The critical theories of Northrop Frye represent an impressive achievement in twentieth century critical thought. He, according to Lipking and Litz "stands at the center of critical activity," and many of the modern trends in literary criticism have a tendency to focus on the work of Frye (Modern Literary Criticism 180). Murray Krieger remarks that Frye "has had an influence—indeed an absolute hold—on a generation of developing literary critics greater and more exclusive than that of any one theorist in recent critical history" ("Northrop Frye and Contemporary Criticism" 1), while Geoffrey H. Hartman using Copernicus's image of the "virile man standing in the sun . . . overlooking the planets" adds that, "certainly no literary thinker, systematic or not, has attained so global a point of view of literature" ("Ghostlier Demarcations" 24). Indeed Frye has endeavoured to chart the critical universe and has attempted to build a theoretical structure of criticism with flexible walls to accommodate critics of different persuasions;
but whether Frye will long retain much influence is difficult to judge. According to one of his more severe critics, "His considerable vogue, like the accompanying reaction against the New Criticism, seems to have been largely the product of a change in mood" (Langman 104 - 119). And as Hartman further observes, "some, even today, think that the paideia of the New Criticism, the attempt to open literature to the direct understanding of students of any background, is undesirable or doomed to failure" (25). Hopefully however, there are differences in the pedagogical methods between the New Critics and Northrop Frye to suggest that Frye is part of a "modern movement to democratize criticism and demystify the muse" (25).

As a student in the early thirties, Frye tells us, he had had to answer vague examination questions about a writer's style, and as teacher in the early forties he had to learn something quite specific about stylistics and rhetorical devices. "No colleague or student . . . could avoid the challenge of the fact that history and philosophy were not just 'background' for literature but were an essential part of literary criticism itself. Writers beyond the Toronto horizon
at that time told me that anthropology and psychology were no less relevant" ("Across the River and Out of the Trees"). He describes this critical impasse in the *Anatomy of Criticism*:

The modern student of critical theory is faced with a body of rhetoricians who speak of texture and frontal assaults, with students of history who deal with traditions and sources, with critics using material from psychology and anthropology, with Aristotelians, Coleridgeans, Thomists, Freudians, Jugians, Marxists, with students of myths, rituals, archetypes, metaphors, ambiguities, and significant forms. The student must either admit the principle of polysemous meaning, or choose one of these groups and then try to prove that all the others are less legitimate. The former is the way of scholarship, and leads to the advancement of learning; the latter is the way of pedantry, and gives us a wide choice of goals, the most conspicuous today being fantastical learning or myth criticism.
contentious learning, or historical criticism, and delicate criticism learning, or "new" criticism. (72).

The goal of Frye is to isolate literary study from the vagaries of changing tastes so that, purged of these elements, the descriptive side of criticism could be brought out in greater perspective. Literary study would then take its proper place among the progressive disciplines of learning and aspire to the condition of science.

In the "Polemical Introduction" to the Anatomy, Frye speaks of a "scientific element in criticism" but cautions "readers for whom the word 'scientific' conveys emotional overtones of unimaginative barbarism (that) they may substitute 'systematic' or 'progressive' instead" (72). Although Frye equated "scientific" with an all-encompassing scheme of classification instead of with a critical testing of hypotheses, that did not diminish the force of his demand that literary description be purged of arbitrary evaluation:

It occurs to me that literary criticism is now
in such a state of naive induction as we find in a primitive science. Its materials, the masterpieces of literature, are not yet regarded as phenomena to be explained in terms of a conceptual framework which criticism alone possesses. They are still regarded as somehow constituting the framework or structure of criticism as well. I suggest that it is time for criticism to leap to a new ground from which it can discover what the organizing or containing forms of its conceptual framework are. Criticism seems to be badly in need of a coordinating principle, a central hypothesis which, like the theory of evolution in biology, will see the phenomena it deals with as parts of a whole.

The first postulate of this inductive leap is the same as that of any science: the assumption of total coherence. (15 - 16).

Frye argues that criticism needs to pass beyond the "primitive" state to a scientific one. Just as the Michaelson-Morley experiment set the groundwork for the theory of relativity in physics, criticism too needs
such a revolutionary experiment or central hypothesis. Frye's purpose is to develop such a synoptic hypothesis and this he does by assuming that there is a total coherence among literary works. He proposes "an examination of literature in terms of a conceptual framework derivable from an inductive survey of the literary field" (7). He suggests that such an examination can and should be scientific.

