



Tracing New Historical Tenets in Lionel Trilling's *The Opposing Self*

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ABSTRACT:

New Historicism is the most innovative and popular critical movement that came into existence in 1980's. The credit for the emergence of this new critical manifesto goes to Stephen Greenblatt who initiates a reactionary canon in the sphere of literary theory to the prevailing text-oriented critical approaches pursued by New Critics, Deconstructionists, Structuralists and Post Structuralists. New Historicists, like these rigid followers of linguistic approaches, undoubtedly acknowledge the importance of literary text, however, they also analyze it with an insight into its historicity as literary text does not exist in cultural vacuum. The phrase coined by Louis Montrose 'historicity of the text and textuality of history' is the critical premise of New Historicists. Since the present paper aims at finding the traces of New Historicism in Trilling's critical tenets in his critical work *The Opposing Self*, hence this is but imperative and authoritative to do an intensive and close textual study of this treatise to locate the seeds of New Historicism and at the same time determining the distinctions between the basic premises of both. In order to accomplish this pursuit, an attempt is here being made to analyze how Trilling stresses the direct and reciprocal relationship between literature and culture with his specific focus on individual self which always remains in constant conflict with culture for its survival. Moreover, dialectical and discursive nature of literature along with its literariness will also be taken into account so that the political nature of literature may also be discerned. In addition to this, an analysis of consciously unconscious self of the writer will also be analyzed so as to understand how the covert depiction of ideology in a work of art is possible because it prevents literature to turn into sheer propaganda. This analysis would definitely reveal the fundamental similarities and dissimilarities between Lionel Trilling's critical canon and that of New Historicists with a hypothetical feasibility of Lionel Trilling's contribution to New Historicism. This is the focal issue that has to be scrutinized here as New Historicists too like Lionel Trilling think that for a literary critic 'an honest place [is] in between.'

Key Words: New Historicism, Textuality, Co-texts, Text, Power Politics, Foucault, Barthes, Self, Freud, Power Politics, Implied Self, Historicity, Literariness, and Irony etc.

The Opposing Self is a distinguished and richly rewarding critical treatise that came into existence in 1955 in America after many years. This is considered to be the most significant critical book compiling nine essays heralding Lionel Trilling's basic critical tenets because he has attempted to revolutionize modern literary theory by propounding a pioneering critical approach to literature with his specific emphasis on literariness of a text along with its sociological aspects, however, what determines its significance and relevance is its amalgamation of literary and sociological aspects influencing and being influenced by individualism. It refers to a rudimentary inclusion of the study of 'self' and 'psyche' of an individual relative to social and cultural life because this is the very 'self' which persistently remains in constant struggle with the existing culture in which it exists and is influenced by and influences it to some extent. This book, in fact, traces various factors of literary criticism, scholastic process and methodology of literary study through an inventive approach to critical analysis of the works of famous literary figures as Jane Austin, William Dean Howells, Henry James, and Charles Dickens. Though all these are widely disparate writers, he has imposed an order and unity in the work by not discussing them individually rather in relation to critical problems and the solution to that. David Kubal has rightly said about Trilling's

critical premise in his article "Lionel Trilling: The Mind and Its Discontents," "Throughout his life Trilling was intent upon establishing an autonomous critical position from which he could interpret and judge society" (280).

New Historicism is a critical approach which disrupts the extremity of purely formal and linguistic critical canon and dogmatism of close textual analysis of a work at the expense of its extrinsic value embedded in its intrinsic part. These purely formal approaches emphasize on the fact that since text is the ultimate reality with the reader, he need not go beyond that and should try to find out the finer meaning by locating the free play of sign and signified or the process of signification to ascertain the aesthetic value. On the other hand, New Historicists opine that to locate solely linguistic and textual features of a piece of writing is to see one side of the coin, rather a text can find proper interpretation if the conditions of its production are also previewed because "New historicism is an approach to literary criticism and literary theory based on the premise that literary work should be considered a product of its time, place and circumstances of its composition rather than as an isolated creation of genius" ("Stephen J. Greenblatt" Wikipedia). New Historicism considers any literary texts as cultural construct whether that text is literary or non-literary belonging to other disciplines of knowledge rather than coming into existence due to divine power of genius. Moreover, New Historicism aims at rehistoricization of text whether literary and non-literary and ascribes due significance to the cultural condition of its production, meaning, impact, its interpretation and evaluation, that is, a literary text is produced and actualized in cultural conditions, not in vacuum.

