

The Invisible Man's Welsh Routes: Ralph Ellison in 1940s Wales

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As a soldier in the American army, the African American writer Ralph Ellison docked in Swansea. Ellison wrote three short stories based on his experiences in Wales - 'In a Strange Country' (published in *Flying Home*), 'A Storm of Blizzard Proportions' and 'The Red Cross At Morriston, S.W.' (unpublished). These constitute a remarkable meditation on questions of race, nationhood and identity - the very themes that would later form the basis for his celebrated novel *The Invisible Man*. Ellison encountered a people with diverse loyalties in Wales, as one of his characters notes in hearing a Welsh choir singing *Land of My Fathers*, *The Internationale* and *God Save the King* in sequence. It is when the choir sing *The Star Spangled Banner* that the African American narrator feels himself to be an American for the first time, and the experience of exile and of contact with a people struggling with their own form of double-consciousness inform the narrator's own developing sense of identity. I will discuss these stories as representing a significant moment in the cultural history of both Wales and Afro-America, and will supplement my discussion with reference to Ellison's critical writings which have a direct bearing on contemporary debates on culture, literature and identity.