CHAPTER – 3

*Myth as Praxis: the architecture of power*
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I

At first, it may seem curious that Frye, with his vision of a hermetically sealed literary universe, would emerge as a fairly prominent social critic in his own right. A parallel to Eliot might be illuminating: both advocated for a tough, unimpressionistic, and technical autonomy of literary criticism, yet once they were established as literary critics, both moved with aplomb from literary to social criticism. Like Eliot, Frye made that move by dividing the social and literary realms. In *The Critical Path: An Essay on the Social Context of Literature* (1971) Frye notes that the critic works within two poles, the literary and the social, and that correct criticism is a mediation between the two extremes: "Criticism will always have two aspects, one turned toward the structure of literature and one turned toward the other cultural phenomena that form the social environment of literature. Together, they balance each other: when one is worked on to the exclusion of the other, the critical perspective goes out of focus. If criticism is in proper balance, the tendency of critics to move from critical to larger social issues becomes more intelligible" (25).

In another sense that shift is effected, Frye argues, by the extension of mythic-literary modes of analysis to the social sphere. Reading cultural myths is a process "very similar to criticism in literature, and it is clear that the different forms of critical interpretation cannot be sharply separated, whether they are applied to the plays of Shakespeare, the manuscripts of the Bible, the
American Constitution, or the oral traditions of an aboriginal tribe" (CP 123). In this respect Geoffrey Hartman makes the point that "though Frye's theory is unified only for literature, it has larger implicit ambitions and is concerned with the 'fables of identity' latent in all cultural or symbolic forms."

Contained within Frye's system is the all-important assumption that literature functions as a microcosm of culture, so that the abilities involved in the right reading of literature qualify one to interpret culture. What one ends up finding in Frye's social criticism is society rendered in terms of his conception of the literary universe, informed as the latter is by the predominant influences of the Bible, Blake, Frazer, and others. So what might sound like the harbinger of the fall of literary studies and a prophetic call for popular or cultural studies—tribes and legal documents ought to be read like, and alongside, literary texts—is actually Frye's own distinct literary criticism writ large: savages and the Constitution end up being read as variants of Frye's versions of Blake and the Bible.

While the horizons of Frye's interpretive focus have expanded, the rhetoric, methods, and assumptions have fundamentally remained the same. This becomes clear in Frye's primary reading of culture, in which all societies' myths are bifurcated into two encompassing categories, myths of concern and myths of freedom. The system of myths referred to as the "mythology of concern," Frye explains, "comprises everything that it [that mythology] most concerns its society to know" (CP 36). The mythology of concern is intensively traditional, becoming "the way of the elders" (37) and giving to culture a "limited orbit" of possibilities. Not surprisingly, Frye articulates the myth of
concern in evolutionary terms: it begins and thrives in the "oral" phase of a culture (38); that phase is "largely undifferentiated," but then in time it "develops different social, political, legal, and literary branches" (36)

Frye posits against this the mythology of freedom, which stresses the "non-mythical elements of culture" that are "studied rather than created" (CP 44). He relates this impulse to the "liberal" and to liberal issues such as "tolerance of opinion" (45, 44) and again, attaches developmental assumptions: myths of freedom, for instance, are integrally related to the phase of writing in cultures: Greek writing culture has given us roots in myths of freedom, Hebraic culture ("the Old Testament maintains a much closer link with the oral tradition") promotes concern (46).

Just as right criticism constitutes a mediation between a closed linguistic system and the social context, so right culture functions when the conservative myth of concern and the liberal myth of freedom negotiate a proper centrisdm. Perhaps Eagleton is too harsh in characterizing Frye's delicate balance as "a position somewhere between Liberal Republican and Conservative Democrat" (Literary Theory 94). There is little room in Frye's system, as in his literary criticism, for the legitimizing of fringe or radical cultural elements: as Eagleton tellingly puts it, "the only mistake" in Frye's system "is that of the revolutionary, who naively misinterprets myths of freedom as historically realizable goals" (94). To be legitimated, any cultural extremity must display the impulse toward a center of Frye's own positioning.
Frye does not view the meeting of concern and freedom as simply harmonious: indeed, he insists upon "the recognition of the tension between concern and freedom" (CP 108). Nonetheless, he characterizes recognition as the liberal tolerance that constitutes "the condition in which a plurality of concerns can co-exist" (108). In other words, Frye points to a Utopian state in which one can choose, in comparative fashion, from a wide range of constricting articles of faith, much as his literary criticism offers the multiple possibilities of reductive mythic patterning. What does not seem possible is the emergence of a genuinely new cultural pattern, a limitation seen in literary critical terms as the inability to recognize new or "fringe literary properties that could conceivably develop into a new genre."³⁴