Lionel Trilling never denies the fact that literature is a cultural construct as is propounded by New Historicists also, hence this premise can be observed in almost all his critical works and *The Opposing Self* (1955) is of great significance from this perspective. In one of the essays contained in this work titled "Little Dorrit," Trilling determines this fact as he writes, "'Little Dorrit,' one of the most profound of Dickens novels and one of the most significant works of nineteenth century, will not fail to be thought of as speaking with a particular and passionate intimacy to our own time" (51). What Trilling seems to suggest about *Little Dorrit* is that it is a modern work of art but, at the same time, its specialty lies with its embeddedness in the cultural condition of which it is a product as it deals not with explicit but implicit social realism impacting the individual 'self' and which cannot be segregated thereof as whatever happens in society gets reflected through literary and other discursive practices because 'self' cannot be studied in isolation of cultural condition as it exists within it, quarrels with it and even serves it for its survival and that the prime subject of study in literature is self as "in almost every developed society, literature is able to conceive of the self of others far more intensively than the general culture ever can" (*Freud and Crisis of Our Culture* 19) He also opines in this regard:

The truth we especially expect literature to convey to us by its multifarious mode of communication is the truth of self, and also the truth about self, about the conditions of its existence, its survival, its development. For literature, as for Freud the self is the first prime object of attention and solitude. The culture in which the self has its existence is a matter of the liveliest curiosity, but in a secondary way, as an essential condition of the Self, as a chief object of the Self's, is energies, or as representing the aggregation of selves. But for literature, as for Freud, the test of the culture is always the individual self, not the other way around. The function of literature, through all its mutations, has been to make us aware of the particularity of selves and the high authority of the self in its quarrel with its society and culture. (*Freud and Crisis of Our Culture* 32-33)

In the preface to *The Opposing Self*, he comes forward to suggest that "the idea [self] preoccupies . . . literature and is central to it, and makes its principle and its unity – the idea of self" and that literature is a cultural construct as suggested in his essay "Little Dorrit" because "[it] is about society, which certainly does not distinguish from the rest of Dickens novels unless we go on to say, as we must, that it is more about society than any other of the novels, that is about society in essence" (ix and 51). The portrayal of essential reality in literature is Trilling's fundamental critical tenet because as Rene Wellek and Austin Warren have also well remarked in *Theory of Literature*, "Literature is really not a reflection of the social process, but the essence, the abridgement and summary of all history" (95). The New Historicists have also propounded this very notion. Trilling denotes how Charles Dickens has depicted the

essence of social reality in his *Little Dorrit*. He remarks: “This essential quality of the book has become apparent as many of the particular social condition to which it refers have passed into history. Some of these conditions were already of the past when Dickens wrote, for although imprisonment for small debts had done away with in 1844, the prison of the Marshalsea had been abolished in 1944 and true court of Marshalsea in 1849” (*The Opposing Self* 51). Moreover, Trilling appreciates the writings of William Dean Howells because the subject matter and the theme of his novels are not the deliberate exposition of his conscious effort. Likewise, New Historicists in later 1980s onwards propounded that a literary text embodies the elements which get reflected, not at all consequential of his conscious efforts but are the outcome of his unconsciousness.