Science, however, has two major objectives: 1) to describe particular phenomena in the world of our experience and, 2) to establish general principles by means of which they can be explained and predicted. The explanatory and predictive principles of a scientific discipline are stated in its hypothetical generalizations and its theories; they characterize general patterns or regularities to which the individual phenomena conform and by virtue of which their occurrence can be systematically anticipated (Hempel 1). The crucial question here is to what extent hypothesis pertaining to literature have been formulated with a claim to universal, or even general validity? T.A. van Dijk in Some Aspects of Text Grammars: A Study in Theoretical Linguistics and
Poetics cautions that "the requirement of generality is not satisfied in poetics. It is difficult to ascribe law or rules to formulate properties of a general or universal character, and even if the theory of narrative claims such generality, they are not explicit enough to be tested" (177 - 78). The literary theorist can claim to have assigned names to certain phenomena and groups of phenomena, but the inter-relationship of these phenomena too often reveals arbitrariness and chance. A possibility for future development of a universal poetics could lie in the construction of general concepts and models, which allow for individual deviations and take account of the historical basis of all literature (Fokkema and Kunne-Ibsch 9). Northrop Frye's theories have contributed, in spite of his terminological buccaneering, to the construction of a metalanguage in terms of which literature can be systematically discussed. Without conceptualization and generalization, and without the terminology of a metalanguage no scientific discussion of the components of literature and literary theory seems possible. "Shirking the definition of literary concepts means the end of a systematic approach to the study of
An observation of this nature runs counter to the Wittgensteinian idea that art defies definition; but Wittgenstein's theory of the 'family resemblance' of related phenomena, which cannot be covered by one definition, has been of little use in the study of literature. And M.H. Abrams emphasizes that the more diverse the family of objects, "the more important it becomes, if we are to talk to some effect, that we specify and limit our use of the term" (What's the Use of Theorising About the Arts" 17). Without further elaboration and clarification it is not clear how the family of literary texts can be recognized. Frye's theories of literature, too, as well as his performance as a critic do not depend on how myth is treated in other disciplines like anthropology, psychology, or comparative religion. And, the ambiguities in Frye's discussions of myth and archetype too, it appears, have been explained away. We are told that "he does not regard them as codes for the hidden messages in literature, as overlays of meaning or vehicles of content" (Polletta 7). These concessions appear suspect, but to appreciate Frye's plea for
critical autonomy, his case ought to be assessed on his own terms.

As Frye puts it, "the archetypal view of literature shows us literature as a total form" (Anatomy 115). His notion of the archetype and all that follows from it is based on the assumption of universalism: the assumption based upon T.S. Eliot's line of argument where the conception of the "total order of words" is not unlike Eliot's belief that the literature from the time of Homer has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. Without this assumption much of his argument, many of his definitions and procedures, and even much of his practical criticism would be untenable. For this reason he opposes those archetypal critics who try to argue on the basis of a historical development. He observes:

The prestige of documentary criticism, which deals entirely with sources and historical transmission, has misled some archetypal critics into feeling that all such ritual elements ought to be traced directly, like the lineage of royalty, as far back as a willing suspension of disbelief will allow.
The vast chronological gaps resulting are usually bridged by some theory of race memory, or by some conspiratorial conception of history involving secrets jealously guarded for centuries by esoteric cults or traditions. It is curious that when archetypal critics hang on to a historical framework they almost invariably produce some hypothesis of continuous degeneration from a golden age lost in antiquity. (109 - 10)

Frye is more ambitious. His aim is to construct a theory of myth that can account for the whole of literature. While he firmly believes that "the things that happen in myth are things that happen only in stories; they are in a self-contained literary world," his general theory of myth complements that of Cassirer's. In an expression similar to what Cassirer might have said, Frye says:

As a type of story, myth is a form of verbal art, and belongs to the world of art, and unlike science, it deals not with the world that man contemplates but with the world that man creates. The total form of art, so
to speak, is a world whose content is nature but whose form is human, hence when it "imitates" nature, it assimilates nature to human forms. The world of art is human in perspective, a world in which the sun continues to rise and set long after science has explained that its rising and setting are illusions. And myth too, makes a systematic attempt to see nature in human shape; it does not simply roam at large in nature like the folk tale. ("Myth, Fiction, and Displacement" 587 - 605)

