CHAPTER THREE

SINCERITY AND AUTHENTICITY; EMERGING CONCEPTS

The aim of this chapter is to show that the quality of authenticity which Lionel Trilling perceives and mostly admires in modern and modernist literature originated in, was in fact an essential characteristic of, the Romantic theory and practice of literature, though authenticity later, in modernist literature, resulted in manifestations and attitudes that would not have been thought possible or desirable by the Romantics. It is in fact Trilling's broad commitment to the ideal of authenticity that impels him to defend the Romantics against the attacks of both literary critics and political theorists. It is further the purpose of this chapter to show the development of authenticity from a romantic to a modernist variety in Matthew Arnold himself--the development from a commitment to the self to an awareness of the loss and disintegration of the self. We shall also discuss Lionel Trilling's concern and unhappiness at the radical developments of authenticity.

It is a commonplace of criticism that Matthew Arnold was a romantic in his poetry and an anti-romantic in his
critical theory and practice. The Scholar Gipsy, for example, shares the Romantics' hostility to the "dictatorship of the never-resting intellect" over the soul and the yearning for an idyllic life; he also represents the freedom of the self which the Romantics cherished, and the joy that such freedom helped achieve. The Scholar Gipsy is, in Trilling's language, the self in its standing quarrel with culture.

This was Arnold the poet. But there was also Arnold the critic and the social reformer who set himself forever against eccentricity, laissez-fairism and in favour of centrality and order. As Trilling himself notes in a review of H.F. Lowry's edition of Arnold's letters to Clough, Arnold's attack on Clough as on the Romantics was a declaration in favour of a classic "centric" position (as against the eccentric), and finally in favour of the abrogation of personality itself. And it is well known how Arnold fought a life-long battle against the British habit of "doing as one likes." That Arnold viewed culture as something opposed to extreme individualism is also clear

1Trilling, MA, p. 112.

But there are aspects even of Arnold's criticism which are not commonly noticed but which mark him out to be a passionate Romantic at heart. There is, first, the conviction and the assertion that poetry is a kind of substitute for religion, satisfying our deepest spiritual impulses:

modern poetry can only subsist by its contents: by becoming a complete magister vitae as the poetry of the ancients did; by including, as theirs did, religion with poetry, instead of existing as poetry only, and leaving religious wants to be supplied by the Christian religion, as a power existing independent of the poetical power.  

And then there is the hope, expressed so earnestly in "The Study of Poetry," that more and more mankind will turn to poetry "to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us." The converse of this view is Arnold's theory of religion—that when a statement was truly poetry it was a religious utterance. This is the very essence of the romantic faith.

3 Trilling, MA, p. 252.


One more instance of Arnold's romantic leanings. If we consider carefully the passages cited by Arnold as examples of great poetry—not merely those that he recommends as "touchstones," but other passages that he gives as instances of "natural magic"—we first of all see that they cover a wide range. But if we want to go deeper and characterize the one profound quality that marks all these passages, we may call it the quest of the romantic imagination, a yearning for the unknown, the mysterious, the never-never land.

So much for Arnold's essential romanticism. But though Arnold was a romantic in his commitment to the self, he was also a modernist in his awareness of the difficulties of identifying the true self. A passage that Trilling cites is quite in point here:

Below the surface-stream, shallow and light,
Of what we say we feel—below the stream,
As light, of what we think we feel—there flows

6 The passage from Paradise Lost ("Darken'd so . . .") is an illustration of his admiration for the heroism of a rebel; the lines from Villon are a lament for the transience of youth and beauty but the lament comes from people who are not "moral"; even humorous poetry is not excluded, as one of the examples from Burns shows (See V.S. Seturaman, "Introduction" to Selections from Matthew Arnold, p. xxiii.)
With noiseless current strong, obscure and deep,
The central stream of what we feel indeed.\(^7\)

Wylie Sypher, writing on this subject earlier than Trilling, had the same idea in mind when he said that

In his melancholy verse Arnold writes as a post-romantic who has lost confidence in the passionate rebellious self "standing for some false impossible shore." Instead he seeks some "knowledge of our buried life" ["Buried Life" is in fact the title of the poem from which we have quoted just now] flowing deep within, unregarded, and intuited only by vague echoes rising to consciousness from a hidden self so inaccessible it is like an "infinitely distant land."\(^8\)

Arnold was also aware, as Sypher goes on to show, of the possibility of the loss of the self.

There are instances even in Arnold's criticism—which is generally said to be in favour of authority, centrality and control--which bring him very close to Trilling. For example, the only hope that Arnold saw for his contemporary Barbarians, Philistines and the Populace was in those few men in each of these classes "who are mainly led, not by


their class spirit, but by a general humane spirit, by the love of human perfection." These people Arnold called aliens. The important point for us is that these aliens are a minority, and that they are dissatisfied with the general culture. It is not far-fetched to say that this comes very close to Trilling's idea of the adversary culture.