Trilling recommends his critical reader that “he will involve us in the enjoyment of moral activity through the medium of a lively awareness of manners” (*The Opposing Self* 77). However, it should not be confused with moralism rather he is much more concerned with the representation of moral realism. It implies that literature deals with the moral condition of a particular culture prevailed within the cultural scenario because literature embodies every activity of human life, and in this context moral activity cannot be kept apart from a particular cultural scenario and mannerism. Trilling also expresses his angst and disgust for the taste of modern readers who do not like William Dean Howells because he is a cultural and social artist as is exemplified through a letter received from one of his students. But he suggests his readers to have literary historical sense while reading work of literature:

And when, in a course of lecture on American literature, I imagined that it might be useful to my students to have a notion of the cultural and social situation which Howells described, and therefore spent a considerable time talking about his book, I received first anonymous letter I have ever had from a student—it warned me that the hope of taste shown by my excess interest in a scandal in the Cafeterias. (*The Opposing Self* 77)

Trilling strongly advocates that literature must be the replica of socio-cultural life and hence addresses Howells “as a historian figure” because he perceives literature in close connection with culture and society and also suggests that a critic, while studying a work of literature, should keep in mind the social and cultural situation of the period of which the work is an integral part. He also elucidates his admiration for Howells because of the literary-historical sense as he opines that if a reader / critic wants to know and understand American culture, he need not go to history books because his work is capable of rendering “the course of American culture” and because he considers literature as an important institution of a society (*The Opposing Self* 78). He writes in *The Opposing Self*, “As it is worth observing that, as he himself says, he devoted himself to a literary career not so much out of disinterested love for literature as out of the sense that literature was an institutional activity by which he might make something of himself in worldly way”(79). Moreover, he is the first who tried to pull down wall of demarcation between literary and historical text. It also reminds the conviction propounded by New Historicists.

New historicists, greatly influenced by Michel Foucault’s concept of the discursive nature of literature, came to suggest the strategy of political reading of the text because they opine that any texts whether literary or non-literary is a cultural construct and reveals the political, social, religious and economic circumstances of the given era though not explicitly expressed but implicitly revealed in a work. M.H. Abrams says:

[P]olitical readings of a literary text— [is the] reading in which they [New Historicists] stress quasi-Freudian mechanism such as ‘suppression’ ‘displacement,’ and ‘substitution’ by which, they assert, a writer’s political ideology (in a process of which the writer remains largely or entirely unaware) inevitably disguises, or entirely elides into silence and ‘absence,’ the circumstances and contradiction of contemporary history. The primary aim of political reader is to undo these ideological disguises and suppression in order to uncover the historical and political conflicts and oppressions which are the text’s true, although covert or unmentioned, subject matter. (187)

In the same strain as suggested by New Historicists, Trilling considers that literature is political and discursive by nature dealing with the political ideology. However, this political ideology is contingent on the personally lived experiences of the writer. In *The Opposing Self*, he comes forward to appreciate

George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* because it is a political-historical text reflecting the Spanish Civil War: "George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* is one of the important documents of our time. It is a very modest book [. . .]. Its manifest subject is a period of the Spanish Civil War" (157). As regards the formation of political ideology based on first hand lived experiences of the author, he has firmly endorsed his conviction in his essay "George Orwell and Politics of Truth," by elucidating that Orwell's repugnance for Communist Party is grounded in his perception as he minutely observes that almost all political parties, though they promise for the betterment of the common people, but once they capture the very locus of power, they in turn, exploit them. Moreover, the poor and innocent people suffer due to the policies of the political parties as the political leaders deviate from the ideas they try to persuade the common people with.