Considering that the above was written a few years after the Anatomy we can safely assume Frye's departure from his earlier stand of projecting criticism as a systematic science. Frye, more correctly, endeavours to make myth the servant of poetry by setting up an architectonic view of literature "standing back," as it were, from the results of earlier twentieth century criticism and gaining a perspective on its main currents, synthesizing the various "armed visions" and reconciling the divisions between aesthetic and moral criticism (Lavin 22). Frye, then, serves the critical community by interpreting for it.
Reinterpreting Eliot, Frye tries to show that in criticism, as Eliot said of literature, the existing monuments "form an ideal order among themselves." Frye besides annotating this statement of Eliot's goes beyond it in attempting to identify the conventions that permit the poet to create new works of literature out of earlier ones. He says:

First, every poem belongs to the total body of writing produced by its author. The more important the poet, the more obviously everything he produces will assume the appearance of a single larger poem. Reading in context is an essential principle of all reading, whether of literature or not .... We cannot think long and deeply about, say, Keat's "Ode on Melancholy" without feeling that its essential relationships cannot be confined to Keats, but that there is a larger reference which is one of the things that the term "Romantic" expresses. This larger reference makes the work of completely different poets, such as Shelley and Byron, or even French and German Romantics that Keats had never heard of, part of the context for
Keat's poem. ("Literary Criticism" 78-79)

Continuing in much the same vein as Eliot, Frye stresses the idea of a poetic tradition:

Works of literature are not created out of nothing; they are created out of literature itself, so far as the poet knows it. Literature bears testimony to its own literary origin by being highly allusive, and allusions in literature are not stuck in: they are a part of the larger structure to which the poem belongs. We should be reading Lycidas out of context if we detached it from the rest of Milton's work, but we should equally be reading it out of context if we detached it from Theocritus and Virgil, to whom the poem itself explicitly and repeatedly alludes. (79)

Frye, however, does not restrict himself to allusions alone. He extends his view to involve the totality of the poem: "the structure of every poem is in one respect unique, but there is also a conventional element in the structure derived from the conventions and genres the poet is using" (79). But Frye's concern
remains with the "total order of words" as he constantly reminds his readers. And this, he tells us, is indicated by convention, genre, and illusion. "Literature associates, by words, the nonhuman world of physical nature with the human world, and the units of this association are analogy and identity, which appear in the two commonest figures of speech, the simile and the metaphor" (79-80). Where, the clearest forms of such association are in mythical images, and conventional structures may be taken as myths because all of them derive from myths: "If the units of poetry are particular images it follows that the substance of poetry, the thing that we look for, is not anything relayed from the area of idea, but the image is the myth or archetype which informs the poetry, and the presentation of myth gives a poet the only impersonality he can have" (Frye, "Phlanx of Particulars" 201-202).

Frye's theory of literature, he tells us in The Critical Path, was developed from an attempt to answer two questions: 1) What is the total subject of study of which criticism forms a part? 2) How do we arrive at poetic meaning (14-15)? In the second essay of the Anatomy, "Ethical Criticism: Theory of Symbols, "we see
an attempt at an answer. Frye says, "Criticism as a whole . . . would begin with, and largely consist of, the systematizing of literary symbolism" and adds that "the criticism of literature can hardly be a simple or one-level activity . . . . [the] conclusion that a work of literary art contains a variety or sequence of meanings seem inescapable" (Anatomy 71-72).

The starting point then, is to assume "The principle of manifold or 'polysemous' meaning"—an establishment of Dante's theory of interpretation: "The thing that has established it is the simultaneous development of several different schools of modern criticism, each making a distinctive choice of symbols in its analysis" (72). Having acknowledged the "Principle," Frye affirms, "We can either stop with a purely relative and pluralistic position, or we can go on to consider the possibility that there is a finite number of valid critical methods, and that they can all be contained within a single theory . . . ." (72). From this premise, Frye answers the first question by rejecting the notion that criticism is a sub-division of literature—a rejection based upon the observation that apart from some aspect of criticism, literature is not a subject of study at all. Instead it is an object
of study which can be neither understood nor taught except as criticism develops its own autonomous principles.