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We saw in Chapter Two how Trilling traces his liberalism to a Romantic ancestry. Everywhere in his writings Trilling returns to the Romantics for reference and reinforcement. John Henry Raleigh has, in his book *Matthew Arnold and American Culture*, drawn up a detailed list of these references, besides pointing attention to the essays on Wordsworth (in *The Liberal Imagination* and *The Opposing Self*) and on Keats. We shall notice just a few of the other incidental references. The new historical sense which we have found since the nineteenth century derives from Sir Walter Scott among others. There is a fundamental relationship between Freud and the Romantics—in as much as both were engaged in a research into the self.


The true place in politics and religion even of T.S. Eliot, for all his repudiation of Romanticism, is in the Romantic line of the nineteenth century—Coleridge, Newman, Carlyle, Ruskin and Matthew Arnold. Scott Fitzgerald is praised for his resemblance to the Romantics, especially to Wordsworth, in their ascribing a special value to childhood. And then

Fitzgerald was perhaps the last notable writer to affirm the Romantic fantasy, descended from the Renaissance, of personal ambition and heroism, of life committed to, or thrown away for, some ideal of self.

And then Trilling has time and again defended the Romantics against various charges including those levelled by Matthew Arnold himself. Against Arnold's labelling of Shelley as an "ineffectual angel," Trilling exclaims, "But if Shelley was ineffectual as an angel, he was far from ineffectual as a man." Even Shelley's unconventional morals should be seen in the right perspective. For


he saw himself as what we would now call a culture hero and he saw himself truly. . . . What is important in a culture hero is the pattern of his conduct . . . The charm of the myth of Shelley, for those who are charmed by it, is the paradox of strength in weakness, of duty in pleasure, of chastity in passion. This pattern Shelley established himself. Shelley believed that nothing he did was sinful or wrong, that his sexual passions were chaste no matter how indulged.16

The attacks on the Romantics have been of two kinds. There is first a school of thinking which blames the Romantics for all the political ills of the twentieth century including Nazism. Trilling denies this charge with considerable vehemence. We have only to ask, he says in "The Sense of the Past," how at all we can or dare "derive the iron rigidity and the desperate crystallization which the New Order of the Nazis involved, or the systematic cruelty or the elaborate scientism with which the racial doctrine was implicated," how we can derive all these from Kant, or Goethe, or Wordsworth, or Beethoven, or Berlioz, or Delacroix—men "who are Romanticism."17


17 Trilling, "The Sense of the Past," in II, p. 199. The following are some of the other places in which Trilling answers similar charges: "Quennell's Byron," Nation, 2 May 1942, pp. 520-21, where he points out that the Romantics actually fought against disorder; EMF, p. 74, where he places Mr Failing of The Longest Journey in the line of romantic liberals; and EMF, p. 153, where he contends that what is meant by Romanticism when it is blamed for Nazi ideology is simply undisciplined emotion.
There are, secondly, the attacks made by literary historians and scholars, especially by Parrington. It was inevitable that a man like Parrington, with such limiting notions of reality, should blame the Romantics and their descendants like Hawthorne for turning away from reality. But perhaps defence would be pointless for the word "romantic" appears in the second volume of *Main Currents in American Thought* "more frequently than one can count, and seldom with the same meaning, seldom with the sense that the word, although scandalously vague as it has been used by the literary historians, is still full of complicated but not wholly pointless ideas, that it involves many contrary but definable things." ¹⁸

There is lastly the very serious charge, probably born out of the modern preoccupation with evil, that the Romantics lacked an adequate awareness of evil. The truth is far from it. The problem of evil, for example, lies at the very heart of Keats's thought. It is the basis of his famous statement, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." That statement, Trilling says, "was not for Keats, and need not be for us, a 'pseudo-statement,' large, resonant, engaging, but without actual significance." What Keats means is that

¹⁸Trilling, "Reality in America," in *LI*, p. 19.
"a great poet (e.g. Shakespeare) looks at human life, sees the terrible truth of its evil, but sees it so intensely that it becomes an element of the beauty which is created by his act of perception."^{19}

Keats thus had an intense awareness of evil. But this awareness exists side by side with a very strong sense of personal identity, a clear knowledge of the self. Everywhere Keats affirms, that is, "the creativity of the self that opposes circumstance, the self that is imagination and desire, that, like Adam, assigns names and values to things, and that can realize what it envisions."^{20} It is for this reason that Trilling says that Keats "stands as the last image of health at the very moment when the sickness of Europe began to be apparent."^{21}

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John Wain, in his review of *Sincerity and Authenticity*, draws attention to the discussion of "sincerity" by W.W. Robson in his essay "Purely Literary Values." Robson examines the adequacy of the term "sincerity," toys with the idea that it must be replaced by some term like authenticity

^{19}Trilling, "The Poet as Hero," in *OS*, p. 36.
^{20}Ibid., p. 41.
^{21}Ibid., p. 49.
but feels finally that like "moral" the term "sincerity" cannot be discarded. Trilling feels, says John Wain, that it should be discarded. But yet, Wain concludes, Sincerity and Authenticity is from one point of view an amplified discussion of the problems raised in Robson's essay.