Hence, Trilling tends to suggest that a writer's main business is to write about political issues which affect the lives of common people, not necessarily with conscious efforts rather unconsciously as is very much in the basic tenet of Historicism: "Orwell's ascertaining of certain political facts was not the occasion for a change of heart, or for crisis of soul. What he learned from his experiences in Spain of course of pained him very much and it led him to change his conduct. But it did not destroy him; it did not, as people say, cut the ground from under him" (*The Opposing Self* 153). Though Trilling advocates that literature should be a political-discursive as politics constitutes a significant aspect of human life, he is very much against the conviction that literature should be reduced to sheer political propaganda. He intends to imply is the covert prognosis of political issues in literary work of art, which is synonymous with 'political unconscious with effective handling of literary techniques. In his famous novel *Animal Farm*, he has employed the technique of allegory to achieve the desired effect and impression of 'political unconscious.' The social and political condition of the age has been depicted covertly with the help of animal fable. To quote Jeffrey Meyers: "Though Critics have often interpreted the book in terms of Soviet history, they have never sufficiently recognized that it is extremely subtle and sophisticated, and brilliantly presents a satiric allegory of communist Russia in which virtually every detail has political significances" (133). This technique of political unconscious and covert delineation of political condition is indispensable to creative faculty and literary techniques capable of rendering aesthetic pleasure. Jeffrey again refers to his "Preface" to suggest the significance and relevance of literariness:

I saw a little boy, perhaps ten years old, driving a huge cart horse along a narrow path, whipping it whenever it tried to turn. It struck me that if only such animal become aware of their strength, we should have no power over them, and that men exploit animals in much the same way as the rich exploit the proletariat. I proceeded to analyse Marx's theory from the animal point of view. (133)

Trilling foresees how literature can be badly affected if it is reduced to mere propaganda or ideology. If ideology finds manifestation through literariness, it would rather enhance the aesthetic and political worth of a text / work because literariness is an inherent property of a literary work. Lionel Trilling seems to have hinted at this point as following lines of Shoben reveal:

As there exists a separation between the political 'ideas' of the educated class and the imagination, contemporary modern literature has become ideological. It was also existent in the 19th century literature. "Flaubert", for Trilling was not unique in nineteenth century France for his belief that bourgeois democracy was bringing about the death of mind, beauty, literature and greatness. (576)

New historicists refer to the reciprocal relation between textuality of history and historicity of the text and that "[t]exts . . . are embedded in particular histories, since we only access those histories in language (Abrams 183). Charis Baldick's remark in *Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* is noteworthy: New historicism [is] a term applied to a trend in American academic literary texts and at the same time (in contrast with older historicisms) the 'textual' nature of history. As a part of a wider reaction against purely formal or linguistic critical approaches New historicists, led by Stephen Greenblatt, drew new connections between literary and non-literary texts, breaking down the familiar distinction between a text and its historical 'background' as conceived in established historical forms of criticism." (171)

Being a historic critic like New Historicists, Trilling had already propounded the notion of the historical study of a text; however, he implicitly refers to the background study of a literary text in order to have a close analysis of the text. If it is closely discerned, there is, in fact, no fundamental difference between historical text and background or the co-texts studied with literature. A writer is supposed to study a literary text written in the past. Now the question arises as to how he can reach the tangible historical background except through historical texts as no historical and social background can be accessible without texts. Moreover, a literary critic must be aware of the time of its composition and for that he is directed to do co-textual study, be it literature or history. In fact, there is no distinction between literary and any other texts because the subject matter treated is the same. As Trilling himself exemplifies this Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* because it projects the historical facts of Spanish Civil War as does history.

As greatly influenced by such theorists as Ronald Barthes and Michel Foucault, New historicists ascribes significance to a text which is discursive in nature and denies the presence of 'empirical self' of the author but at the same time cannot dismiss the 'implied self' of the author. Ronald Barthes informs that "the author cannot come back into text [,] . . . he can only do so as guest" (Das 107). It suffices the notion that a writer appears in his writing as disguised in his ideologies which gets manifested unconsciously in the text. The writer appears to be consciously unconscious in order to conceal his identity under the coverings of his ideologies and the presence of certain ideologies again reveal that the author is influenced by his own cultural conditions and that he also knows the role he plays is not of a social reformer but just to give the hint to the readers. Thus, a complete suppression of the self is not possible because he is a sensible and sensitive intellectual of the society.

The New Historicists seem to manifest... tendency to decenter, and in extreme cases to delete what is often called 'agency of author as a self-coherent, purposive and determinative human subject. Moreover, the self of the author is in the grip of 'controllable workings of the unconscious compulsions towards culture" (Abram 187).

