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Lionel Trilling: Criticism and Politics (Book Review)

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Finally in setting forth a *theory of cure*, Hiltner is more concerned with direction than solutions. Adams thinks solely in terms of sanctification, i.e. a restored relationship to Christ. In the process Hiltner denies the biblical diagnosis of man's plight and Adams spiritualizes healing.

In his concluding observations Hielema acknowledges Hiltner's erudition and his "eye for the needs of man," but disapproves of his interpreting special revelation in the light of general revelation. Hielema applauds Adams' summons to return to the Bible, but deplores his tendency to absolutize his own insights.

As a reviewer, I have learned much from reading Hielema's dissertation. His analysis of the positions of Hiltner and Adams is keen and perceptive. Further, I am in basic agreement with his concluding evaluations.

However, as I finished reading this dissertation, I also had a feeling of disappointment. In the opening chapter Hielema states that the purpose of his work is to promote the search for "renewal" in counseling. While it may be claimed that much is implied in Hielema's critique of Adams and Hiltner, there is little that is explicitly stated to give us an idea of the desired nature and

direction of that search for renewal.

Further, when Hielema does offer a closing perspective for our "drive for renewal" (p. 262), he speaks of the importance of theology, i.e. of seeing pastoral theology in proper relationship to other theological studies, and of seeing theology in proper relationship to other scientific disciplines. (This is an emphasis made also in an earlier critique of Adams' position [pp. 223-226]). Admitting the importance of seeing theology in the context of its relationship to other sciences, is it not more important and basic for renewal, however, to gain a clearer understanding of the relationship of *Scripture* to pastoral theology, to theology in general, and to all scientific disciplines?

Finally, Hielema doesn't make clear if we should speak of pastoral or Christian Counseling. In any case, would it not be preferable to put this choice aside and simply speak of Christian pastoral counseling?

These criticisms must not be misunderstood, however. They are presented to help in the search for biblical renewal in counseling, a search in which Hielema has clearly and capably participated.

Lionel Trilling: Criticism and Politics, by William M. Chace. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1980. 200 pages. Reviewed by James Vanden Bosch, Assistant Professor of English.

An essay on Lionel Trilling which appeared two years after his death bore the title "The Elusive Trilling." The author of the essay, Mark Schechner, after characterizing Trilling with that adjective, demonstrated that his attempt to capture Trilling was no more successful than other attempts had been.* But his title, at least, is an accurate one: Trilling resists the kind of analysis which relies upon simplification, whether generous or reductive. And he remains elusive in spite of the notable presence of his work. Trilling influenced American intellectual life for several decades, beginning in the 1940s. His work is now being republished in a uniform edition by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, an edition which will include one or two volumes of essays not published since their initial appearance in reviews and journals. When this uniform edition is completed, we will have not only the Lionel Trilling of past significance, but also a Lionel Trilling made readily available to the present.

Nor is it the case that there has been little effort by critics to explain or account for Trilling. After his death in 1975, many critics and writers tried to sum up his career and to specify his significance. In the past three years, Robert Boyers, Tom

Samet, and Mark Schechner have written short studies of Trilling, although none of them is complete or fully satisfying. We now have William Chace's book, *Lionel Trilling: Criticism and Politics*, as the first full-length treatment of Trilling, but it, too, is characterized by its limitations.

For one thing, Chace does not always read Trilling accurately. This is not Chace's problem alone, since others have also been misled by Trilling's elaborately ironic prose. But Chace sometimes mistakes an ironic statement, or one meant to be attributed to someone other than Trilling, as a straightforward declaration of Trilling's personal position, as in his discussion of Trilling's remarks of 1952 in the "Our Country and Our Culture" symposium sponsored by *Partisan Review* (pp. 99-102). At other times, Chace misplaces the emphasis of a Trilling argument (especially in his analysis of Trilling's essay on James Joyce [pp. 140-145]), or confuses the meaning of key words ("complication" [p. 96], and "sincerity" in relationship to "authenticity" [pp. 146-151]).

