



The Journey Abandoned: The Unfinished Novel

Lionel Trilling

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In 1947, Lionel Trilling, the prominent literary critic, published a novel entitled *The Middle of the Journey*. While conducting research in the archives at Columbia University, Geraldine Murphy discovered a second novel—a clean, well-crafted "third" of a book that Trilling described as having "point, immediacy, warmth under control, drama, and even size." *The Journey Abandoned* was supposed to be a novel about the anomalies of heroic action in a conformist age. Instead, published here for the first time, it is a highly personal portrait of the life of letters in America.

Jorris Buxton, the narrative's larger-than-life focus, is an elderly poet and novelist turned distinguished mathematical physicist. Modeled on the romantic poet Walter Savage Landor, Buxton is destined to embroil himself in a principled but somewhat absurd conflict, just as the aged Landor had, and through his folly complicate the lives of his admirers. These memorable characters include Garda Thorne, a beautiful short-story writer (and Buxton's former mistress); Harold Outram, the director of an influential private foundation and a compromised man of letters; Philip Dyas, the headmaster of a private school; the Hollowells, a wealthy, progressive couple; Marion Cathcart, a young woman of Outram's household; and Vincent Hammell, an untried literary man from the Midwest and Buxton's newly appointed biographer.

Hammell is the central consciousness of the novel. A young man from the provinces, he is drawn from Trilling's own experience yet also indebted to the nineteenth-century *bildungsroman*, the literary form Trilling admired as a critic and emulated, in these pages, as a novelist. In her introduction, Murphy considers how *The Journey Abandoned* (which is her title) relates to the critical ideas Trilling articulated in his famous essay collection, *The Liberal Imagination*. She speculates that Henry James came to displace Landor as the model for Jorris Buxton, a development that may have both inspired and inhibited the writing of this novel.

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