Indispensable with political unconscious, historical and literary text, is projection of autobiographical elements in a work of art is fundamental premise of New Historicists and Trilling's critical conviction is not at all different from those of French philosopher and theorist Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes who have propagated that the personality of a writer does not come directly in his writing but as an implied 'self.' To quote Rajnath: "The text gives us a glimpse into the life of the author and a kind of biography can be constructed from it. The author becomes a paper author, no doubt, but he is all the same an author not different from the implied author" (49). Trilling denotes that *Homage to Catalonia* is also written with autobiographical elements but these elements are not directly expressed; and that the personal voice of the author represents the whole voice of common people. He remarks that "no one can read history without being made aware of what were the grounds of this attitude, yet the personal claim to a historical guilt yields but an ambiguous principle of personal behaviour, a still more ambiguous basis of thought" (*The Opposing Self* 162). The suggestion being that biographical elements in a literary work are also part of history and that biography is a separate but integral discipline of history though from personal to general. Moreover, biography (text) helps a critic / reader to reconstruct the time of the production of the literary work and hence becomes equivalent to historical text and co-text for literary text. As Rene Wellek and Austin Warren remark

Even when a work of art contains element which can identified as autobiographical, these elements will be so rearranged and transformed in a work that they lose all their specifically personal meaning and became simply concrete human element of a work. (78)

As implied earlier, the implicit projection of 'self' and 'autobiographical' elements in a work are discerned as suggested by Barthes and Foucault, Trilling also determines the effacement of autobiographical elements from the writing by introducing the concept of 'self'. He appreciates George Orwell, T.S. Eliot and E.M. Forster who focus on the effacement of direct personal entry in their work, "It is true of T.S. Eliot for all that he has spoken against the claims of personality in literature. Even E.M

Forster, who makes so much of privacy, acts out in public the role of private man becoming for us the very spirit of private life” (*The Opposing Self* 156)

Lionel Trilling ascribes equal significance to literariness of a work along with its historicity and cultural significance because he understands that “a work of art, no matter how much rejects or ignores its story, is deeply rooted within it. It has massive cultural meanings. There is no such thing as ‘work of art itself’” (78). In his critical analysis of Charles Dickens’ *Little Dorrit*, Trilling underscores the symbol of prison which connotes the suppressed individual ‘self’ imprisoned and governed the subtle tendrils of power structures and strictures of social responsibilities, religious and moral code of conduct. Michel Foucault underpins the same conviction of unbound disciplinary powers exercising their unseen but subtle power politics on individual self. Trilling remarks that “in a score of ways the of incarceration, is carried out, persons and classes being imprisoned by their notions of their predestined fate of their religious duty, or by their occupations, their life schemes, their ideas of themselves, their very habits of language (*The Opposing Self* 52).

Trilling appreciates Dickens because he has laid bare the actual social reality by using this very symbol of imprisonment because “the prison is an actuality before it is ever a symbol; its connection with the will is real, it is the practical instrument for the negations of man’s will which the will of society has contrived” (*The Opposing Self* 53). Trilling also finds out the liaison between Arnold’s lines, “‘Most men in brazen line’[. . .] echoes Wordsworth’s ‘Shades of prison house begin to close / Upon the growing boy,’ might have served the epigraph of Little Dorrit.” It is in fact, a social reality that culture governs each and every aspects of human life through its power structures. For Trilling, ‘Self’ itself embodies the societal power structure and rules as his statement used for Dickens’ writing reveals. This conviction of Trilling about ‘self’ representing power strictures is derived from Sigmund Freud and being influenced by him he considers that “the organization of the internal life is in the form often fantastically parodic of a criminal process in which . . . mind at once [is] a criminal, the victim, the police, the judge, and the executioner. And this is a fair description of Dickens’ own view of mind, as having received the social impression it becomes in turn the matrix of society” (*The Opposing Self* 53).

