women involved in Ogden's investigations in ways he had not fathomed—until he does and is further estranged from the doomed realities of dating. The only consistent female presence is in fact that of his mother Eva.

The novel hinges around the repeated motif of relatives, their mysterious disappearance, and the sudden appearance of people *pretending* to be those missing relatives, thus faking their identities. The deception of masks is also something that will affect the protagonist himself, in an ultimate narrative "turn of the screw" (to use the title of Henry James's novella). The novel also interrogates the authenticity and resilience of ties in an American society whose ravaged Dream seems a distant utopia: gun violence, prostitution, hard-drugs and con-men seem to drag the reader of *Assumption* into a whirlwind of desolation.

The novel opens with Ogden pitching his tent in the New Mexico desert, reaching higher ground so as to avoid flash flooding. What may be Ogden's idea of a spiritual retreat, the desert, is yet associated with a sense of inhospitality and threat. Although Ogden seems to be looking for a connection with his late father (which he does reach), he is frustrated to see that the desert he used to experience with his father has nothing to do with the desert he now experiences alone:

He stared up at the new moon and the clouds that threatened to obscure it and tried to recall the last time he had been able to sleep in the desert. The desert he and his father had shared was not like this one. The high desert was not so severe, was not so frightening, relentless, was harsh only for its lack of water. (3)

Perhaps because of the current severity of the desert, the father's nearly supernatural message that Ogden receives in that opening page is very much aligned with the place where it is received. It is a message that, like the desert, can be described as severe and relentless:

His father spoke to him, a dead voice telling Ogden he was a fool, a fool to love the desert, a fool to have left school, a fool to have joined the army, a fool to have no answers, and a fool to expect answers to questions he was foolish enough to ask. And his father would have called him a fool for working as a deputy in that hick-full, redneck county. (3)

In that last sentence, separated from the previous by a full stop, it is no longer unclear where the message comes from: when Ogden imagines his father criticizing his job, it is not a dead voice addressing the son sharply, it is the son appending the father's mystical address with his own bit—an addition marked with the conjecture modal "would". Of course, on a purely rational level, even "His father spoke to him" is but a projection of a son missing his father. But it is of importance to discriminate between the way the beginning is introduced, and the way the second part of the father's message is introduced.

This issue of the message—the un-decidability of the message, its lack of clarity and the pressing, heightened sense of moral confusion that ensues—is confirmed in the opening of the third chapter, when the narrator develops the theme of Ogden's confusion:

Ogden's father would never have approved of his son's job with the sheriff's office. He wouldn't have said it outright, that had never been his way except in Ogden's dreams, but he would have made it clear that he believed Ogden to somehow be a traitor. A traitor to what would have remained forever unclear, but it would have been tinged with the language of race and social indignation. (13)

The idea of a confusing, sometimes unmanageable patrimony—not just in the material sense, but also of course cultural and moral patrimony—is a recurrent theme in Everett's fiction, and figures prominently in *erasure*. But if one goes much further back in time, this issue of a being "a traitor to what would have remained forever unclear, [...] tinged with the language of race and social indignation" (*Assumption*, 13) appears in Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*, when the narrator is confronted to his grandfather's cryptic deathbed message. And much like the very unsettling dreams the invisible man has, Ogden is also confused by dreams which, because they are unclear and induce some sense of brain-racking guilt, he cannot simply sweep away.

A very old black man, the grandfather character in *Invisible Man* was a slave who, after being freed, had lived through segregation and enjoyed, or seemed to enjoy, a meek life devoid of any bitterness, until his death in the 1920s. The narrator describes him in these terms: "He was an odd old guy, my grandfather, and it is said I take after him. It was he who caused the trouble." (Ellison, 15).