While "literature is not itself a myth of concern," it nonetheless contains all cultural possibilities, for "it displays the imaginative possibilities of concern, the total range of verbal fictions . . . out of which all myths of concern are constructed" (CP 98). The dilemma is that "the critic wants to get into the concern game himself, choosing a canon out of literature and so making literature a single gigantic allegory of his own anxieties" (127). Extending his application beyond literary criticism, Frye holds that Freud and Marx failed to divest themselves of belief and thus produced "an encyclopedic programme that they called scientific" but, Frye adds, "nine-tenths of the science of both turns out to be applied mythology" (ss 54)

In Frye's mind these encyclopaedists have drifted unknowingly into "mythological expressions of concern, in which man expresses his own attitude to the culture he has built"; this leaves them prey to "a disease of thinking which is best called anxiety" (ss 54). But of course Frye's formula for reading Freud and Marx can with some striking parallels be turned on him, for Frye
has also constructed encyclopedic, comprehensive writings that mystify a set of mythological concerns held dear by the author. And, like Marx and Freud, he has given to this mass the rubric of scientism.

Perhaps his own "anxiety" is nowhere more significantly veiled than in his treatment of Christian religion, particularly his rendering of Protestant versus Catholic traditions. Typically, Frye denies partisanship on the issue of belief, while in fact his work rests on certain implicit theological and religio-cultural assumptions. Although Frye denies that commitment to a particular belief colors *The Great Code*, for example, the book is, as George Woodcock notes, "indissolubly linked with Frye's religious background. It is the kind of book one cannot imagine a Jew or a Catholic, or even an Anglican, writing about the Bible. It comes out of the heart of the English dissenting tradition which, dispensing with liturgy, gave the Bible a centrality rivalled only in other puritan and book-obsessed traditions."³

Fry's barely veiled judgments on Catholicism emerge, for example, in his discussion of the Bible as supreme interpretive text. Heralding it as "a structure of universalized poetic meaning that can sustain a number of discursive theological interpretations," Frye then states that "when the Catholic Church achieved temporal power, it was able to confine to a very narrow orbit, but after the Reformation it became obvious that secondary or discursive meanings of the Bible could take on many different but internally consistent forms" (TGC 65). Therefore, his insistence upon the Bible as well-wrought urn is framed within the Protestant insistence on free reading. In *Fables of Identity*, he asserts the preeminence of the "Protestant, radical, and Romantic qualities" in the
British literary tradition and yet notes that he has "no thought of trying to prefer one kind of English culture to another"; indeed, he insists, "I regard all value-judgements that inhibit one's sympathies with anything outside a given tradition as dismally uncritical." But he then delivers a biting diatribe on what he perceives as Eliot's "reaction" against these elements: in the twenties of the present century, after the shock of the First World War, this intellectual reaction gathered strength. Its most articulate supporters were cultural evangelists who came from places like Missouri and Idaho, and who had a clear sense of the shape of the true English tradition, from its beginnings in Provence and mediaeval Italy to its later developments in France. Mr. Eliot's version of this tradition was finally announced as Classical, royalist, and Anglo-Catholic, implying that whatever was Protestant, radical, and Romantic would have to go into the intellectual doghouse.

(149)

Now Eliot and Pound did not stress the French and Italian elements of British literary tradition so much as they did the influences of those elements upon emergent Modernist art (their own included). Disclaimers to the contrary, the similarities between Eliot and Frye may be more revealing than their differences. It is important to note that Eliot's alternative reading of the canon is hardly a freewheeling dismantling of the notion of time-honored canon but rather a reinscription that merely emphasizes a different set of authors. Harold Bloom succinctly articulates this continuity when he states that Frye's notion of the myth of concern as it applies to literary interpretation "turns out to be a Low Church version of T. S. Eliot's Anglo-Catholic myth of Tradition and the Individual Talent... Freedom for Frye, as for Eliot, is the change, however slight, that any genuine single consciousness brings about in the order of literature simply by joining the simultaneity of such order" (Map of Misreading 30)
Bloom goes on to label Frye's notion of simultaneous order as a "noble idealization" and asserts that "such positive thinking served many purposes during the sixties, when continuities, of any kind, badly needed to be summoned, even if they did not come to our call" (Map of Misreading 30). Bloom's words could well be describing Frye's own rhetoric on the youth culture in the 1960s. Indeed, Frye handles sixties counterculture exactly as he does literary works on the periphery of the great tradition: he charts their position within a continuous order, defining them in relation to the traditional or archetypal elements of culture and thus disarming them of actual social impact.

In The Critical Path Frye effectively contains the sixties movement through his own comparative method, similar to Eliot's mythical method, in which he brings to light "parallels between the present and the nineteenth-century American scene, between contemporary turn-on sessions and nineteenth-century ecstatic revivals, between beatnik and hippie communes and some of the nineteenth-century Utopian projects; ... the populist movements at the turn of the century showed the same revolutionary ambivalence, tending equally to the left or to the right, that one sees today" (140).

