

bivalent” or innately extralegal executive in Aristotle (or in medieval thinkers such as Aquinas, Dante, or Marsilius of Padua), claims that “a second remedy was first proposed by Machiavelli . . . This is to recognize openly the necessity of tyranny in the character of the prince, who initiates and innovates, even while he seeks democratic sanction for his actions so that he may seem merely to execute the people’s will.” This “modern doctrine of executive power” is, however, alien to the author of *The Prince* and *The Discourses*. Where the real man was concerned with achieving political stability in a world subjected to unstable fortune, Mansfield’s Machiavelli is primarily exercised by “the problem for which the modern notion of executive power is the solution”—namely, the difficulty of reasoning from generals to particulars in the application of law (a problem that bothered Kant and Condorcet far more than Machiavelli).

When Mansfield discusses Machiavelli’s views on dictatorship, his Machiavelli loses all resemblance to the historical one. “Machiavelli denies that dictatorial authority was harmful or that it was the cause that brought tyranny to Rome, as had been alleged.” By paraphrase and selective quotation, Mansfield makes it sound as though Machiavelli approves of dictatorship in general. In fact, in a passage that Mansfield curiously does not quote, Machiavelli argues that the specific Roman institution of dictatorship did not harm the Roman republic *only* because of the virtue of the Roman people, the “short duration of the dictatorship,” and—most important—because the Roman dictator’s “limited authority” permitted him to “do nothing to diminish the constitutional position of the government, as would have been the case if he could have taken away the authority vested in the senate or in the people, or have abolished the ancient institutions of the city and made new ones.” In other words, Machiavelli is making the very distinction Mansfield claims he does not make—between the temporary dictator, governed by law even in crisis, and the founder or reformer of a city, a genuinely despotic “prince” who creates or purges “modes and orders.”

Machiavelli goes on to argue that in emergencies government by a council,

not by a single man, is best. He also warns against giving either a single or a collective temporary dictator “power to make laws and in general to act as if they were the . . . people.” Long-term authority should not be given to any individual, even an elected executive, unless accompanied by “supervisors . . . appointed to see to it that they should not be able to abuse their authority.” So far from arguing that the executive is inherently or necessarily beyond the law, Machiavelli praises Roman dictators who “could not annul a decree of the senate, nor . . . make new laws,” and claims that “[n]o republic is ever perfect unless by its laws it has provided for all contingencies, and for every eventuality has provided a remedy and determined the method of applying it.”

Another of Mansfield’s claims, that Machiavelli “abandons all concern, vital in the Aristotelian tradition, for the distinction between the tyrant and the king who rules justly,” is equally groundless. In a chapter of *The Discourses* entitled “Those who set up a Tyranny are no less Blameworthy than are the Founders of a Republic or a Kingdom Praiseworthy,” Machiavelli argues that law-abiding kings and republican magistrates in life “rest secure and in death become renowned,” whereas tyrants in life “are in continual straits, and in death leave behind them an imperishable record of their infamy.” How can Mansfield, then, write that “Machiavelli thought his new doctrine would bring men more glory and security no matter what regime”? Because Mansfield’s doctrine of executive power, which he claims was passed on, with modifications, from Machiavelli to the American Founders by way of Hobbes, Locke, and Montesquieu, is not to be found in Machiavelli at all, the subsequent argument of the book collapses.

Mansfield ends *Taming the Prince* with a paean to the prince (his, not Machiavelli’s) untamed. “Periods of executive leadership such as the Reagan Revolution show what American government means,” writes Mansfield. “The Reagan Revolution . . . promised to produce a certain America, peopled by a certain kind of American with certain virtues—not just the same America better off or more secure.” This comes as news to many of

us who voted for Ronald Reagan, unaware that we were granting an “ambivalent,” that is, inherently lawless executive the authority to mold us into the American equivalent of the Soviet New Man. Aristotle, with his preference for divided power and the rule of law, “would not have approved the modern executive in whom one-man rule becomes actual and the rule of law comes to seem theoretical,” and Machiavelli, champion of senatorial oversight, would have been horrified by the lawlessness of Admiral Poindexter or Colonel North. But we should not worry, according to Mansfield, as long as the California actor or Texas oil man who happens to occupy the Oval Office has “the perfection of the soul” that is virtue. And besides, we do not need to worry about executive tyranny, since “while previous republics were fearful of great men, Americans are proud of their ‘great presidents.’”

Praise God we Americans can all sleep tight in our beds for evermore.

Michael Lind writes from Washington, DC.

The Unsovereign Artist

by Chilton Williamson, Jr.