But in fact the issues Trilling raises are far deeper, far more than mere literary—though a right understanding of these, as Trilling himself says, is "of the very essence of a proper response to literature." They relate to man's life in society (or man's refusal to live in it or of it), even perhaps man's place in the universe. In the words of Geoffrey Hartman, Trilling's book is a "powerful diagram of the moral life from Shakespeare to the present." Extending the metaphor, we may say that creative writers and


philosophers (not to mention political figures like Robespierre) are so many points plotted on this diagram. We should however give up the metaphor of a diagram if it prevents recursion, re-examination and complication.

"It ought to be for us a real question," Trilling had said in "The Sense of the Past" in The Liberal Imagination, "whether, and in what way, human nature is always the same." And now he opens Sincerity and Authenticity with the observation that now and then "it is possible to observe the moral life in process of revising itself." The argument of the book is that the moral life of the Western world changed itself twice in the course of about four centuries, first by the addition of a new element called "sincerity" and then by the replacement of that element by a "more exigent" concept which may be called "authenticity."

Hamlet provides the first vantage point in the survey of these changes. When Polonius, in a rare moment of self-transcendence, advises his son Laertes, who is bound for Paris:

This above all: to thine own self be true
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man
(I.iii.78-80)

"he has conceived of sincerity as an essential condition of virtue and has discovered how it is to be attained."\(^{28}\) What is implied here is a concept of "sincerity" which would lead "from the ideal to a common morality, to a structured society."\(^{29}\) It is also implied that between me and my self there is a perfect alignment as there is between me and my fellow-men. This is the kind of attitude that characterizes Shakespeare's young heroes like Florizel who show a wholeness of spirit and conformity to traditional morality and the social code. We must however remember that this concept of "sincerity," now old-fashioned, was itself a new idea when certain cultural circumstances made it possible and desirable to be introduced. We do not ask whether the patriarch Abraham was sincere. There was no one, no institution for him to be sincere to. He was guided solely by his spiritual vision.\(^{30}\)

"Sincerity" then has meaning only when there is a body called society. But when we say, as Polonius meant, that we should show absolute "sincerity" to our selves and then we cannot be false to society, there arise all sorts

\(^{28}\)Trilling, \textit{S&A}, p. 3.

\(^{29}\)Robert E. Spiller, Rev. of \textit{Sincerity and Authenticity}, \textit{American Literature} (Duke University), 45 (Nov. 1973), 482.

of difficulties. Which self, among my various and perhaps opposed selves, shall I be true to? (There was perhaps a time, the time that sincerity reigned unchallenged, when such a question would never have been asked; man was whole, all of a piece. At least the true self of man was considered not very different from the institutional self.) Matthew Arnold recognized the difficulty of locating the true self, as we saw earlier in this chapter. And then, in the way it was conceived of ("Be true to thine own self . . . Thou canst not then be false to any man") sincerity seemed to be not an end in itself but a means:

Society requires of us that we present ourselves as being sincere, and the most efficacious way of satisfying this demand is to see to it that we really are sincere, that we actually are what we want our community to know we are. In short, we play the role of being ourselves, we sincerely act the part of the sincere person, with the result that a judgment may be passed upon our sincerity that it is not authentic.³¹

The idea of sincerity had particular importance in the sixteenth century when it meant "absence of dissimulation or feigning." Dissimulation fascinated the sixteenth century thanks to Machiavelli. Hence the dissembling villain --Richard III, Iago, Bosola and the like.³² Nowadays,


³²That the fascination had not completely ceased even in the nineteenth century is clear from the creation of such
however, the "villain" is not quite credible because we tend to lay the blame on circumstances, we locate evil in social systems rather than in persons. Even in Molière's Misanthrope Alceste is tortured by the fact that the life of man in a developed community must inevitably be a corruption of truth.33

For all these reasons sincerity fell out of favour. Authenticity is morally more strenuous, it is based upon a more exigent conception of one's self and what being true to it means, a wider reference to the universe and man's place in it. At the behest of the criterion of authenticity much that was once of importance has come to seem mere ritual; much that was traditionally condemned—disorder, violence, unreason—has now been accorded moral authority.34

Trilling makes a detailed examination of Diderot's Le Neveu de Rameau (written between 1761 and 1774 and published posthumously) to illustrate his contention that authenticity arose chiefly out of a disgust with the principle of insincerity upon which society is based. Pascal characters as Becky Sharp and Blandois (in Dickens' Little Dorrit).