Throughout The Critical Path Frye 'trots out' contemporary slang of the counterculture ("turn-on sessions") in order both to authenticate his own familiarity with that culture and to render the novelty or urgency of the terms on the level of contained history: the effect is to deaden any sense of freshness in the current form by bracketing it within a continuous tradition. Extremist
movements, typified above in the parallel of populist movements with the counterculture uprising, are characterized structurally according to their off-centeredness.

Even when Frye recognizes the novelty of the counterculture within its own specific cultural context—he concedes that "the situation is so new that not all its social implications are clear yet" (CP 145)—he is still quick to place the novelty within the containing parameters of his own discursive system. What he views as the current "absorption of the poetic habit of mind into ordinary experience" (which is the opposite of making life into great art) manifests itself in the return of the primitivist oral stage of literature. So, though the particular shape of radical social change is not yet realized, Frye has already anticipated its filiations and thus framed its contours: "Both oral poetry and the life it reflects rely on a spontaneity which has a thoroughly predictable general convention underlying it" (145-46). Countercultural social activity, then, is figured as a collective attempt at retrogression, "a concerted effort to break down the barrier between art and life, between stage and audience, drama and event or 'happening'" (146). Frye labels these performances "improvised symbolic dramas.

Frye's clear delight in his own figuring of the police as Blakean demonstrates sympathy on his part for the protesters; indeed, it must be said that Frye in The Critical Path indicates his understanding of the frustrations motivating the protesters, especially in regard to the Vietnam war (138). The point here is not whether Frye was politically correct but that he found it necessary to place the counterculture of the sixties into his own controlling comparativist framework. What he finds objectionable in counterculture protesters is not usually their stand on the issues themselves, but rather their feeling that they were embarking on something new: he really cannot stand the enthusiasm that arises from the feeling that there is something new under the sun, uncontainable
within his own code. He needs to remove any sense of radical cultural break and refigure the novelty as a progressively continuous realization of essence: "all genuine effort at social change aims, not at creating 'another society,'" Frye notes, "but at releasing the real form of the society it is in" (156).

So Frye in his essay "The University and the Personal Life" laments the New Left's lack of recognition of the "traditions or context of anarchism" (SM 27). And in the same essay, although he praises the radical protests against the Vietnam war, he is harshly critical of "the general panic, even hysteria, that the loss of reference to temporal context has left us with" (34). Indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that this panic, originating from that lost connection to tradition, constitutes college campus protests. Frye thus attempts to separate the general movement from the specific cause (Vietnam war) and relegate the former to the status of simple maladjustment. "Student unrest is not a genuine social movement," Frye claims, "it has no roots in a specific social injustice, as Negro unrest has" (47). The all-embracing collectivity of the Great Tradition, which was used to contain not only the student movement but the whole counterculture, now shuttles them to the periphery of social significance: "Like the beatniks, who have gone, the hippies, who are on the skids, and the LSD cults, which are breaking up, student unrest is not so much social as an aggregate of individual bewilderments, frustrations, disillusionments, and egotisms" (47).

Frye extends his criticisms to counterculture literary artists, who "with their mystiques of orgasm, drugs, and quasi-Buddhist moments of enlightenment" fall predictably and with pedestrian effect into the pattern of striving toward "ideal experience" (CP 30), and to drugs and rock music, which he groups together as "more strenuous forms of resistance" to "mass communication," more
vigorous that is than simple "apathy." Drugs, on the one hand, "may promise genuinely new sensory experiences, of a kind that mass media cheat us out of and that the socially approved narcotics fail to provide"; rock music, on the other hand, "wraps up the listener in an impermeable cloak of noise" (149): both are characterized as aberrations, mutual signifiers of a sick and misguided society.

The aspect of the counterculture that hits Frye closest to home, dissent within the walls of the university, is treated to a combination of the strategies of containment, belittlement, and marginalization. Frye presents campus protesters as a simple lot who believe that since "complete objectivity is impossible," then "differences in degree are not significant" (CP 109). They do not realize, as do academics, that "concern" and "freedom" "interpenetrate"; indeed, Frye notes, "it is clearly one of the unavoidable responsibilities of educated people to show by example that beliefs may be held and examined at the same time" (109). Indeed, Frye goes so far as to liken the protesters, in their incapacity for reflection that is tied to their ideological insistence upon the "relevant," to fascists: "A certain amount of contemporary agitation seems to be beating the track of the 'think with your blood' exhortations of the Nazis a generation ago, for whom also 'relevance'