When, at the beginning of Ellison's bildungsroman, the narrator's grandfather is about to die, he delivers a message to his son, and demands that the message be communicated to all the descendants. However quiet the freed slave's life may have seemed to his family, on his deathbed, the message goes like this: "Son, after I'm gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth" (15)

The request finds its negative image in *Assumption* when the son, Ogden, reflects on his father's opinion: "Ogden never did much like the uniform [of the Sheriff]. He disliked it as much as he had disliked the one he'd worn in the army. His father had been alive for that uniform. It wasn't that the man hated the idea of his son being a soldier; he hated the idea of his being an American soldier. He'd moved to New Mexico from Maryland because there were fewer people and so, necessarily, fewer white people." (13)

If the father's message in *Assumption* (or at least what Ogden believes his father's message to be) is as haunting and confusing as the grandfather's message in *Invisble Man*, the two messages disagree. The grandfather urges to "live with your head in the lion's mouth and let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open", that is to say he recommends the use of strategic subterfuge, whereas the father's message in *Assumption* seems to feature the very opposite stance, an escape from the "White" world. What remains, in both Ellison and Everett, however, is the effect of the father's message. This effect is best described by the retrospective narrator in *Invisible Man*, and applies equally well to *Zulus*, *erasure* and *Assumption*: "It had a tremendous effect upon me [...]. I could never be sure of what he meant. [...] It became a constant puzzle which lay unanswered at the back of my mind. [...] It was as though I was carrying out his advice in spite of myself. [...] The old man's words were like a curse." (16-17)

In *Assumption*, the grown-up son's doubts are reiterated throughout the novel, and he never really finds the answer he is looking for. The son's complex mode of questioning is further disrupted by his biracial identity: "[Ogden's father] hated white

people, but not enough to refrain from marrying one, Ogden's mother. Ogden's mother never flinched and always laughed off her husband's tirades as silly, which they no doubt were, but it was hard for a son to think that his father hated half of him." (13)

Even the son's relationship with the desert is a wedge between him and his father's memory, because Ogden's relationship with his native environment is informed by, and parts from, his father's:

[Ogden] looked out his window at the landscape. He deeply loved the place, the mountains, the desert, the rivers, the fish, but he felt like a failure remaining there. It had been different for this father, he thought. The man had come there from someplace and carved out a life. He'd worked house construction and driven cats and plows in the winter and seemed happy with that, while instilling in his son the notion that there was more out there. (37)

This idea of legacy, of the enduring, almost radioactive effect of the father's expectation on the child, is obviously not something uncommon in life, but it is particularly developed as a theme in Everett's fiction, and in *Zulus*, *erasure*, and *Assumption* especially. But if it has to be noted that the fathers' bonds with their sons and daughters in these novels are based on a problematic understanding of patrimony and moral responsibility, one should also note—and this is something that appears clearly in *Assumption*—that that bond the child retains is also something very positive: it has its benefits. For example in *Assumption*, at a moment when Ogden is trying to recharge his batteries, so to say, a very different aspect of his relationship with his late father is revealed. Ogden prepares some bait to go fishing, and he recalls how his father had taught him that: "As he dubbed a mixture of yellow [...] and red [...] onto the olive thread he recalled his father. He no longer felt sad when he thought of him. In fact, thinking of him helped Ogden relax. They had been close, for some reason not having the conflicts his friends had had with their fathers." (49) Not having the conflicts *then*, but certainly having them now, as has been seen, after Ogden's father's death.

### **Conflicted patrimonies: *erasure*.**

A similar conflict arises after the suicide of the protagonist's father in Everett's novel *erasure*. In this novel, the protagonist, who bears the very evocative name of Thelonius Ellison, is an African-American author of "widely unread experimental novels and stories. Considered dense and often inaccessible." (*erasure*, 225) Monk, as Thelonius is nicknamed, tries to create art without sacrificing his vision and his ethics as a writer in a book industry oriented by the value of money and profit. He is thoroughly irritated to witness the commercial success of yet another "ghetto novel" by a certain Juanita Mae Jenkins, a middle-class African-American opportunist whose only real experience of the ghetto spans one week when she was 12.

Jenkins's novel features a dull, overused plot, heavy references to sexuality, vulgarity and violence, perpetuating racist, monolithic stereotypes about Blacks (especially poor, urban Blacks) while pretending to offer the reader a portrait of the real and singular "black experience" in America. Literary critics shower praise upon Jenkins and her novel: "a masterpiece of African American literature [...] the experience that is and can only be Black America" (39). By hailing Jenkins's urban fiction as a masterpiece, the critic betrays a legacy of more than two centuries of African-American literature.

But for Monk, things get really tough when he is faced with the disintegration of his family ties. Monk's sister Lisa, a gynaecologist in an abortion clinic offering its services to young, out-of-wedlock pregnant women, is assassinated by an anti-abortion fanatic. Monk's mother develops Alzheimer's disease, and Monk's brother Bill is so busy collecting the pieces of his broken life after his divorce that Monk is alone in trying to keep the ship afloat and to steer his family out their crisis. The events prompt Monk to leave his artistic and intellectual retreat, placing him in the position of a *paterfamilias*, literally the father of the family.