As Sigmund Freud has determined that the individual self can be divided into three parts, namely, ‘unconscious,’ ‘subconscious and ‘conscious.’ The suppressed and irrational thoughts and desires reside in the unconscious and subconscious, however, refined and rational thoughts embodies the welter of consciousness. Since Freud has propounded and Trilling derived from him the whole understanding of the mechanism of human psyche which has a rational side to control the irrational aspect of unconscious and subconscious and thus restrains the non-confirmative wills and desires of the unconscious. Trilling believes that writer also has a sensibility and seriousness for filtering out the obscene, illogical provoking passion, and thoughts before they come out. This is the reason why Trilling seems to be favoring ideological unconscious on a writer’s part and does not want that overt ideologies must form the texture of a literary work. A writer must be consciously unconscious. The main motive behind Trilling’s critical premise is that it is the duty of a critic that he / she should concentrate on how the ‘Self’ is shaped by modern society itself and how it exhibits itself in literary work.

The most significant thing to be noticed in this regard is that even the state and government cannot be successful in controlling the subversive voices, if people don’t have side of mind. Moreover, the writer does not directly write about the marginalized group of society because of the fear of being censored and power politics rooted in power structures but indirectly and through symbolic representation, he can make his readers aware of the exploitation and suppression as a result of oppressive policies of government, though he cannot become a propagandist and extremist.

Trilling also illustrates this view that a rebuttal or counter power to the power politics emerge through the characters and situations created by the writer in a work. He points out that the characters portrayed in Charles Dickens’ *Little Dorrit* have “the social will, the will to status [. . .]. To be recognized, deferred to, and served – this is their master passion. Money is of course a great consequence in the exercise of this passion, yet in Little Dorrit the desire for money is subordinated to the desire for deference” (*The Opposing Self* 58). This conviction of Trilling seems to be identical with that of New Historicism because, according to them, the marginalized or suppressed social beings want to cut the bar

of imprisonment and breathe the fresh air. For this purpose, they require power because power is fluid in nature and keeps on changing its location if one is willing to acquire it, and that as Michel Foucault refers to in his critical philosophy, this is the strongest medium to change the scenario, whether it is achieved by money or by status. This is the very reason why, as Trilling thinks, Charles Dickens has crowded his novels with such characters as aspire for social status through money power.

Lionel Trilling, like New Historicists, appreciates literature because it 'dialectical' and 'discursive' practice and due to this reason, he confers his regards on Henry James as he himself writes that "[t]he nature of the terms of James' dialectic suggests why his fiction is always momentous. And it is quite within the scope of his genius to infer the political macrocosm from personal microcosm, to write large and public disorder of the personal life" (*The Opposing Self* 109). He also believes that if literature is discursive by nature, it may not only depict just history but histories of the particular time. Trilling analyses this discursive nature of literature when he critically examines Henry James writings and points out how he presents the feminist movement in *The Bostonians*, through his characters in which Verena Torrent, the heroine is caught up by an intense and possessive Oliver Chancellor into a militant feminist movement which was very much prevalent in America and is considered to be the significant part of American history: "The movement for female emancipation in America and in Protestant Countries of Europe in nineteenth century was predominantly social and legal in its program and even had, although not always an outright anti—erotic bias which exposed it to the imputation of crankishness and morbidity" (*The Opposing Self* 109). Moreover, Henry James also advocates that female must be endowed with equal human rights like their male counterparts but he does not favor extremity of radical feminism leading to lesbian society because he cannot deny the maintenance of homosexuality.

Likewise, Trilling turns to Jane Austen who feminized English novel by writing on women related themes and by presenting masculine mind as it appears to women. Her novel is replete with feminine atmosphere which turns out to be in a sharp contrast with that of Henry Fielding. Her chief theme is love in the life of women and mostly her novels revolve round a love affair, its progress or decline, the speculations, jealousies and rivalries that distinguish women from men, the influence of circumstances and upbringing upon their characters – all these traits are admirably delineated. Moreover, her writings are also dialectic and discursive as she gives voice to the suppressed and marginalized group of women with her specific technique of irony, with a vivid and realistic delineation of the life of nineteenth century women who were considered inferior. Trilling also refers to the fact as to how with her subtle handling of the technique of irony, she makes her writing discursive and historical. Trilling remark is worth noting as he says that "[the] irony is but engaging manner by which she marks society 'crude coercive power' and in her novel Mansfield Park she has tried to show what the social coercion is in all its literal truth" (*The Opposing Self* 210).