In *Spiritus Mundi* Frye again refers to the "neo-Nazi slogan of 'relevance' " and ties it to a "feeling" among the undergraduate population 'that departments of English in universities were under a moral obligation to be as contemporary as possible" (5). In *The Critical Path* he claims that 'only the student himself establishes the relevance of what he studies" 156); the university has done its
job by providing the wide wealth of the Great Tradition which, like *The Golden Bough*, represents an almost limitless storehouse of treasures that can be variously interpreted. For Frye, the university functions as "an engine-room" of ideas, the "power" of which "can last only so long as the university keeps operating" (SM 43). It mystifies the ideological filiations and political and economic contingencies of the university when he asserts that it figures as "the source of free authority in society, not as an institution, but as the place where the appeal to reason, experiment, evidence, and imagination is continuously going on" (43).

Bell-Villada notes Frye's relation to a typical attitude of midcentury centrist liberalism, in which the university is considered a "universalist institution . . . with its ideal of standing above all conflicts and preferences and studying all phenomena with equally disinterested objectivity" ("Northrop Frye" 280). The tie of this view to Frye's notion of a scientistic, value-free criticism is significant: in the broadest sense, the university serves as the ideal site at which the scientist-critic can practice his trade, for it is a locus shorn of all judgmental bias. In "On Value-Judgements" Frye extends the conception of 'value-free' not only to the criticism but to the classroom as well:

"The more consistently one conceives of criticism as the pursuit of values, the more firmly one becomes attached to that great sect of anti-intellectualism. At present it seems fashionable to take an aggressive stand in the undergraduate classroom, and demand to know what, after all, we are really trying to teach. It appears that we are concerned, as teachers, with the uniqueness of human beings, or with the fullness of humanity ... or in fact with anything at all, so long as it sounds vaguely impressive and is not reducible to treating literature as something to be taught and studied like anything else, (ss 73)
Frye's disdain for value-related conceptions of pedagogy is integrally tied to his insistence that literature or English is a subject, like chemistry or biology, i.e. made up of the genuine building blocks of knowledge. Frye, bringing to mind recent rhetoric on "cultural literacy," incisively notes the fallacy leading people "to doubt that genuine knowledge of literature is possible" (ss 72). His assumption of literature's empirical primacy, as an order of irreducible cultural fact, leads inexorably to the notion that a teacher ought to perform not as an "opaque substitute for his subject" but as a "transparent medium of it" (73). Teachers function as clear windows through which the radiance of culture shines. The students can go their own ways and disseminate multiple interpretations of the revelation. Freedom, as structured by Frye, is the room in which the student's subsequent interpretive efforts go on.

In spite of the fact that Frye figures the university as a free forum, the actual learning process is decidedly antidemocratic. The student demand for relevance in subject matter is scornfully refused, and faculty decision on curricular change is called collusion "with the student's innate resistance to the learning project" (ss73). More broadly, "dialogue" in pedagogy is posed as fallacy, "a literary convention taken to be a fact of life" (SM 46). Frye's reading of Plato, for example, repeats Frazer's strategy of narrowing the conception of dialogue into an orchestrated version of the multivocal: "Nothing happens in Plato until one person, generally Socrates, assumes control of the argument and the contributions of the others are largely reduced to punctuation" (46). Control for Frye predictably means form or structure, the prerequisite for learning, that necessarily removes the originality of the individual: "Everything connected with the university, with education, and with knowledge, must be structured and continuous. Until this is grasped,
there can be no question of 'learning to think for oneself.' In education one cannot think at Random. ... We do not start to think about a subject: we enter into a body of thought and try to add to it" (47).

Frye's discussion of the structure (rather than the dynamics) of the learning process duplicates his rhetoric on the structure of social change, which in turn is a doubling of his rhetoric of literary and ultimately semiotic processes. All these function by drawing large circles around their subjects: at bottom, there is an insistence on structured continuity and a fear of the haphazardly or spontaneously discontinuous. The essentialist nature of the order of words, social formations, and knowledge is necessary in order that the historically contingent and ideologically fueled aspects of that order be mystified. The comparativist critic steps in as the mediator of the comprehensive universal, which he has himself garnered and arranged. To others are left the sundry tasks of adding bricks to the order.

II

A focus on the text *The Critical Path*, subtitled 'An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism/ allows one to trace two paths from it: forward to *Words with Power* in 1990, and then backward to *Anatomy of Criticism* in 1957. *The Critical Path* was published in 1971, but written, and compulsively rewritten, between 1968 and 1970. Parts of it were composed, and delivered as lectures, at Cornell, at Indiana, and also at Berkeley, where Frye was visiting professor in the spring of 1969. These dates remind, when one reads *The Critical Path* today, that the book is inseparable from its own social context: that is, a profound crisis in the universities, reflecting the
broader social crisis over the war in Vietnam, the crisis that had been threatening to tear apart the cohesive ideology of the Western liberal societies.