"the first modern man" spoke of cosmic alienation—the eternal silence of those infinite spaces which terrified him. But for Diderot it is the social man who is alienated. According to the protagonist of Diderot's book, the younger Rameau, social man is separated not only from society but from his own actual self. In the interest of self-preservation, he has to play out a number of roles. The social man is a mere histrionic figure. The scapegrace nephew gives Diderot a demonstration of this role-playing with marvellous virtuosity.35

But apart from this intention of castigating society for its promotion of insincerity, Rameau's Nephew has a further intention. (And it is this ambiguity of intention as much as anything else in the book that appeals to Trilling.) It is this second intention which makes the book so entrancing, and so liberating. This was to suggest "that moral judgment is not ultimate, that man's nature and destiny are not wholly comprehended within the narrow space between vice and virtue." The nephew in his mimetic skill figures as an aspect of humanity itself, as the liberty inherent in its spirit, in its energy of effort, expectation and desire. The nephew's astonishing pantomime operatic performance thus anticipates "the idea which

Nietzsche was to articulate a century later, that man's true metaphysical destiny expresses itself not in morality but in art."

After this initial illustration of the distinction between sincerity and authenticity, Trilling cites another text, Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Mind* where Hegel makes a similar distinction between the "honest soul" and the "disintegrated consciousness." These are terms to describe the initial and final stages in the development of the relation of the spirit (the individual mind) to society. There are in fact three stages in this development. There is first the "noble" relationship, the "sincere" state, a complete identification of the individual self with the power of society or of authority resulting in inner reverence and a kind of "dumb service." But the spirit by its very nature cannot long remain dependent; it longs for freedom. So it moves to the second and the transitional stage in which there is a commitment to rather than identification with the external power. We have here the "heroism of flattery." This leads to the third and final stage, the stage of "authenticity," when there is bitter resentment, anger and revolt. Hegel calls this the "base" relationship but he also declares that the movement from "nobility"

to "baseness" is not a devolution but a development. The "baseness" leads to and therefore is "nobility." In refusing to submit to an external noble ethos, the self achieves autonomy but in the process of achieving autonomy, it also loses its own wholeness; it becomes alienated from itself; so we may say alienation is preservation.37

Hegel calls the self in its first state "the honest soul" intending "honest" as a limiting term—implying limitation of both mind and power. This state evokes Hegel's scorn because in its wholeness it submits to traditional morality. This state, a state of harmony between the self and society and a state of integrity for the soul itself, has lost favour with us, Trilling says, as writers and readers. We think with Hegel that the characteristic activity of the self is that by which the self, in its state of "disintegrated consciousness," rends and tears everything in culture. To us as to Hegel, sincerity, which was originally taken to be an element of personal autonomy and a progressive virtue, comes to seem regressive and retrospective standing between the base self and the disintegration which is necessary if it is to attain its true and

"noble" state.  

The example that Trilling gives to illustrate the self trying to escape from the "honest" state to that of "disintegrated consciousness" and true authenticity is Goethe's Werther. Unlike Rameau's however, the alienation Werther achieves is not complete. We may add the examples of Tattycoram and Miss Wade in Little Dorrit who act out the self's rage against society. The "sincere" state at its best could perhaps be seen in Esther Summerson of Bleak House.

Trilling seeks next to interpret the two values (or states) by referring to Nietzsche's distinction (in his Death of Tragedy) between the Apollonian and the Dionysian principles which has found wider currency and favour among students of modern culture than Hegel's distinction. Nietzsche's two principles are of course not historic

38 Trilling, S&A, pp. 38-44. Peter Tomlinson, in a review of Sincerity and Authenticity, charges Trilling with giving excessive endorsement to Hegel's general intent, and adds: "Trilling's credence might have been less if he had recalled how disconcertingly Hegel turned his theory upside down. The intensely conformist ethic he then evolved was based on individual subservience to the ideal State, conceived on a Prussian-style monarchy. The primitive beginning of the historical process had become its exalted end." In fact, Tomlinson concludes, Trilling is "too hospitable towards the notion of spiritual autonomy" (Peter Tomlinson, "Sincerity," Essays in Criticism, 24 (1974), 419).

modes of the self but rather "eternal modes of art and existence." Yet they are obviously cognate with Hegel's "honest soul" and "disintegrated consciousness." The Apollonian principle is that of positive ends in view, of manifest reason and order. It is associated with light, vision and the plastic arts. The Dionysian principle is its negation. It seeks to destroy limits and distinctions. Indifferent to pleasure and pain, its good is ecstasy and the extinction of the individuated self. Its characteristic art is music—such music as overbears and dissolves the self.  