William Faulkner:
American Writer

by Frederick R. Karl
New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson;
1,131 pp., \$37.50

A thousand-page book, like a thousand-foot ship, must not disappoint; unfortunately, Karl Frederick’s *William Faulkner* is the *QE II* of American literary biography. “This book attempts,” Professor Karl states in his foreword, “to integrate the latest in biographical information with Faulkner’s own large body of work in fiction and poetry.” He adds that, “It will not replace Joseph Blotner’s monumental two-volume biography of Faulkner, which is an altogether different kind of book,” but does not deign to mention the more recently published *William Faulkner: The Man and the Artist* (Harper & Row, 1987)

by Stephen B. Oates—an (atrocious) exercise in what its author described as “pure biography,” making use of “psychological insights” in order “to shape the whole of Faulkner’s life so as to suggest its essence.” Especially by comparison with Oates’s vulgarly pretentious aim, Professor Karl’s agenda may strike the sympathetic reader as a refreshingly straightforward alternative to Professor Blotner’s old-fashioned (impure?) biographical approach. In this frame of mind, it is possible to pass uncritically over Professor Karl’s subsequent words, when he says, “This study is in the deepest [!] sense a biography: not only a presentation of the relevant facts of the subject’s life, but an effort to understand and interpret that life psychologically, emotionally, and literally.” The word “biography,” apparently, has been purifying and deepening itself lately, to the point where—like the word “democracy”—it has become susceptible of personal definition. (Or perhaps it is simpler than that. “Well, how long was the *Mauretania*?” “790 feet.” “The *Acquitania*?” “901 feet.” “Well, let’s make this one a thousand feet and see what happens.” This from *The Queen Mary* by Neil Potter and Jack Frost.)

It is possible, I think, without signing away one’s life to the New Criticism, to agree with M.E. Bradford that a profound mystery exists between the life of the artist and the life of his art, the integrity of which needs to be respected for reasons going even beyond its inscrutability. That, on the theoretical level, is my primary complaint against *William Faulkner: American Writer*; on the practical level, there is the further problem that Professor Karl’s method of demonstrating the biographical wellsprings of literature re-

quires that he recapitulate the story line, and reintroduce the principal characters, of even the most minor of Faulkner’s works. To a reader no more than moderately familiar with the Faulkner corpus, the procedure is tedious in the extreme, and grows more so as the stack of turned pages mounts steadily beneath his passive left hand. William Faulkner himself explained his failure to read *Gone With the Wind* by insisting that no story requires a thousand pages for its telling; and though in refutation of his argument we have *War and Peace*, the simple fact is that Tolstoy—unlike Karl, who is a careless, imprecise, and often confusing writer—for the most part wrote good sentences. Even if we grant that the ship should be as long as it must be, the stipulation that the plates be cleanly riveted and that the lines draw the eye still obtains.

There are other problems with *William Faulkner: American Writer*, almost all of them subsumable under what has to be seen as the overarching one, which is Professor Karl’s completely uncritical enthusiasm for that artistic movement known as Modernism, itself the subject of an earlier and most interesting work (*Modern and Modernism: The Sovereignty of the Artist 1885-1925*, 1985) by the same author. While it is beyond question that the innovative, fundamentally subjective techniques of literary Modernism have produced what are—particularly by comparison with so much of the literary production of Postmodernism—masterpieces, it is certainly going too far to see in Modernism the scientifically certified apex of several millennia of literary evolution. Evelyn Waugh, for example, who set out quite deliberately in the opposite, “retrograde” direction, had artistically sound reasons for doing so, as George McCartney has demonstrated. Given his aesthetic formulation, Waugh was by no means philistine in regarding James Joyce—the Joyce who wrote *Ulysses* anyway—as “barmy”; nor is *The Sound and the Fury* at any level a novel superior to Waugh’s masterpiece, *A Handful of Dust*. As a book should be as long as it needs to be, so should it be written in the style its subject, material, and author require, the Modernist being simply one among many possible lying to hand.

Professor Karl, however, does not see it this way: for him, Modernism is the shining way, not capable of supercession until something still more innovative comes along. Thus he insists on regarding Faulkner as probably the greatest American novelist of the 20th century (as probably he was) because he adapted the techniques of European Modernism both to his native soil and his native talent. When, after *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), Faulkner by and large ceased to employ those innovations—and certainly to extend them—he entered upon what Karl can only see as a long period of gradual creative decline. That the later novels may in fact represent a falling-off of Faulkner’s talent is not the point; what is crucial is that Karl sees progressive innovation as a touchstone of great art, without seeming to consider that innovation may be unsuited to various literary subjects and materials, and to the voices that these generate. When after *Absalom!* Faulkner became, roughly speaking, a vadic poet of sorts, the voices and techniques that had been suitable to *The Sound and the Fury* became simply inapplicable to the work at hand. Whether or not the innovator in Faulkner was aware of that fact, the artist surely was.

The question of William Faulkner’s religious belief—or the want thereof—is a vexed one. Professor Karl is at pains to stress the “spiritual” aspect of Faulkner’s writing—Old Ben, The Wilderness, the paramount virtue of endurance—while at the same time downplaying his avoidance of doctrine, church, and formalized belief. Karl’s emphasis is consonant with his idea of “the sovereignty of the artist,” who becomes thereby a kind of priest, withholding to himself and kindred sophisticates the artistic vision that so often functions as the Modernist equivalent of the religious one. Here, however, Karl misreads his subject. Addressing a class at the University of Virginia in 1957, Faulkner remarked, “Why the Christian religion has never harmed me. I hope I have never harmed it. I have the sort of provincial Christian background which one takes for granted without thinking too much about it, probably. That I’m probably—within my own rights I’m a good Christian—whether it would please anybody else’s standard or not I don’t know.” Con-