Frye's response to the virtual civil war raging around his head in the late 1960s is in character: he thinks back through the entire history of the way that the West has related social belief, individual freedom, and the creative arts and sciences, and the way that the university has participated in this network of relations. The cardinal idea around which Frye arranges the whole network is his idea of the 'myth of concern,' which he describes in *The Critical Path* as comprising 'everything that it most concerns its society to know.' He says: 'The myth of concern exists to hold society together, so far as words can help to do this. For it, truth and reality are not directly connected with reasoning or evidence... What is true, for concern, is what society does and believes in response to- authority, and a belief, so far as a belief is verbalized, is a statement of "willingness to participate in a myth of concern' (36).

This description makes the myth of concern sound a great deal like an ideology. 'Ideology' is a notoriously slippery term, but according to Terry Eagleton, one of its foremost students, its sense always has to do with the legitimating of society's power-structure through a variety of strategies of signification: through promoting the society's values; through naturalizing those values into apparently commonsensical presuppositions; through marginalizing rival forms of thought; and through mystifying the true power-relations that obtain in society (*Ideology*, 5-6). Softer, less overtly Marxist, accounts of ideology than Eagleton's tend to emphasize ideology as a contestive
space of signification, rather than as a mechanism serving the exclusive interests of the dominant social group. Nevertheless, everyone seems to agree that ideology is the place where social belief, social value, and social power are inculcated in, and then expressed by, social subjects as meanings and interpretations.

Frye, as usual, is well ahead of us, because he remarks in *The Critical Path* that the reader would have no problem in substituting the word 'ideology' wherever he uses 'myth of concern' (112). So, given that *The Critical Path*, like so much of Frye's later work, is precisely about the relation of literature to concern, to ideology, we have reason to wonder - even leaving aside Hayden White's demonstration of 'counter-ideological' elements in the *Anatomy* - whether Frye was really the idealizer and mystifier and dehistoricizer that much of contemporary commentary wants to make him out to have been. Expressing the form of the relation between literature and concern in *The Critical Path*, Frye says that, while a society's literature grows out of its myth of concern, it is not identical with it: literature 'represents the *language* of human concern' and 'displays the imaginative possibilities of concern' (98). Unlike concern, 'Literature is not to be believed in: “there is no religion of poetry: the whole point about literature is that it has no direct connection with belief”'(128).

In *The Modern Century*, written just before *The Critical Path*, Frye says that some modern myths of concern, most notably the democratic myth of concern, are 'open' or 'liberal' myths, in that they are able to moderate their own ideological anxieties sufficiently to allow other kinds of discourse - based not on pure belief, nor on pure rhetoric, but on critique and argument and truth of correspondence - a space in which to operate (114-15). In *The Critical Path*, Frye calls this
objective, scientific kind of discourse a 'myth of freedom.' He associates it explicitly with whatever is 'liberal' in a society, and says that it out of, grows and then enters into a permanent tension with, concern itself (44-5). Certain ideologies, in other words, open spaces for the performance of their own critique, their own partial demystification. The relation of literature to ideological concern, as he tries to set it out in *The Critical Path*, troubled Frye so much that he kept sitting down simply to revise the book, and then rewrote it completely. And still, in *The Critical Path*, the relation seems unsettled, nervous. Literature, rather than being concern, is supposed to represent the 'language of concern.' But was not the myth of concern only ever a language in the first place? Frye's difficulty is that of finding, as he puts it, a 'middle way': a path between the deterministic fallacy of subsuming literature into social history and the aestheticist fallacy of cutting it off completely from its sustaining social roots and potential social force (32-3).

The fact that *The Critical Path* places Frye there between determinism on the one side and aestheticism on the other - makes it an emblematic text for his whole career. The suggestion that Frye was never quite satisfied with the way that he worked out the relation of literature to ideology is confirmed when we open his last book and find that there, in *Words with Power*, he spends the first hundred or so pages on concern, ideology, and literature that he had presented twenty years earlier in *The Critical Path*. In addition, this indicates how aware, even near the end of his life, Frye remained of the critical currents that were flowing around him. In other words, he knows in *Words with Power* that a new 'historicism' a new integration of literature with social ideology, a new account of the relation of words to power, is underway in the discipline; and he knows that he needs to address it.
Frye is willing to concede in *Words with Power* that 'ideology seems to be the delta which all verbal structures finally reach' (19). But here he divides the myth of concern into 'secondary concerns,' the hard-core ideological matters, and 'primary concerns' which are concerns about things so basic that any direct statement of them can only take the form of platitude: 'that life is better than death, happiness better than misery, health better than sickness, freedom better than bondage, for all people without significant exception' (42). As in *The Critical Path*, literature is seen as related to secondary concern, but as distinguishable from it, except that here the distinction seems to consist less in literature as being the 'language of concern' than in literature's ability to relate secondary concerns to 'the primary ones of making a living, making love, and struggling to stay free and alive' (WP, 42-3).