Having assumed this much, Frye then proceeds to develop his argument by placing the question of meaning in a broader perspective and urges us to see the meaning of a literary work as a part of a larger whole. "Meaning or dianoia," he reflects, "was one of three elements, the other two being mythos or narrative and ethos or characterization. It is better to think, therefore, not simply of a sequence of contexts or relationships in which the whole work of literary art can be placed, but each context having its characteristic mythos and ethos as well as its dianoia or meaning" (73). The principle of meaning gets subsumed under the more broad-based "Context" and, context, then, becomes the organizing principle, and the term phases is used to denote the contextual relationships of literature.

The word ethical in the second essay of the Anatomy refers "to the connection between art and life which makes literature a liberal yet disinterested ethical instrument" (Denham, "Introduction" in Northrop Frye on Culture and Literature/24). The word does not derive from the meanings of ethos and the
intention is not to expand the analysis of "Character" as in the first essay. Perhaps Frye has stated best the place of the study of myth in a liberal education and the place of the study of literature and literary criticism in the city of man. Ethical criticism, Frye says, is based on

the consciousness of the presence of society. As a critical category this would be the sense of the real presence of culture in the community. Ethical criticism, then, deals with art as a communication from the past to the present, and is based on the conception of the total and simultaneous possession of past culture. An exclusive devotion to it, ignoring historical criticism, would lead to a naive translation of all cultural phenomena into our own terms without regard to their original character. As a counterweight to historical criticism, it is designed to express the contemporary impact of all art, without selecting a tradition. (Anatomy 24-25)

The historical and contemporary attitudes, Frye maintains, can never be really reconciled, but
tradition and telos can be, where telos is the sense of the total form—a coherent and unified order of words. At this point criticism acquires the conception described as culture by Matthew Arnold, where the study of the best that has been thought and said becomes and organized force in society.

It is the archetype, we see all along, that links the past with the present and thus Frye is able to place art in its archetypal aspect as an ethical instrument. It becomes more than an object for aesthetic contemplation because, archetypally, it is a product of civilization, "a vision of the goals of human work" (113). Frye is led, therefore, to reconsider the implications of ethical criticism. In "Criticism, Visible and Invisible," Frye says that the end of criticism is "not an aesthetic, but an ethical and participating end: for, ultimately works of literature are not things to be contemplated but powers to be absorbed . . . . The 'aesthetic' attitude, persisted in, loses its connection with literature as an art and becomes socially or morally anxious: to treat literature seriously as a social and moral force is to pass into the genuine experience of it" (The
And of its moral significance, Frye says, "the poet reflects and follows at a distance, what his community really achieves through its work. Hence the moral view of the artist is invariably that he ought to assist the work of his society by framing workable hypotheses, imitating human action and thought in such a way as to suggest realizable modes of both" (Anatomy 113).

Clearly, the references are to the imagination and society and yet Frye will not admit to either of them exclusively. In the "Tentative Conclusion" to the Anatomy Frye emphasized:

The ethical purpose of a liberal education is to liberate, which can only mean to make one capable of conceiving society as free classless, and urbane. No such society exists, which is one reason why a liberal education must be deeply concerned with works of imagination. The imaginative element in works of art, again, lifts them clear of the bondage of history. Anything that emerges from the total experience of criticism to form a part of liberal education becomes, by virtue of that fact, part of the emancipated and
humane community of culture, whatever its original reference. Thus liberal education liberates the works of culture themselves as well as the mind they educate. (347-48).

As sound and logical as this view might seem, Frye has no place for it ultimately because it represents art as useful and functional," serving the external goals of truth and goodness (112-15). From this it naturally follows that if society should become the goal of criticism, then art becomes subservient to morality or one of the practical sciences, and, the detached imaginative vision Frye seeks is lost.