It is part of Chace's strategy in this book to try to give the reader a sense of experiencing with Trilling some of his dramatic encounters with

ideas, issues, and other dilemmas. This is done in a number of ways. Chace has written large sections of this book in the present tense, and he has organized the book as a series of hypothetical crises of intellect and morality. And Chace has chosen to write this book in a grand rhetorical style which is doubtless an attempt to imitate what Chace calls Trilling's "stately lucubrations." But by whatever means, when Chace describes or summarizes Trilling's work, he removes what is essential to it (its wit, suppleness, and cogency) and turns Trilling's seriousness into lugubrious solemnity. Trilling had a weakness for the general topic and the broad generalization, but he more than compensated for this by his ability to generate interest in his engagement with a literary text or occasion. Chace's treatment magnifies Trilling's tendency toward the general and the vague, and allows for the false impression that Trilling was habitually sententious.

As distracting as these features are, the major problem with Chace's study is its limited focus, that is, its description of Trilling's work as being characterized by the relationship between criticism and politics. Although it is accurate to say that Trilling, in his work, was very much involved in issues that had a bearing on politics, it would be no less true to say that his criticism was involved in issues that had a bearing on education, or psychology, or intellectual history. But for Chace to assume that Trilling's work can best be comprehended within the limits indicated by the title of his book is to make an error which limits the usefulness of the study itself. Trilling's literary criticism involved itself with politics, education, psychology, and intellectual history because he was committed to secular matters generally, to the affairs of this time, of this place.

Any full treatment of Trilling's work will have to take account of a phrase borrowed from Hegel used frequently by Trilling from the late 1950s to the end of his career. This phrase is "the secularization of spirituality," and by it Hegel referred to the fact that, after the Reformation,

Christian spirituality was more and more exercised upon the concerns of this world, and rightly so, rather than upon the other-worldly. Trilling, in his use of the phrase, did not refer to Christian spirituality, but expanded it to refer to a 19th-century phenomenon (also described by M.H. Abrams in his *Natural Supernaturalism*) which was characterized by the application of Christian terminology, as well as religious energies, to the activities of this world, to man's life in history. Trilling's strongest allegiance was to a spirituality grounded in and committed to the realities of man's earthly existence. This kind of spirituality, a secular spirituality, was seen by Trilling to bring the advantages of realism to man's efforts in politics, education, psychology, and in literary criticism. He saw that the strongest temptation for modern man was to deny the reality of the limitations of this world, and to disregard the lessons of these limitations. It was Trilling's commitment to a secular spirituality which allowed him, in 1950, to offer the novel as the best source of knowledge about man's life in the world, and which later led him to suggest that the novel could lead away from the truth. Common to both statements was his commitment to the secular; according to Trilling, what had changed was the way in which people received the insights of literature. Literature which could provide a firmer purchase on reality could also become a means for misrepresenting reality.

It is only within this context that it is possible fully to understand Trilling's complex transactions with Marx and Freud, with the Romantics and the 19th-century novel, with the New Critics and American literature. It is because of Trilling's commitment to this secular spirituality that his assessments of literary situations could be as challenging as they have been and continue to be, and until this aspect of his work is accounted for, the best Trilling is the one we can experience in his work first-hand.

**Nation*, Sept. 17 and Sept. 24, 1977, pp. 247-250, 278-280.

Faith and Fiction: The Modern Short Story, by Robert Detweiler and Glenn Meeter. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979. 314 pages, \$10.95. Reviewed by James Vanden Bosch, Assistant Professor of English.

Barth, Barthelme, Brautigan, Coover, Gass, Hawkes, Elkin, Pynchon, Sukenick, Vonnegut; experimental fiction, innovative fiction, super fiction, metafiction, anti-realism, irrealism, fabulation, postmodernism, the literature of exhaustion, the literature of replenishment.

Readers who recognize the above authors and labels know that the American short story has

undergone a transformation since the middle or late 1960s. This change has not gone unnoticed; accompanying the new fiction has been a debate which has not always been dispassionate and disinterested. The claims made for and against this literature are often extreme, ranging from worshipful attention to a body of writing that will save us, to a contemptuous dismissal of such