This sense of primary concern was only gestured at in *The Critical Path* in its passing suggestion of a 'concern behind concern' (103). Unfortunately, though, all of this belief in some 'primary' terrain sounds exactly like an ideology itself. Indeed, such an invocation of a realm of 'natural' or 'primary' human needs, transcending all distinctions of race, class and gender, and connected with the aesthetic, is precisely what contemporary left cultural critics mean when they talk about an 'aesthetic ideology.' By defining, as it were, the minimum of what is essential for all human beings you can end up producing a highly distilled version of the Western liberal ideology itself.

In *The Critical Path* Frye describes the 'typical humanist' as follows: 'The typical humanist strives to be sane, balanced, judicious; he is not a prophet nor an angry man ... He avoids both technical and colloquial language, and has a deep respect for conventions, both social and literary. As a professional rhetorician, his instinct is to save the face of the situations he encounters by finding the appropriate words for them' (90). It would have been hard for informed readers in 1971, and it
would be impossible for us now, to miss the hint in this passage: the hint that, in so describing the 'typical humanist,' Frye is also giving a pretty fair description of himself. He, too, is someone who constantly seeks to 'save the face of the situations he encounters/ either by finding new contexts that will allow what were previously thought of as opposites to coexist or by finding a 'middle way' between them, or by showing that they are not really opposites at all. The last of these is precisely what he does, in The Critical Path, with the social turmoil going on around him in the late 1960s: those who prosecute war have lost sight of primary concerns, and can only see secondary ones; but those who seek to end war by 'harassing and bedevilling the university' (164), trying to turn it into a church or political party, have given in to secondary concern as well - they cannot see that where the university belongs is in the myth of freedom, and that the road to primary concern goes via freedom, not via secondary concern.

This habit of seeking the 'middle way' is of course what marks Frye as a liberal. It is interesting to reflect that to be a liberal was a deeply unfashionable thing both at the very beginning and then again at the very end of Frye's writerly career; but he never was uncomfortable with the label. Indeed, when, in an interview with Marylou Miner recorded less than a year before his death, Miner compared him to Matthew Arnold, he replied: 'Except that Matthew Arnold had yellow streaks in him which prevented him from being a proper liberal at times. It's the streak of cowardice in Arnold that seems to make him a flawed liberal from my point of view' (Interview with Northrop Frye/ 13). Frye's legacy, therefore, is bound up inextricably with the destiny of the liberal mind.
The word 'liberal' takes us back to the 'myth of freedom'. That is where Frye places the university in society, and it is also where he places his own vision of criticism in *The Critical Path*, where he says that the critic 'is not himself concerned but detached. His criteria are those of the myth of freedom, depending on evidence and verification ... Once the critic is released from the preoccupations of a moral and evaluating approach, he is obliged to preserve a tolerance for every variety of poetic expression and a respect for every poet's individuality' (99). However Frye tries to rework it over the years, literature retains a connection with secondary concern, and hence with ideology. But criticism belongs inside the myth of freedom, and it is criticism that continually performs the rescue operation that lifts an element in all literature clear of its origins in ideology. This is why Frye's idea of 'primary concern' is not necessarily just the 'aesthetic ideology' revisited: the relation between literature and primary concern is a constructed relation, not a natural one. And criticism is the place where the construction occurs.

This complicates our sense of Frye's liberalism. When he talks about human apocalyptic revelations (Eli, 105), Frye sounds like what Richard Rorty calls a 'liberal metaphysician/ someone who believes that there are real essences behind our philosophical vocabularies (Contingency, 73). But when he talks about the spirit of inquiry as a 'myth' of freedom, Frye sounds more like what Rorty calls a 'liberal ironist': someone who thinks that the only real choices are between old and new vocabularies (Contingency, 74-5), Frye says in *Words with Power* that reducing a work of literature to its ideological dimension, or what he calls its 'overthought' (57), is a critical decision. His own decision - and Anatomy makes it quite clear that this is simply an assumption
you make if you believe that such a subject as criticism can exist as an objective study - is to examine the formal 'under-thought' of poetry, the progression of images and metaphors and narrative structures that connect the work of literature to the whole literary universe; this grand poem then images forth the triumph of primary over secondary concern, and thus rediscovers the social power of words in a renewed context.