Moreover, Trilling rejects the traditional concept of male literary tradition by putting forth his critical manifesto which includes great women writers along with male ones and hence it would not be wrong to assert that his critical credo seems to include Feminist Literary Criticism. He also averts male writers' repugnance to female writers just because of gender based discrimination. Trilling says, "Mark Twain said that she inspired in him an animal repugnance" (*The Opposing Self* 209). This remark suggests that he did not like Austen because she is a female writer:

The animality of Mark Twain's repugnance is probably to be taken as the male's revulsion from a society in which women seem to be at the interest and power, as a man's panic fear at a fictional world in which masculine principle, although represented as admirable and necessary, is prescribed and controlled by a female mind. (*The Opposing Self* 209)

Trilling also analyses Professor Garrod's remark regarding feminized presentation in a literary work: "[H]e implies that a direct sexual insult is being offered to men by a woman author who 'describes everything in youth of women which does not matter' in such a way as to appeal to 'that age of man when they have begun to ask themselves whether anything matters' (Emerson also calls her "'Sterile and Vulgar'" (*The Opposing Self* 209). But Trilling considers her to be a great writer by expressing his anguish for the fact that she was not endowed with the regard and place which she deserved because of prejudiced

attitude towards female writers. He appreciates her for her careful handling of 'irony,' 'humor,' and satire:

Jane Austen's irony is only secondarily a matter of tone. Primarily it is a method of comprehension. It perceives the world through an awareness of its contradiction, paradoxes, and anomalies. It is by no means detached. It is partisan with generous of spirit, it is on the side of 'Life' of affirmation. (*The Opposing Self* 209)

Thus on the basis of above discussion, Trilling can be regarded as the first thinker in New historical mold, though some similarities and dissimilarities can be perceived in the critical credos of Trilling and that of New historicists, the spirit seems identical. Trilling has used the term background against which a literary work can be accessed, however on close analysis that background seems to be turning into co-texts (historical text). Similarly, Lionel Trilling takes into notice the discursive nature of literature by coining the term 'dialectic.' Oblique description of micro-logical histories is the very root of New Historicists, but Trilling lays emphasis on the conflict of the self of the author or the individual self with the cultural scenario, which, in fact, lays bare the histories of the culture because the self of the author is extra-sensitive. Moreover, the 'self' is also of great significance in order to escape the blunder of reducing literary work to mere political propaganda. The political unconscious can be accessed through it and it is again the very 'Self' which helps to maintain the discursive nature of text because it is a step towards the effacement of the direct entrance of personality in a text.

To conclude, it can be said that art requires an appropriate theory which should be all-inclusive. Whether it is New Historicism or Trilling's critical canon of cultural criticism, the fact remains intact that both contribute relatively to a broader enterprise. Though Trilling did not belong to any established movement of literary criticism, however, the significance and relevance of his professional achievement and critical canon is replicated and has impacted the arena of literary theory and pedagogy with its inclusive return to empirical scholarship, revival of the critique of ideology. The noticeable thing about Trilling is that his is a paramount legacy as a cultural critic, a critical humanist, a public intellectual and a teacher because as a teacher he could comprehend and explain the issue of life and its existence and that his criticism is the outcome and response arising from human interaction. Thus, after his death, Trilling's cultural criticism became once again attractive in the late 1980s as many literary academics recoiled to Marxism and post-structuralism because he believed that the 'honest place is in between.' Moreover, this analysis also establishes Trilling as a pioneer of cultural criticism or new historicism, though hypothetically, because he has rendered his services to the critical question or literary problems which are yet to be solved by scholars and critics of future generation.

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