

PAL: Perspectives in American Literature - A Research and Reference Guide - An Ongoing Project

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Chapter 10: Ralph Waldo Ellison (1914-1994)

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Primary Works

Invisible Man, 1952; *Shadow and Act*, 1964; *Invisible Man*, 1982; *Going to the Territory*, 1986; *Juneteenth*, 1999 (Random House).

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A Student Project by Lena Perez

Ralph Waldo Ellison was born on March 1, 1914 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Ellisons' child was not stifled with racism. Oklahoma was not affected as much by the racial tension that appeared so much in the south. As he grew older Ellison want to become a "Reniassance man". He wanted to have knowledge in all areas. He wanted to be a whole man by knowing alot about everything.

Ellison attended Tuskegee Institution in Alabama for the years (1933-1936). He then headed north to New York study sculpture. In New York he met a man by the name of Richard Wright. Wright encouraged Ellsion to write book reviews. After writing book reviews he soon started writing essays and short stories. Ellsion became the editor of the Negro Quarterly . When serving in the Merchant Marines during World War II he first began thinking about writing a novel.

Ellsion started his novel The Invisble Man in 1945 and it was then published in 1952. The Invisble Man was Ellsions greated work. Besides The Invisble Man he collected two dozen of his essays and put them in a book called Shadow and Act which was published in 1964. He also published another book of essays and short stories in 1986 called Going to the Territory. Some of his nost anthologized stories "Flying Home", "King of the Bingo Game", and "A Coupla Scalped". Ellison started a forth book but never finished. The Juneteenth was going to a trilogy. It was later published.

Ralph Ellison became such a recognized writer he was often asked t o lecture and teach at colleges and universities around the country, some include; Yale, Columbia, Rutgers, and Bard. He was not only an a accomplished writer and a professor but a man who was proficient as a jazz trumpeter. He was also a free lance photographer and a furniture maker. Ellison was also an expert at electronic equipment.

Ralph Ellsion died on April 16, 1994 of cancer. Ellsions' work is stilled used today in many college campus' around the country. Ellsions' work may still be used but not all of his peers feel the same way about his work. Most of his peers believed in his writing ability. Saul Bellows called Ellison's work "superb" (Dictionary of Literature, p.139) . Like Bellows the Saturday Review saw Invisble Man as a "a great Negro Novel" but " a work of art any contemporary writer coud point wo with pride" (Dictionary of Literature, p.139). Not all of Ellison's peers have agreed with him and attacked him. Some critics believe that Ellison is too conservative. Ernest Kaiser a black critic called Ellison an "Established writer, an Unle Tom" (Dictionary of Literature, p.139).

Ellison's writing could be called autobiographical. His writings are about his life experieces. His first novel The Inivble Man was thought to be about him because there were some many similarties between the main character and himself.

The Inivble Man brought Ellison many awards. He Recieved a Rosenwald Fellowship from 1945-1947. In 1953 he won the National Book Award, Russwurm Award, and the National Newspaper Publishers' Award. He recieved another fellowship to the National American Academy of Arts and Letters in Rome from 1955-1957. In 1969 he won the Medal of Freedom. He was made a Chevalier de l'Ordes des Artes et Lettres in 1970. He was elected to many offices also, he was elected the vice- president of the American P.E.N. in 1964 and The National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1967. He was trustee of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and on the board of advisors of the Institute of Jazz Studies.

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http://www. kirojasto.sci.fi/rellison.htm.

Dictionary of Literature, Vol. 2, pg. 136-140

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