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cerning his own standard, William Faulkner himself was clearly in some doubt; yet two facts are incontrovertible. The first is—Karl refers to it—that along with Shakespeare, the Old Testament was Faulkner's favorite reading matter, and that, as his fiction attests, he was well versed in it. The second is that Faulkner realized, ultimately, that art and the artist are *not* sovereign. What other, final, explanation is possible for his lifelong inclination to play every *other* role than that of the writer? This "imposter," as Professor Karl calls him, may have been such; but his impostures appear to have been prompted by genuine humility and self-knowledge, rather than their opposites. Faulkner, the consummate artist, knew just how unsovereign artists actually are. Like other major writers—one thinks of Hemingway, the big game hunter—he felt, at times, that an artist was among the most insignificant, if not actually contemptible, things to be. Like Tolstoy, he preferred very often to think of himself as a farmer instead.

In one respect—and one only—is the artist vassal, not suzerain, for Professor Karl; and that is in his relationship to progressive opinion. Throughout his text, Karl is at pains to Americanize Faulkner—which is to say, to transmute him from a white Mississippian of his time into an eccentric kindred spirit (but a kindred spirit all the same) of the (white) Northeastern liberal of Karl's contemporary milieu; when the portrait-frame, subjected to such unnatural pressures, begins to bend and warp (as it does whenever Faulkner's problematic attitudes toward the question of race arise), Karl simply apologizes for the discrepancy, and cites the fact that, after all, Faulkner was a white Mississippian, etc., etc. . . . How sad that a man who has spent years researching and writing a thousand-plus-page book about another man, of another place and time, should seem to consider his labors justified only to the extent that his subject's ideas concerning race, religion, women, and what we today call global democracy dovetail with the prevailing orthodoxy. Because, otherwise, why worry such old bones?

Chilton Williamson, Jr. is book editor of Chronicles.

Tugging the Leash

by J.O. Tate

Poodle Springs

by Raymond Chandler and

Robert E. Parker

New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons;
268 pp., \$18.95



Marlowe's back, and Parker's got him. Well he should. Parker knows every one of Chandler's quirks: he wrote part of his dissertation about Chandler twenty years ago. And then he started writing his Spenser books. (Where do you suppose he got the idea to name his private eye after a 16th-century English poet?) But Spenser is very East Coast—unlike Marlowe, the disillusioned voice of La-La Land.

There's no point in belaboring the "plot" or the action of *Poodle Springs*—there wasn't much point to that in Chandler's books, either, because readers followed Marlowe for the uneasy atmosphere and the snappy patter, not for the rhinestone ratiocination or even for what was going to happen next. Readers hung not on what Marlowe said but on how he said it; they turned the pages of the books because Raymond Chandler compelled them with what he called "magic" and "music."

Parker undoubtedly has some of that wise-cracking Marlovian magic. His ventriloquism is accomplished—he makes you want to turn the page for some more of this sort of stuff:

"Do detectives have fights, Mr. Marlowe?" she said.

"Sometimes," I said. "Usually we put the criminal in his place with a well-polished phrase."

"Are you carrying a gun?"

I shook my head. "I didn't know you'd be here," I said.

Sometimes, though, Parker misfires: "I was so far out on the limb now . . . that I felt like a coconut." That one doesn't fly because coconuts don't grow far out on limbs. On the whole, though, Parker maintains that certain Chandlerian strain:

For a change of pace I swiveled my chair around and stared out the window at Hollywood Boulevard for a while. The first

idea I had was that it was time to change the grease in the fryolator in the coffee shop downstairs.

Now that one was bottled in bond.

So never mind about the case Marlowe works on. The point is, he's married. Raymond Chandler himself wrote the first four chapters right before he died in 1959. Those four chapters are familiar to Chandlerians from *Raymond Chandler Speaking* (1962), and are here imaginatively continued by Parker, who's done his homework. He remembers that Marlowe met Linda Loring in *The Long Goodbye* (1954) while they were both drinking gimlets, so we have an authentic reprise of that potent cocktail. We have pornography, as in *The Big Sleep*, an allusion to the gambling ships of *Farewell, My Lovely*, a key photograph as in *The High Window*, a Santa Ana as in "Red Wind," a nostalgic reflection as in *The Little Sister*. This was Chandlertown in 1949:

I used to like this town. . . . A long time ago. There were trees along Wilshire Boulevard. Beverly Hills was a country town. Westwood was bare hills and lots offering at eleven hundred dollars and no takers. Hollywood was a bunch of frame houses on the interurban line. Los Angeles was just a big dry sunny place with ugly homes and no style, but goodhearted and peaceful. It had the climate they just yap about now. People used to sleep out on porches. Little groups who thought they were intellectual used to call it the Athens of America. It wasn't that, but it wasn't a neon-lighted slum either.

Parker's paraphrase, in 1989, goes like this:

It was one of those comfortable cool bungalows with big front porches that they used to build at about the time that L.A. was a sprawling comfortable place with a lot of sunshine and no smog. People used to sit on those porches in the evening and sip iced tea and watch the