Trilling once again returns to the present and observes how in our time the Apollonian principle, like the "honest soul," has fallen into disrepute. We are told for example that psychology has no longer any place in the novel. This is because in spite of earlier misunderstandings, we now know that Freud and psychoanalysis are in the service of the Apollonian principle, seeking to strengthen the "honest soul" in purposive selfhood.  

Yet another "cognate" distinction is made by Rousseau who constitutes the next point in Trilling's cultural diagram. There was in this Swiss an interesting conflation

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40 Trilling, S&A, pp. 53-54.  
41 Ibid., pp. 54-56.
of two kinds of sincerity—the English and the French. That is, he not only believed (as the French do) in knowing the truth (even the worst) about himself and making it public—witness all his confessions in his book of that title; he also meant by "sincere," as the English do, to be himself in action, deed, what Matthew Arnold called the "tasks." \(^{42}\)

Now Rousseau did display the "disintegrated consciousness" (for example in the simultaneous courting and transcendence of shame) but he also aspired to the condition of the "honest soul," wholeness of spirit, or what he called the "sentiment of being." Rousseau set against this the "sentiments of art" which he said were inimical to the "sentiment of being"—a view which would seem scandalous to us. Rousseau condemned all literature on this ground, particularly the theatre which, by inducing the actor and the spectator to put on various selves made them lose their individual selves. \(^{43}\)

Peter Tomlinson chides Trilling for "the half-assent he gives to Rousseau's indictment of literature." Tomlinson questions the first premise of both Rousseau and Trilling here, "that the mind can and should be self-subsistent":

The current tendencies Trilling refers to do not represent dangers inherent in the artistic culture as such. Art, especially literature, makes us free by helping us to a fuller possession of our own experience. Once this is understood, and the myth of sheer autonomy discarded, artistic culture can be prized just as we have always prized it. . . . Any real private self is both "honest" and in a sense "self-estranged," yet is nourished by art, by role-playing and social interaction.  

Now surely Trilling's point in this discussion of Rousseau's views as in the whole book is the irony of the situation when an art that claims to be autonomous actually turns out to be abjectly dependent on external control. As we will see later on, Trilling can hardly be said to exalt "the myth of autonomy." We will also see in Chapter Six that his objection to this worship of a false autonomy is that it does not make us free. It sets up another tyranny in the name of the adversary culture. The private self here is not "nourished by art," it is made sick by it; it is not nourished by "social interaction," it repudiates it. The praise of the Romantic poets is that they cultivated an autonomy that helped us "to a fuller possession of our own experience," while not shunning "social interaction."  

Let us return to Trilling's account of Rousseau's heresy. Rousseau makes two exceptions to his general condemnation of the arts: oratory, and the novel. These  

two, he felt, are committed to the "honest soul" and its appropriate sincerity. Trilling cites an instance each from these two genres. The case of Robespierre the orator is ironic. Like his fellow-revolutionaries he was committed to utter sincerity, i.e. a rejection of all hypocrisy. But the rhetoric necessitated by the avowal of sincerity led to exactly the role-playing in which Rousseau had found the seeds of personal and social corruption. As André Gide said, "One cannot both be sincere and seem so." The most ironic comment on Rousseau's high view of oratory was the public performance enacted by Robespierre and others on the Festival of the Supreme Being on 8 June 1793.45

Jane Austen shows her affinity to Rousseau by her approval of the "honest soul" and the "sentiment of being." But all her novels (except Mansfield Park) judge departures from the sentiment of being through the dialectical mode--irony and interplay--where at least some admiration is given to the energy of spirit striving towards autonomy. However Mansfield Park employs the categorical mode with harshness. The objection to the amateur theatricals in Mansfield Park is essentially Rousseau's objection--that impersonation leads to the negation of the self, and therefore to the weakening of the social fabric. No indulgence

is shown to the Crawfords because everything they do is a kind of role-playing. 46

Trilling explores further the implications to art of the sincerity-authenticity distinction by a reference to yet another dichotomy—the one made by Burke between the beautiful and the sublime. Authenticity has, in common with Burke's "sublime" (which in turn is similar to Schiller's "energizing beauty") a settled antagonism to Burke's "beauty" (which corresponds to Schiller's "melting beauty"). Both Burke and Schiller perceive (unlike Rousseau) that art can have an intention other than that of pleasing. We should say therefore—bearing in mind the differences in connotation between "please" and "pleasure"—that the sublime or the authentic does not please but it gives pleasure. Now we would go a step further and say, with Susan Sontag, that pleasure has nothing to do with artistic experience. This view has been prepared for by the revolution in aesthetic theory by which the artist's reference is not to his audience but to himself. 47 Art is no

