
Lionel Trilling did not want to be remembered this way, Diana Trilling claims, and, thanks to her memoir, he won't be any longer. The Lionel Trilling who appears here is a sympathetic, troubled, and complex man who was prone to bouts of depression and harbored a secret contempt for "seriousness and responsibility." Like her husband, Diana herself hid "private timidities" beneath a confident and magisterial public persona.

In this intimate, plainspoken memoir, Diana unflinchingly records the Trillings' illnesses and phobias, as well as their faithful drinking habits (they were "never wholly sober" in each other's company before their marriage), chronic indebtedness (which lasted until 1970), and interminable adventures in psychoanalysis (three of her seven analysts died while they were treating her). The book has much wit, and little mirth. "For more than a decade," she writes, "Lionel and I squandered life not in pleasure but in fearfulness."

Considering their low opinion of happiness, it appears their marriage was quite happy. Diana lent her husband confidence and improved his writing. Yet even as Lionel encouraged her to develop an independent public voice, she never doubted that her "first responsibility" was to the home. It was an unequal partnership, but a partnership all the same.

As a female writer starting out in the 1940s, Diana overcame many obstacles, not the least of them a Radcliffe education designed to teach diligent wives how to recite "favorite poems of Shelley or Keats" while "drying our dishes." When she began to contribute book reviews to *The Nation*, Lionel's friends insisted she write under her maiden name so as not to embarrass him in public. She refused, and her writing career quickly acquired a momentum of its own. Her first reviews skewered the "little man" heroes of left-wing novelists and challenged their faulty assumption that "capitalism was responsible for all the woes of mankind, from stuttering to sexual impotence." When Lionel Trilling wrote of the "dark and bloody crossroads" where literature and politics meet, he may have had his wife's work in mind. Prone to sudden panics and fears, though, she pursued a life of diffidence and caution: "I could more readily challenge Sidney Hook in political debate than defend my place in line at a supermarket."

Diana Trilling concludes her memoir in 1950, the year her husband established his reputation with the publication of *The Liberal Imagination*. In the preface to that book, he wrote that the "job of criticism" is to "recall liberalism to its essential imagination of variousness and possibility, which implies the awareness of complexity and difficulty." These words were Trilling's touchstones, his credo, and he did not choose them hastily.

Some of the exquisitely crafted ambivalences of *The Liberal Imagination* were experienced, his wife's memoir shows, as messy and intractable contradictions. The man who always said, "It's more complicated . . ." was quite complicated himself. Among other things, Diana Trilling's book will forever silence those critics who charge that her husband led a life of airy abstraction. She herself is proof to the contrary.

MARK MORRIS. *By Joan Acocella. Farrar, Straus. 287 pp. \$27.50*

By the early 1980s American modern dance had strayed far from its originators' intentions. Isadora Duncan's turn-of-the-century Grecian improvisations and Martha Graham's midcentury expressionistic dramas had given way during the '60s and '70s to conceptualist choreographers' theater pieces: concerts staged on spiral staircases; musicless pieces in which the dancers spoke; whole evenings in which "real" people—nondancers—stooped, sat, and ran. Although modern dance had always puzzled the uninitiated, it had become too self-absorbed to notice that the audience was losing interest.

But dance watchers stirred in 1984, when a 27-year-old choreographer named Mark Morris presented three new works at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Morris was not "in-your-face," not even avant-garde; he eschewed the use of theatrical tricks to create visual interest. As dance critic Joan Acocella writes in her new biography, "His work is not a Happening. . . . There is no effort to break down the fourth wall." Morris's goal, instead, is to communicate feeling, logic, and emotion through dance steps. As he puts it, "My philosophy of dance? I make it up, and you watch it. End of philosophy."

Now 36 and still actively choreographing—

indeed, perhaps just entering his artistic prime—Morris may seem not quite ready for the confining entombment of a biography. Yet given that Acocella credits Morris with rescuing American modern dance from minimalist torpor, an exploration of his methods may not be premature.

An exceptionally talented dancer himself—though tall and beefy, he achieves a simultaneous playfulness and seriousness, massiveness and grace—Morris soon became frustrated with the artifice of ballet (“[I] got tired of pretending to be a straight guy in love with a ballerina”) and the shortsightedness of modern dance. In 1980 he formed his own company and set to creating dances that unabashedly hearken back to the work of modern dance’s founders: the naturalism of Duncan, the exoticism of Ruth St. Denis, the lonely inner landscapes of Graham, the exaltation of Doris Humphrey, the heroism of José Limón.

Yet Morris’s choreography is distinguished from his predecessors’ by three traits that are strongly associated with ballet and usually considered anathema to modern. First, he is not afraid to make dances that tell stories. His inspirations range from pop novelist Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* to the essays of Roland Barthes. Second, Morris understands music as well as he understands dance. Although he favors baroque choral music, his tastes range from Vivaldi to the Violent Femmes. Third, Morris favors “classical” structure over ostensible (or real) randomness. He’s a sucker for symmetry and doesn’t worry, like the generation of choreographers before him, about coordinating his dance steps note by note with the music.

The source of Morris’s appeal—itself subject to wide debate in the dance world—lies in his synthesis of existing steps, and in his accessibility, whether that accessibility is provided by a tragic story line, a witty costume, or a gesture that means what it looks like.

Unfortunately, *Mark Morris* as book is less accessible than Mark Morris as choreographer. Sometimes simplistically descriptive, at others the book presumes the reader’s familiarity with ballet terminology. Still, the choreographer emerges as feverishly creative, exuberantly ambitious, and disarmingly vulnerable. It’s too soon to tell if Mark Morris is the savior of American modern dance, but Acocella’s biography offers an early glimpse of what may be a resuscitation in progress.

WILLIAM FAULKNER AND SOUTHERN HISTORY. By Joel Williamson. Oxford Univ. Press. 509 pp. \$35

“History,” says the young Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce’s epic *Ulysses*, “is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.” One can also imagine William Faulkner uttering such a lament about his troubled cultural and historical heritage. Unlike Dedalus, Faulkner was neither an escapist—he rarely left his native Mississippi—nor an idealist. Indeed, Faulkner’s love for and loyalty to the American South, the region he wrote about so obsessively, was tempered by a strong sense of its failings: its ignorance, poverty, and racism. Faulkner’s literature, writes Williamson, was “an exhaustive critique of Southern Society and . . . its failure to bring the human values inherent in man, evident in the natural setting, into the world.”

In his new biography, Williamson, a professor of history at the University of North Carolina, examines four generations of Faulkner’s predecessors in Mississippi—William himself does not appear until page 141—and through these lives constructs a detailed historical image of “the world which constructed William Faulkner . . . the universe of race, class, sex and violence, of family, clan and community.” Inquiring into whether Faulkner’s great-grandfather, Colonel William C. Falkner, maintained a “shadow family” (an unacknowledged marriage to and children with a female slave), Williamson provides an enlivening historical explanation of miscegenation in the South, a central theme in Faulkner’s literature.

Although Joseph Blotner’s two-volume, 2,000-page biography of Faulkner, published in 1974 and revised in 1984, remains the most comprehensive biographical source available, Williamson’s tenacious sleuthing yields an occasional nugget of fresh information for the serious Faulkner scholar. He debunks many commonly held myths about Colonel Falkner: for instance, that he was a great slaveholding planter and that his wife Lizzie saved his life when she was only nine years old. Yet Williamson indulges in a bit of mythmaking himself. One theory regarding grandfather Charlie Butler’s abrupt departure—that he ran off with an “octaroon” (someone one-