To make matters worse, Monk is haunted by memories of his childhood, flashbacks chiefly featuring his father Ben, who committed suicide seven years before the beginning of the action of the novel. Family is indeed an essential theme in *erasure*. If the book cover for the original edition announces a "novel of family, race and publishing in America", out of those three themes the critical focus has mostly dealt with race and publishing, neglecting the family theme. Yet in the novel, two narratives constitute the plot's matrix: on the one hand, Monk's life as a writer and a struggling artist, and on the other hand Monk's life as the member of a struggling family. Chapter after chapter, the partition between these two narratives gets thinner, until they join in a tragic and confusing finale. Alternating an adult present and flashbacks in childhood, these family sections of the novel confer to it a palette of dark hues and emotions such as melancholy, wistfulness and solitude.

From the very first chapter, Monk evokes the mostly unspoken resentment among the Ellison siblings. Lisa, Bill and Monk form a triangle of jealousies, misunderstandings, and complex ties. At the heart of this, according to Monk, is a problem with language: sharing the same blood, but not the same modes of communication. "[A]nyone who speaks to family members knows that sharing a language does not mean you share the rules governing the use of that language. No matter what is said, something else is meant." (32) For instance, near the end of a phone conversation with his sister Lisa, Monk is annoyed by his sister's terse mode of communication: "She hung up before I could say Goodbye or I'll be ready or Don't bother, just go to hell" (4). Between Monk and his brother, communication is even worse:

I watched [Bill's] lips and I realized I understood nothing he was saying. His language was not mine. His language possessed an adverbial and interrogative geometry that I could not comprehend. I could see the shapes of his meaning, even hear that his words meant something, but I had no idea as to the substance of his meaning. I nodded. (213)

It is by focusing on Monk's childhood flashbacks that one can trace the source of the family's conflicts and troubles: the parents are shown to bear large responsibility (/ a sense of responsibility involves the parents), especially the father, this mysterious patriarch named Ben Ellison—a man described as brilliant and taciturn. But if Ben says little, this little goes a long way. During a stroll with his son Monk, Ben tells him: "You're not like your brother and sister. [...] You have a special mind. The way you see things. If I had the patience [...], I know you'd make me a smarter man." (9) This paternal validation is confirmed when Monk is twelve years old, and his father utters the following prophecy, perhaps mostly directed at his favourite, the youngest sibling: "Lisa, you and Bill will be doctors. But Monk will be an artist." (143) The father's prophecy (or is it a command?) is fulfilled. Bill becomes a surgeon, Lisa becomes a gynaecologist, and Monk becomes a writer, deploying the father's literary sensibilities.

What ultimately seals the three siblings' jealousy and resentment is the unexpected death of their father Ben: "four heart attacks he would suffer before just out and shooting himself one unseasonably warm February evening." (10) Monk comments the event very little, and does not elaborate on its aftermath, but one can read between the lines the emotional earthquake brought into the family.

In the novel, descriptions of Ben alive portray him as a strong and demanding father figure. When Ben's own father dies, Ben delivers a speech for dinner in which he re-asserts his atheism and the necessity to confront death rationally, in a deconstruction of potentially racist dark/light symbolisms: "I ask that grief not push us to the irrational belief in some god. We do not believe that Father has gone on to the good light. He told me often he was not afraid of the dark. Neither am I. And neither are you." (196) And probably because, after four heart attacks, he feels like his days are counted, Ben decides to take his own life.

Monk's grief becomes pathological and the father's expectations on his son come back with a vengeance. Monk feels that he cannot betray the memory of his father, the person who pushed him to become what he is, the father who gave him the confidence to dedicate himself to his vocation:

For my father, the road had to wind uphill both ways and be as difficult as possible. Sadly, this was the sensibility he instilled in me when I set myself the task of writing fiction. It wasn't until I brought him a story that was purposefully confusing and obfuscating that he seemed at all impressed and pleased. (32)

In *erasure*, it is evident that Monk pays a very high price for this poisonous legacy from the father, this obsessive quest and taste for difficulty, in the same way that the narrator in *Invisible Man* both pays a price for his grandfather's deathbed warning.

