



## Book Reviews



Nancy Ashley

### Programs available now:

**Elvis, Gladys, and the Colonel:** Using two stories behind the King, Elvis and Gladys by Elaine Dundy and Elvis and the Colonel by Dirk Vellenga, see a determined lad change the world with his mastery of four genres of music. Elvis is in the Hall of Fame for Rock 'n Roll, Country Music, Gospel, and Rockabilly. "Elvis is the greatest cultural force in the twentieth century," commented Leonard Bernstein, composer and conductor. Hear excerpts from his musical performances.

**Elizabeth Spencer in Landscapes of the Heart and "The Light in the Piazza":**

In her heart-warming memoir we meet the wit, sly observation, love of literature, and passion for life of ES. She takes her place among the distinguished generation of Southern writers of the twentieth century, giving us romance in Florence, Italy, in "The Light in the Piazza." This novella has been made into a movie and was a hit musical on Broadway in 2005. The grandson of Richard Rodgers composed the music for "Light."

**Edith Wharton Defines and Defies the Gilded Age:** Using two great biographies, \_

Edith Wharton: a biography by R.W. B. Lewis (Pulitzer Prize winner) and Edith Wharton by Hermione Lee (definitive biography). Meet a precocious, independent, intellectual lady who loved houses, gardens, books, and writing more than the confinements of marriage and social prattle. From age 38 she became a prolific writer, producing a book each year. She lived the last 24 years of her life in France and is buried at Versailles.

**Martha and George Washington:** Meet a youthful and winsome Martha in Patricia Brady's biography Martha Washington: an American Life, who made a home for the "Father" of our country. She was his soulmate and comfort at home and during the eight hard years of wartime winters. From a new religious biography, George Washington's God by Michael and Jana Novak, hear in Washington's own words insights into his views on God, Providence, religious freedom, virtue, and concerns of faith and character.

**Walker Percy: A Pilgrim in the Ruins** by Jay Tolson is a biography that shows Percy as he came to view life as a journey, on his "search for meaning." Educated to be a medical doctor, he became a writer instead. He diagnoses social ills and thinks he knows the cure. He converted to Catholicism as an adult and wrote six novels and numerous philosophical essays that explore 20th century man's search for meaning. He won the National Book Award for The Moviegoer, a quintessential New Orleans novel, where Binx Bolling is the anti-hero. Percy is from an Old South family but writes for the New South with some degree of humor.

**William Faulkner: One Matchless Time** is a new literary biography by Jay Parini who has been a professor at Dartmouth and Middlebury Colleges for the past 38 years teaching Faulkner. This biography is written for the general reader and interfaces Faulkner's biography with his novels written from 1929 to 1942. He described this productive time in his writing life as "one matchless time." Faulkner took "his little postage stamp of native soil in north Mississippi and created his mythological Yoknapatawpha County and the city of Jefferson, using a local geography as a backdrop for universal themes. Faulkner said the only thing worth writing about was "the human heart in conflict with itself." Storyline is given from The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying.

**Oprah Winfrey: The Early and Unknown Life** using The Uncommon Wisdom of Oprah, edited by Bill Adler and Oprah Speaks by Janet Lowe. A difficult childhood was useful in developing her character and her love of excellence. Her purpose in life was learned at an early age four at her grandmother's knee: "God put the strong on this earth to help the weak." Oprah is a cultural icon of great influence and has exported American culture around the world with her syndicated talk show that emphasizes making daily life better for you and me. Recently she has become controversial with some of her spiritual recommendations.

**Tom: the Unknown Tennessee Williams by Lyle Leverich** is the definitive biography of the first 33 years of Thomas Lanier Williams' life. He grew up more as a minister's son in his grandfather Walter Dakin's Episcopalian rectory in Mississippi than the son of his aristocratic father who was a traveling salesman. When his father moved the family to St. Louis, he forever looked back to his early years in the comforts of the Old South. His plays are primarily set in the South with characters who are diminished by the modern world. Excerpts from "The Glass Menagerie" show his genius in creating art from his own life.

**Leontyne Price: A Musical Journey to Freedom** using Leontyne Price: Journey to Freedom by Joseph McNair. She was the first black diva of opera who sang in every major opera house in the world during her 25-year opera career. Her voice has a broad range and a spiritual quality that has not been surpassed. Hear her singing a patriotic song, followed by her personal story, her stardom in "Aida," which became her signature opera, and closing with the aria from "Il Trovatore" that won her a 42-minute standing ovation at the Met in 1961. Retiring from opera in 1985, she continued doing recitals and master classes until 2000. She was presented the Algor Meadows Award at SMU in 2000.

**Eudora Welty: Her Family, Her Fiction, and Her Photography** using One Writer's Beginnings by Eudora Welty and Eudora Welty: a biography by Suzanne Marrs. Welty would have been 100 in 2009! Celebrate her great short stories which create an emotional wallop when her memorable characters cross their circumstances. She is funny! Currently, the Welty House and Garden is open at 1119 Pinehurst, Jackson, MS.

**Willie Morris: All-American Good Old Boy and Scholar** using North Toward Home by Willie Morris and New York Days, both autobiographical. "My Dog Skip," a 1999 movie is a close replica of Willie's childhood in Yazoo City, Mississippi. Willie loved American history and was a Rhodes scholar after editing "The Daily Texan," student newspaper at the Univ. of TX. At age 32, he was the youngest editor of the oldest literary magazine in the country, Harper's Magazine. He wrote 19 books in all.

#### **Biographical material:**

**Native Mississippian, born and reared in Grenada, MS.  
Married to Bill Ashley, International pilot/Check Airman, American Airlines  
Two married daughters; two grandchildren  
B.A. degree, Mississippi University for Women; M.A.T., Vanderbilt Univ.  
32 years of church leadership/teaching  
Book Club programs presented since 2000**

**Member: Colonial Dames XVII C; DAR, Highland Park; Southern Memorial Assoc.; Advisory comm. for the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, Univ. of MS; Eudora Welty Foundation Board; Mortar Board Alumnae; Marianne Scruggs Garden Club; Dallas Woman's Club**

[nashley1@sbcglobal.net](mailto:nashley1@sbcglobal.net)