Another way of looking at Frye's point of view is to see it as a combination of poetics, which separates literature from other forms of verbal expression. In trying to carry forward his argument of two principal perspectives, the Aristotelian or the Longinian. And in an earlier review article, "Interior Monologue of M. Teste," on Paul Valery's essays on the theory of criticism, Frye says:

There are traditionally two main centres of interest in the theory of criticism,
sometimes described by the words poesis and poema. The former, or Longinian, center is primarily an interest in the psychological process of poetry and in the rhetorical relation (often arrived at by indirection) set up between poet and reader. The latter, or Aristotelian, center is primarily an interest in the aesthetic judgement, detached by catharsis from moral anxieties and emotional perturbations. Any complete theory of criticism needs both, but in a specific aesthetic judgement must take precedence, for the Longinian interest is in enthusiasm, or what "carries us away," or what "carries us away," in other words, in what uncritical feelings we may trust to afterward. (NFC 188-89).

In using this traditional distinction of whether art is seen fundamentally as product or as process, Frye describes the difference by appealing to a series of opposing concepts: classical versus romantic, aesthetical versus psychological, hieratic versus demotic, artifact versus expression, imitation versus creation, and so on. From the perspective of poetics,
he says, poeta and poema are assumed to be embedded in a context of nature irrespective of the modes of expression that a critic may use to discuss them. In the Aristotelian tradition, nature has reference to the physical order, or to structure and system and in the Longinian tradition, it refers to the total creative process (The Well-Tempered Critic 111 - 22).

When poeta and poema, however, are seen in the context of experience rather than nature, we are faced with considerations of authors' intentions, direct appeals, moral value, evidence and truth. And here Frye says, criticism, like literature, can also be discussed in terms of either product of process, either detachment or participation. The concern of the critic, therefore, is "with two kinds of experience. First, he has to understand and interpret the experience which forms the content of the work he is reading. Second, the impact of the literary work on him itself is an experience, 'an experience different in kind from any experience not of art,' as T.S. Eliot puts it" (128). It is Frye's aim to balance the two conceptions of criticism which stem from the two contexts of experience.
Frye is looking for a more unified conception of criticism than an approach that tends to dissociate the intellect from the emotions, nature from experience, beauty from truth, and aesthetic from social value. The disinterested critical response, he says, is fundamental, but never an end in itself (140), and the ultimate aim of "literary education is an ethical and participating aim" (142). Frye's solution to the apparent impasse is to suggest that these opposites are "inseparable, two halves of one great whole which is the possession of literature" (144-45). And by asking what it means to "possess" literature we can only lead ourselves to Frye's view of the imagination and his conception of the central place of art in culture, where culture is defined as "a total imaginative vision of life with literature at its center" (154), and literature defined as "a total imaginative form which is . . . bigger than either nature or human life, because it contains them, the actual being only a part of the possible" (155).

To view culture and literature in these terms is to see Frye's critical system through the Blakean view of the imagination, as he puts it in the Anatomy: "When
we pass into anagogy nature becomes, not the container, but the thing contained" (119), that is to say, to possess literature means really to be possessed by it—which is the highest level of imaginative experience. Frye enunciates this fully in The Well-Tempered Critic where, "literature," he says,

neither reflects nor escapes from ordinary life: what it does reflect is the world as human imagination conceives it, in mythical, romantic, heroic and ironic as well as realistic and fantastic terms. This world is the universe in human form, stretching from the complete fulfillment of human desire to what human desire utterly repudiates, the quo tendas (that is, anagogic, "where you should be going") vision of reality that elsewhere I have called, for reasons rooted in my study of Blake, apocalyptic . . . . Some religions assume that such a world exists, though only for gods; other religions, including those closer to us, identify it with a world man enters at death, the extremes of desire becoming its heavens and hells; revolutionary philosophies associate it with what man is to
gain in the future; mystics call it the world of total or cosmic consciousness. A poet may accept any of these identifications without damage to his poetry; but for the literary critic, this larger world is the world man exists and participates in through his imagination. It is the world in which our imaginations move and have their being while we are also living in the "real" world, where our imaginations find the ideals that they try to pass on to belief and action, where they find the vision which is the source of both the dignity and the joy of life. (155 - 156).

Even though Frye strongly emphasizes the principle of autonomy in his polemical introduction to the Anatomy, his overview of criticism is expansive enough to include other modes like the moral and social reference to criticism and the centrifugal aspect of literary meaning. Frye discusses literature in both its poetic and extra-poetic contexts and yet both are rooted in his broader framework of the visionary imagination.