This is the central argument that Frye reiterates in Words with Power, "think of a poet, in relation to his society, as being at the center of a cross like a plus sign. The horizontal bar forms the social and ideological conditioning that made him intelligible to his contemporaries, and in fact to himself. The vertical bar is the mythological line of descent from previous poets back to Homer' (47). Frye's work tells us this one story, over and over: it is criticism, and criticism alone that can free literature from becoming or remaining a mere counter in the historical process of the legitimating of ruling-class interests.

Frye, as a critic, was confronted by two stark alternatives: on one side is a historical determinism so powerful that it cannot see anything like an autonomous 'aesthetic space' for literature, condemning all such notions as bourgeois illusions; on the other side is a linguistic nihilism so intense that it cannot see any social function for literature whatsoever, reducing it to an endless 'free-play' of ambiguous signifiers.

In Anatomy, Frye sees these alternatives as, simply, ideologies: as 'dialectical crowbar[s]' or 'determinisms/ all 'substituting a critical attitude for criticism' (12, 6). It is impossible to
overestimate the extent to which Anatomy emerges out of Frye's anxiety that such ideological approaches, such surrenderings of criticism to secondary concern, such 'definite positions' as he calls them (19), had reached a dead end.

III

St Paul, said that we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against powers, against the rulers of this world of darkness, against spiritual wickedness in high places. In recent years, literary and cultural criticism have wrestled - mostly in the dark, like Jacob - with the question of the relationship between language and power. The title of Frye's last major work, *Words with Power* it was natural to assume that Frye, despite his aversion to polemics and direct confrontation, had become interested in the debate and intended to take part in it, responding at last to the heavy criticism, even the dismissal, of his own theories during the poststructuralist era. Revision in such an extraordinarily consistent thinker is highly significant, and *Words with Power* quietly revises *The Great Code* by adding rhetoric - the ideological phase of language - exactly in the centre of its sequence of descriptive, conceptual, metaphorical, and kerygmatic phases.

*Words with Power* approaches its subject by means of current issues and vocabulary, the subject itself had been long meditated. From the outset Frye recognized, to borrow the title of one of his essays, that language is the home of human life; therefore a theory of society has to begin with a theory of language and its various functions.
Frye's literary theory gives a central place to myths and archetypes which extend from his literary commitments to his social concerns. Anyone who has a problem with Frye's literary theory is likely also to have a problem with his social perspective - and that these will be two versions of the same problem; that one's evaluation of both his literary and his social thought will depend upon whether one accepts or rejects the central principle of Words with Power, that which Frye calls existential or ecstatic metaphor. That is the latest name he found for the experience on which all his writing depends. From ecstatic metaphor springs the *axis mundi* which forms the anatomy of the entire order of words; from it springs the quest or journey which is the total narrative of literature; but from it also blossoms a vision of society progressively transformed in history through being recreated by its revelatory, or apocalyptic, power. The standard complaint about the mythical and archetypal perspective is that it is reductive it forces all the diversity of literature into the mould of a few predictably repetitive universals. The educational implications of such a point of view are authoritarian and conformist: education's job is to condition people into thinking within the categories of a few universal truths which work to reinforce social unity.

Attacks on Frye during the fifties and sixties tended to take the form of calling *Anatomy of Criticism* unscientific; the question was whether the archetypal patterns were there or not in an empirical sense. Attacks on Frye during the seventies and eighties often took another form. The question then became: Who has decided what the universals shall be, and whose is the authority to interpret, and therefore impose, their meaning? And this was a social, not just a literary, question. Literary patterns and meanings may remain within the realm of the hypothetical- the imagination's 'as if'. But the same myths and metaphors that organize literature serve as a model for the myths
and metaphors that organize culture and society. If the two realms were not synergetic, Frye would have no means of speaking in *Words with Power* of the social authority of the poet.

It is hardly a profound observation that the chief social and cultural problem of the contemporary world is the reconciliation of unity with diversity, common identity with difference. In the United States, 'multi-culturalism' and 'diversity' have become buzz words; Canada is trying to decide whether it is a 'Salad Bowl'; Europe is the chrysalis of an unknown species; the Soviet Union is 'former'; and Yugoslavia burns... Now the era of superpowers seems to be over: China and the United States may not fall apart like the Soviet Union, but it is clear that both are on the verge of transformation into something much less monolithic and overshadowing; and the false unities and orders, both foreign and domestic, imposed during the imperialistic period are crumbling. the reaction in the opposite direction against all forms of order, unity, or pattern, on the grounds that these are nothing but ideologies in disguise. At bottom a kind of anarchism whose goal, if anarchism can have a goal, is the addressing of some very real social injustices. But the feeling often seems to be that diversity is enough, that unity is invariably the sheep's clothing of some wolf's ideological program.