46 Trilling, S&A, pp. 72-78.

47 In his Introduction to Literary Criticism Trilling discusses M.H. Abrams's postulation of the four elements of the artistic situation which receive different degrees of emphasis in different periods and movements and theories of art: the work of art, the artist, the subject matter of art and the audience (LC, p. 6). In those terms, the
longer required to please the audience. But the audience
does make a high demand upon art--we demand of art, not
that it please us, but that it give us spiritual sustenance.
We expect the authentic work of art to instruct us in our
inauthenticity and to ask us to adjure it.  

The last major text that Trilling discusses in the
elucidation of "authenticity" is Conrad's *Heart of Darkness.*
Now this short novel, especially its hero Kurtz, is the
"paradigmatic expression" of authenticity. But (as in
Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*) there is an ambiguity of inten­
tion and effect in this work. This exemplification of
authenticity also paradoxically contains a hymn to civili­
zation, especially English civilization. Even as Marlow
sees the horror and triumph of Kurtz's authenticity, he
himself, the honest soul (like Diderot), values the inte­
grity and sincerity of English civilization. Such since­
rity was possible for Englishmen of the nineteenth century
because of the work ethic and also because of their solid
and rich society. Even in the decline of personal religious
faith, men clung to earnestness and integrity of self and
sincerity lest they should fall into French libertinism.

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element of the audience would now appear to have been pushed
out of existence and the element of the artist considered
supreme.

48 Trilling, *S&A,* pp. 94-98.
Hence George Eliot's stern declaration of the imperative nature of duty. 49

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The foregoing pages were an attempt to summarize Trilling's complex account of the values of sincerity and authenticity. The whole strength and significance of Trilling's thesis is the panoramic view it takes and offers of European literature and thought of the past three or four centuries. It takes the fullest and most "elegant" account of all the shifts and modulations that the two concepts have undergone through this period. Sincerity and Authenticity is therefore "a book that is essentially beyond summary, because its value consists largely in detailed nuance and variation from chapter to chapter." Irving Howe, who recognizes this fact, tries, instead, as he himself says, "to push the distinction between sincerity and authenticity to a point of high focus, perhaps over-focus, in ways that Trilling might not always approve, and with the end of bringing into the glare of the explicit" some of the implications of the book:

Sincerity involves aspiration, an effort to live by a moral norm; authenticity directs us to a putative truth about ourselves that depends on our "essential" being, "beneath" and perhaps in disregard of moral norms--though it demands that we

drive towards that "essential" being with an imperiousness that is very much akin to traditional moralism. Sincerity implies a living up to, authenticity a getting down into. Sincerity is a social virtue, a compact between me, my self, and you; authenticity is an assertion, a defiance, a claim to cut away the falsities of culture. It takes two to be sincere, only one to be authentic. Sincerity speaks for a conduct of should; authenticity for a potential of is. Sincerity is a virtue of public consciousness, authenticity a repudiation of its bad faith. Sincerity implies a recognition of our limits, authenticity asserts the self as absolute. We are to be persuaded toward sincerity, but stripped, shocked and shamed into authenticity.  

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In the last chapter of his book Trilling discusses some of the developments in contemporary art and thought (e.g. the devaluation of the past, the decline in popularity of psychoanalysis) by which our preoccupation with authenticity expresses itself. We shall return to this last chapter later on, but let us pay some attention to the Symposium on the book and the concepts held in Skidmore College in 1974. (An edited transcript of the Symposium was published in the Salmagundi number for Spring 1978). Trilling himself took part in the Symposium and answered questions. The answers and comments made at the Symposium (by Trilling and others) focussed on the unhealthy extensions and developments of the doctrine of authenticity.

50 Irving Howe, "Reading Lionel Trilling," Commentary, 56 (August 1973), 70.
Authenticity was primarily an offshoot of the desire for autonomy. But Trilling was aware that at the behest of a feeling for autonomy, there had disappeared from our lives all sense of commitment, all sense of actuality, of weightiness—"gravity it used to be called." "That wonderful word which is so popular in our culture," Trilling warns, referring to "autonomy," "is a very dangerous word, indeed. We want to be autonomous in every way." But, ironically, even as we passionately affirm and demand autonomy, our universities and colleges present what are called disciplines "which don't allow autonomy and which require a service rendered to the object of study." Trilling of course admits that there seems to be no effectual means of countering this development; the only thing we can do is "to go on bemoaning it."  

