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 oneeighth black) and sired "perhaps three or four children who would have been William Faulkner's cousins"—is so speculative that it is written under the qualifying section title "Maybe."

Moreover, in his determination to find Faulkner's one and only literary inspiration in the culture of the American South, Williamson does not leave open the possibility that Faulkner was greatly influenced by other sources, notably his artistic contemporaries—Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Joyce. And Williamson's interpretation of Faulkner's literary texts often passes from the banal to the trite, with insights such as "buildings stood for artificial, man-made institutions and the 'outdoors' for the natural order."

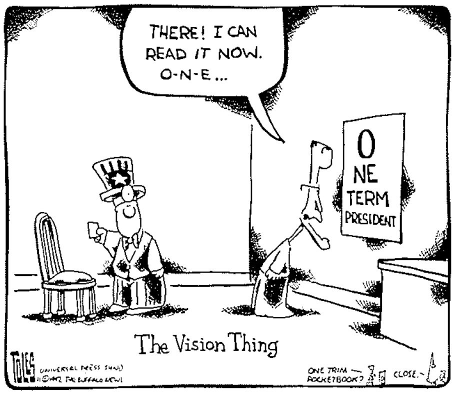
Nevertheless, the book is a valuable demonstration of what the cultural historian can contribute to literary interpretation. While William Faulkner never read books about Southern history, he once noted that "he was just saturated with it." So too was his art.

Contemporary Affairs

WHITE HOUSE DAZE: The Unmaking of Domestic Policy in the Bush Years. *By Charles Kolb. Free Press. 387 pp. $22.95*
HELL OF A RIDE: Backstage at the White House Follies 1989–1993. *By John Podhoretz. Simon & Schuster. 249 pp. $21*

As George Bush's presidency recedes into political history, two young Reaganites who served under Bush have stepped forward to offer their spin on the rise and fall of an administration. Both books have a great deal in common: Each scolds Bush for not being more like Reagan, each praises the same heroes and fingers the same villains, and each falls under the category of political memoir that Peggy Noonan has called "If Only They'd Listened to Me, the Fools!"

In *White House Daze*, Charles Kolb, formerly a domestic policy adviser, engagingly describes a White House gripped by inactivity and arrogance. Since Bush himself never bothered to define a "vision thing" for domestic policy, his senior underlings emphasized process over ideology. Believing in little beyond themselves, they fought hard for nothing of importance. "The agenda was a nonagenda," writes Kolb.


THERE! I CAN READ IT NOW. O-N-E...
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ONE TRIM — POCKETBOOK?
CLOSE.

Kolb lodges the standard Republican complaint against Bush: He wrecked his presidency because he broke his promise. The "no new taxes" pledge was just campaign rhetoric. Bush might have recovered from this blunder after the Persian Gulf War by launching an attack on domestic problems with innovative proposals such as school choice and tort reform. But he decided to coast along on saved-up political capital. The enormous egos of Chief of Staff John Sununu and Budget Director Richard Darman only made matters worse, Kolb claims. Both men unfailingly blocked creative reform efforts.

The Bush administration's paralysis is on full display in Kolb's best chapter, which focuses on a single day, December 12, 1990. On that day, the administration had to confront three small crises: the poorly handled firing of Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos, former "drug czar" William Bennett's surprise refusal to assume command of the Republican National Committee, and education official Michael Williams's decision to ban funding for colleges and universities that administered or accepted race-based scholarships. To be sure, any administration would have had its hands full that Wednesday morning. But to a White House with no inner compass, the day's frenetic activity achieved an almost comic quality as the nation's leaders aimlessly mucked about with no sense of what they wanted to accomplish. As Kolb shows in great detail, almost every day was December 12.

John Podhoretz's *Hell of a Ride* offers much the same diagnosis. But while Kolb pays close attention to actual policy, Podhoretz, who worked in