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REVIEW: Romancing God: Evangelical Women and Inspirational Fiction

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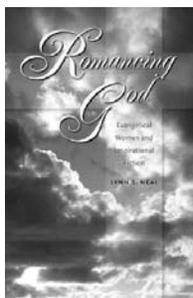
mile stretch of the main branch of Peachtree Creek starting at Piedmont Road and arriving eventually where the creek flows into the Chattahoochee River, once the site of the Creek Indian village Standing Peachtree. As he journeys down the creek, we learn about the history of the watershed, the development and overdevelopment of the land around it, and how this overdevelopment has led to problems of flooding and contamination of the creek by sewage and ground water runoff. The reader also learns about the history of many of the people who came and settled near the creek and helped to establish the city of Atlanta. The troubled history of Atlanta's sewer system is covered as it is intimately intertwined with the history of the watershed. *Peachtree Creek* is a cautionary tale of a beautiful natural resource barely surviving within an urban jungle. The author offers hope that while the watershed will never be returned to its original pristine state before man intervened, it may, with work and dedication, be brought up to a healthier quality for future generations. The text is interspersed with archival photographs and photographs taken by the author. Also included is a chronology of the watershed and a selected bibliography. Enthusiastically recommended for all libraries. ►►

— Reviewed by **Kim Tomblin**
Forsyth County Public Library

Romancing God: Evangelical Women and Inspirational Fiction

by Lynn S. Neal (University of North Carolina Press, 2006; ISBN 978-0-8078-5670-3, \$18.95).

Religious romance fiction follows the familiar formulaic pattern of secular romance novels but is differentiated by the addition of a third central character to the love relationship — God. In her work *Romancing God*, Lynn Neal notes that the formula in successful evangelical romance is “boy plus girl plus conservative Protestant Christianity equals a happy marriage.” In her examination of the role that evangelical romance fiction plays in the devotional life of Christian women, the author interviewed a number of avid readers and romance authors to explore the draw of inspirational fiction. Highlighting the devotional aspect of leisure reading in the lives of the readers, the interviews also bring to light the many ways in which these novels both underscore and undermine the readers' religious faith. The author discusses the issues of race, sexuality and paternalism and the ways in which female readers use the novels to create a definition of appropriate femininity within the context of their faith. Filling a gap in scholarship on the topic, Neal provides an unbiased and well-researched look at a literary genre that holds a



significant market share in book sales. Her interpretation places the genre in the context of both the romance and evangelical Christian aesthetics. The book contains a clear historiography of romance and religious fiction, several examples of illustrated book covers and a comprehensive bibliography. Recommended for academic libraries or libraries with a collections focus on religious studies or literary criticism. ►►

— Reviewed by **Kate Farley**
Armstrong Atlantic State University

Ralph Ellison: Emergence of Genius by Lawrence Jackson

(University of Georgia Press, 2007; ISBN 0-8203-2993-2, \$22.99).

In 2001, Lawrence Jackson published a book that would be the first to examine the early life of the writer, critic and former musician Ralph Waldo Ellison. In 2007, Jackson went one step further and created an exhaustively researched book that provides readers with a well-rounded view of the author's early life. Tracing his life from poverty to the publishing of his famed novel, *Invisible Man*, Jackson weaves together a comprehensive list of resources including paper collections, interviews with Ellison's family, friends and associates, as well as numerous articles and monographs to lyrically paint a re-creation of the life that Ellison lived. Born in Oklahoma, Ellison was given his name by his father, who named his son after the American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson. The book chronicles Ellison's childhood from birth in Oklahoma to his years studying music in the music school at Tuskegee where, after reading T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," he experienced the life-altering moment that led to a life of writing. Weeks later, Ellison authored his first creative work. Although music remained dear to his heart, writing was the vehicle through which Ellison would become a notable figure in American history. The book is neatly divided into chapters covering distinctive time periods in the author's life, including his involvement in the Socialist Left. In *Ralph Ellison*, the author has produced an engaging history of America starring a literary icon. Readers learn about the history of Ellison's family, institutions where he studied, organizations of which he was a member and about influential individuals among Black America's literary elite, such as Langston Hughes and Richard Wright. Scholars and researchers interested in learning more about Ralph Ellison will not find a more intimate look into Ellison's life. Highly recommended for medium to large public libraries and all academic libraries. ►►

— Reviewed by **Tamika Maddox Strong**
DeKalb County Public Library