Another unfortunate development is that, in their violent reaction from the work ethic of a bourgeois society, the advocates and practitioners of authenticity turned away from all discipline and work and indulged in a kind of bohemianism. One thinks especially of the hippies and the like. Trilling noted sadly in the Symposium that while work can be a falsity and there can be  

such a thing as too much commitment to work, "there can also be too much commitment to freedom and playfulness and the gratuitous and the fortuitous." A generation of young people is emerging which, far from believing that work is its salvation, seems to conceive of any work as the surest way to perdition.52

One of the participants in the Symposium felt uncomfortable at the doubleness of Trilling's attitude: on the one hand Trilling had argued in the book that the violent assault on bourgeois society was quite necessary, but now he maintained in the Symposium that the emphasis which had come to be placed on authenticity was unfortunate. How did Trilling reconcile these two positions?53

Trilling's answer to this was that "we are in history and there are no simplicities in history." He rejected the idea of authenticity only in its deteriorated form. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when artists passionately affirmed authenticity there had been a touch of heroism about it. That authenticity was directed against philistinism and bourgeois respectability—things which really existed. When they reacted, for instance, against the idea of art as representation, they were again doing something real and historically necessary.

The artist had indeed to tear things apart and put them together in a new way. But, Trilling said, he must reject authenticity when it became a mere cliché, as sincerity had earlier done. He had to cry halt when people had come to attach moral meanings to a mere fashion, to a kind of dress, to "faded denims."

When great claims are made for it, I feel I must reject it. There are moments when the word authenticity seems to me ridiculous—as when it's applied to a certain Scotch whiskey . . . or to certain people. I find it difficult to think about authentic people. All people are authentic because they're human beings . . .

Irving Howe, who also took part in the Symposium, added his own illustration by saying that while there was something genuinely authentic about a Flaubert or a Zola or a Joyce, writers who were cut off from the mass audience and the popular taste, there was something ridiculous in a writer for *Playboy* claiming authenticity and seeing himself in the line of these great writers.\(^5^4\)

And then there is the highly disturbing association of authenticity with violence. Trilling had suggested this even in the book and now he confirmed it in the Symposium. There is "a kind of assault . . . a defiant self-assertion in the notion of authenticity, so far as it may be said to exist in relation to society at all."\(^5^5\)

\(^5^4\)Ibid., pp. 96-97. \(^5^5\)Ibid., p. 94.
Trilling had earlier remarked, in his essay on Isaac Babel in *Beyond Culture*, on the association between art and violence. The apprehension of reality, he had said, is often marked in Isaac Babel by images of violence. This is what Irving Howe had also meant when he said that we are to be stripped and shocked into authenticity.

Robert Boyers opened another line of inquiry when he remarked in the Symposium that the violence which Trilling had identified as a component of authenticity was frequently directed not simply against the others but against the self. In other words, there is, in the very notion of authenticity, a kind of self-examination "which in itself is probably unhealthy and unfortunate for the self, whatever the positive values we have come to associate with it." Trilling quite agreed with this statement and admitted that he "tried to bring authenticity into as much disrepute as I could exactly on that ground."

This provides a convenient point of return for us to the book. In the last section of the book Trilling discusses and condemns with unusual vehemence—"the spirited phrase" and the "vivacity" here are more characteristic


of Arnold than of Trilling if we may say so—the most outrageous extension of the notion of authenticity, viz. the doctrine that madness is the most authentic condition and makes for a state of perfect health. As if this were not enough, the originator of this view, Norman O. Brown went on to say that in such a state we can reach divinity—everyone can be a Christ. 58

Now it is one thing to assert the alienated nature of the social reality and see cogency in the view, proposed by the great minds of the last two centuries, "that proposes an antinomian reversal of all accepted values, of all received realities." But it is quite another thing, Trilling indignantly points out, to make insanity "the paradigm of liberation from the imprisoning falsehoods of an alienated social reality." What hope or courage can we get from "the great refusal of the human connection" that this doctrine expresses, "the appalling belief that human existence is made authentic by the possession of a power, or the persuasion of its possession, which is not to be qualified or restricted by the co-ordinate existence of any fellow man?" 59

And there is the gross irresponsibility of the view

that madness leads to, and is, divinity:

The falsities of an alienated social reality are rejected in favour of an upward psychopathic mobility to the point of divinity, each one of us a Christ—but with none of the inconveniences of undertaking to intercede, of being a sacrifice, of reasoning with rabbis, of making sermons, of having disciples, of going to weddings and to funerals, of beginning something and at a certain point remarking that it is finished.  