Monk sometimes wishes his identity were different. Yet at the same time, he could not have it any other way: what the father gives as a legacy is thus a very alienating and taxing personality Monk cloaks himself in. Moreover, the late father keeps coming back in the narrative, for example when Monk discovers old letters which prove his father had had an affair with a white English nurse, and that Ben is also the father of an illegitimate daughter. Monk's quest to find this new sibling only leads to more confusion and disappointment.

By taking his own life, Ben robs his son of the possibility to rebel and commit a *symbolical* Oedipal murder, therefore moving on in his life. Maybe as an indirect vengeance on the father who abandoned the ship and what is more, after having sabotaged it, and in order to mock the literature in which Monk has to compete with in bookstores, Monk decides to write a parody of a ghetto novel. It is precisely a type of novel the father would have loathed. Yet Monk does not write it just *any* typewriter, for he uses his father's old manual typewriter:

I went to what had been my father's study, and perhaps still was his study but now it was where I worked. I sat and stared at Juanita Mae Jenkins' face on Time magazine [...] and I remembered passages of *Native Son* and *The Color Purple* and *Amos and Andy* and my hands began to shake [...] I put a page in my father's old manual typewriter. I wrote this novel, a book on which I knew I could never put my name" (61-62).

Monk cannot put his own last name on this shameful production, a name which, in more ways than one, is also the *Nom du père*<sup>2</sup>, Ben Ellison, and the name of the author

<sup>2</sup> I am here hinting at to Jacques Lacan's "Name-of-the-Father", his theory of the three paternal functions (the symbolic, the imaginary and the real father). Monk authoring a ghetto novel violates his father's *law*.

of *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, is it not enough of a betrayal of the father's implicit prohibition to write the exact opposite of what his father has called for, on his father's most symbolic object, his typewriter?

As a conclusion, I would like to open this reflexion onto a different aspect of fatherhood in Percival Everett's fiction, which calls for further inquiry: critical interest may be focused on another distinctive—father—"figure in the carpet" that emerges in *Suder* (1983), *Cutting Lisa* (1986), *God's Country* (1994) *Wounded* (2005), *The Water Cure* (2007) and *I Am Not Sidney Poitier* (2009). This "figure in the carpet" is one of very unlikely fathers who, despite their better judgment and legal or moral considerations, end up being cast in either comic or tragic paternal roles, accomplishing the job that no one else can or will do. In Everett's farcical Western *God's Country* (1994), African-American cowboy Bubba eventually becomes the protector of a sprightly white girl, an improbable destiny that significantly echoes that of *Suder* in the eponymous novel, and deconstructs racist assumptions about black paternity skills, as well as the invisibility of positive black father figures in both mainstream and minority literatures. The racial scheme is reversed in Everett's *I Am Not Sidney Poitier* (2009), where a wacky white Ted Turner becomes the tutor and mentor of a black child, named Not Sidney. The appalling but perhaps necessary retributive actions of the fathers and father figures are much more tragic in *Cutting Lisa*, *The Water Cure* and *Wounded*, three novels ending in bloodshed, and showing father figures beyond redemption, yet caught in anything but clearly delineated moral dilemmas.

## Works Cited

- BAUER, Sylvie. « Percival Everett: An Abecedary. », *Transatlantica* n°1 | 2013 [Web], 27 March 2014. <<http://transatlantica.revues.org/6369>>
- ELLISON, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. New York, The Modern Library, [1952]1992.
- EVERETT, Percival. *Zulus*. Sag Harbor, NY, Permanent Press, 1990.
- . *erasure*. Hanover, NH, University Press of New England, 2001.
- . *Assumption: a novel*. Minneapolis, MN, Graywolf Press, 2011.

---

<sup>3</sup> But of course *erasure* is also a narrative structured around a problematic relationship with another kind of fathers, not biological, but literary "fathers" or ancestors. The authors Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright are so important in the novel (mainly because the novel is based on a pastiche and re-writing of Richard Wright's *Native Son*, pitted against the revered heritage of Ellison's *Invisible Man*) that they deserve a separate analysis. Such analyses have been offered by French Everett scholars and specialists such as Anne-Laure Tissut, Michel Feith, Françoise Sammarcelli, and Sylvie Bauer, to name but a few.