* * *

It remains now to draw out the implications of Trilling's attitude to the madness-is-health doctrine and in general to the development of authenticity itself. His revulsion at this doctrine is first due to its thoroughly unsocial, anti-social nature, nay its rejection of society altogether, its assumption that "alienation is to be overcome only by the completeness of alienation." On the other hand Freud's view that the self for its full development not only rebels against society but needs the presence and influence of society is truly liberating and "fortifying" (in Arnold's phrase) in its dark and strenuous moral realism. Trilling had remarked in his biography of Arnold how to Arnold all the human virtues are social in


61 Ibid., p. 171.

62 Ibid., pp. 150-51.
growth.⁶³ Arnold had said, "Civilization is the humanization of man in society."⁶⁴ Arnold had not said that civilization is alienation. In fact, as Trilling observed elsewhere, Arnold's humanism was his answer to his, and in general to man's, loneliness and alienation.⁶⁵ For all his admiration for authenticity Trilling retains his humanistic faith at the basis of which is the belief in man's life in society.

And then there is his commitment to the values of mind and reason as the force that should govern our lives. Matthew Arnold said that we should endeavour to make "Reason and the Will of God" prevail. Whatever Trilling's reservations about the second part of that phrase, he must have been appalled at a tendency which tried to make Unreason prevail as the Will of God.

If we read Trilling aright, a perfectly "sincere" state—a state of integrity for the self and a state of harmony between the self and society—is, according to him, just out of the question now. But having granted that, he gives his approval only when the self realizes its own

⁶³Trilling, MA, p. 113.


⁶⁵Trilling, "Introduction" to EMA, p. 6.
possibilities by its indignant perception of the culture, by offering resistance to the pressure of society even while recognizing society as a real and necessary entity. Trilling withholds approval, however, when the self proceeds to deny or repudiate the existence of society altogether. What Trilling desiderates therefore is the Opposing Self rather than the Alienated Self. That is why he calls Keats "the last image of health at the very moment when the sickness of Europe began to be apparent." For Keats shared "the Miltonic doctrine of maturing freedom and responsibility in the field of this world." 66

* * *

It may be of some interest to examine Trilling's dilemma in terms of the psychology and philosophy which in India have governed human action and the will that prompts human action. The basis of the Indian philosophy and psychology is the assertion of a higher-than-the-mental life. To discover this higher principle and organize the mind and the will according to that principle is the objective of all inner disciplines which constitute yoga. Mind or reason then is not the last term of evolution. Even the highest reason we are capable of is merely

66 Trilling, "The Poet as Hero," in OS, p. 49.
67 Ibid., p. 46.
an instrument like the body or the will which has to serve a higher purpose and a higher Will and so it was called an inner instrument or Antahkarna. (There is, thus, very little scope here for "bad faith," the ultimate charge against the "inauthentic" self.) Human will, therefore, however imperfect and limited, is only an unconscious instrument of the divine will which fulfills itself. The way out is for the individual human will to become a conscious instrument of the Higher Will (which may be defined as Reason and the Will of God). They spoke of several stages of purification for the attainment of this state. The first of these is a renunciation of all egoistic aim for our works and all pursuit of action for an interested aim, for the sake of a particular result. They held that the individual has no right to the fruit or consequences of his action and he must accept in a state of equality success or failure, pleasurable or painful sensations consequent on the action. This state of equality paves the way for the impulse to action coming not from the lower self but from the higher self through the influence of reason; and the individual realizes the universal energy or the Divine Will as the Doer and himself as an instrument, a conscious centre or channel of action and phenomenal relation. This leads next not only to a realization of our true individuality—what Arnold calls the best self in us—but to "a perception of
the divine in all energies, in all happenings, in all activities, and a free and unegoistic participation of the true self in cosmic action—an elevation of all human will and activity to the divine level of perfection. (Hence perhaps Arnold termed this perfection as something endless. His epigraph to Culture and Anarchy was Estote ergo vos perfecti! which may be rendered as "the full perfection of our humanity." This included not only a perfection that we can achieve as fully developed human beings but the possible perfection which we can achieve by making Reason and the Will of God prevail through our best selves.)

It is thus that the individual can function as an individual and yet not come into conflict with other individuals and their wills and actions. He thus contributes to the total harmony. This however is true only of those who by a practice of detachment get at their best self. It is possible that in the name of asserting one's individual will one becomes an instrument of lower impulses and creates disorder and feels that madness is health. That was why the individual was prescribed a discipline largely negative which consisted in indifference, stoicism and endurance and finally detachment.

While Arnold seems to have reached the highest point of detachment to be able to realize the possibility of discovering the true self and working out the Will of God, Trilling's stoicism and his attempt to rise above dualities could lead him only so far as to discover the disastrous consequences of authenticity and keep him in a state of dilemma or a dim awareness of the need for positing a higher Will.