First of all, this courts a dangerous tribalism, as people huddle together in various ethnic, religious, economic, or other in-groups. Secondly, the modern world is a very lonely place, as people increasingly lose not only their sense of community but even a sense of personal identity. that life would be one exuberant carnival if only we could learn to live without such unhealthy security symbols as stable relationships, families, communities, and strong egos. Old orders and unities
must change, and change to something at once more equitable and more flexible, but a choice between order that denies difference and difference that denies order is no choice at all. It is what Blake called a 'cloven fiction.

that for Frye myths and archetypes, the units of unity and order in literature, are not categories of sameness and uniformity, but of something more paradoxical which the Romantics called unity-in-diversity, identity-in-difference, multeity-in-unity, the unity of opposites. The verbal means of expressing the identity of two different things is the metaphor, but in literature, as we noted, metaphor remains in the realm of the hypothetical or 'as if.' Therefore the social concerns of *Words with Power* drove Frye behind literary metaphor, so to speak, into the more experiential realm of ecstatic metaphor, of which literary metaphor is a descendant.

To ordinary consciousness, one thing is never also something else, except tautologically, so ordinary consciousness has, or thinks it has, little use for metaphor. It follows for ordinary consciousness, including what we call reason and commonsense, that unity and diversity, the universal and the particular, the One and the Many, can never be integrated. All there can be are a series of compromises, usually involving some form of hierarchical subordination, or an oscillation from one mode of perceiving to the other. In the paranoia of our times, what used to be dismissed as mystical or irrational - metaphor's paradoxical statement that \( A = B \) - is now more likely to be suspected as ideological double-talk hiding a political motive: if we say that All is One (or else should be) we have a good paradigm for a 'totalizing' social order. Therefore, if ecstatic metaphor is something more than wish-fulfillment or brainwashing, where is it available to us?
Its more intense forms occur in the kind of epiphanies or peak experiences characteristic of shamans, prophets, etc., and their latter-day descendants, the artists. Blake speaks of knowing the world in a grain of sand, eternity in an hour; more pertinent to our social theme, he speaks of One Man who is all human beings when viewed close up, and who is also identified with God and nature. Abraham Maslow claimed that such peak experiences are not unique to religious or artistic visionaries, but are the major identifying mark of self-actualized personalities. But what of those who have not been privileged enough to have had such an experience? Some of them may rather resent, in fact, the privileging of those who claim to have done so. Blake wished that all God's people were prophets.

Metaphors considered as units of structure build up the framework we call a cosmology; considered as units of process they build up the narratives we call myths. There is a misconception that myths are inherently conservative, that they are deterministic patterns imposed out of an anxiety about time and change. It is certainly true that myths, up to the Romantic period, have most often been pressed into the service of ideologies interested in controlling or preventing change: the natural order and social contract set down at the Creation by gods or culture heroes is renewed cyclically, is meant to endure eternally without deviation, and is the paradigm for every social activity down to eating and love-making. Frazer, one of the two influences on Frye's early social thought concurrently with Blake, showed how this was true of traditional nonhistorical societies, both archaic and contemporary; the other early influence, Spengler, showed that a cyclical decline-and-fall pattern survives in the sequence of historical civilizations, despite attempts of an ideology of linear progress to disguise it. Thus, the power of myth gets perverted by
what Frye calls the secondary concerns of the social contract into a cycle of eternal sameness; Frye calls Blake's version of this the Ore cycle. In it, the fiery-haired Ore embodies both the organic energy of physical nature and the social energy of revolution; but eventually such energy always declines, and Ore is made subservient to the icy-haired law-and-order figure Urizen; or else is sacrificed to Urizen in his prime, like an Adonis; or simply ages into him, as a hippie may age into a yuppie and vote Republican. In any case, the historical cycle merely turns round again, as law is imposed upon freedom, restraint upon desire, coercive unity upon diversity.

Blake realized, as did Freud and Jung after him, that this struggle of opposites is not a vestigial remnant of a savage time, as Frazer thought, but is fought out in the mind of every individual in every society. The humanities have become much more polemical in recent decades because certain writers have forced us to recognize that, like it or not, the humanities can find no sequestered ground apart from this struggle. Blake would have understood those writers, and up to a point sympathized with them: if there were ever a writer in the margins it was the neglected poet-prophet who scribbled some of his best aphorisms literally in the margins of books whose reactionary social opinions infuriated him.

The great social need of our time, as of Blake's own, is for a means to break the Ore cycle, the war between unity and diversity. Blake recognised that there is no fatalistic inevitability about that cycle, for when the power of ecstatic metaphor is liberated from its Samson-like subservience to the ideology of sameness, it becomes a force working progressively through history for recreation; through it, unity-in-diversity becomes not a static state of being but a dynamic process of evolving revelation, or apocalypse.
This may all sound naively idealistic enough. Yet the postmodern period is hardly likely to survive if we do not figure out how to achieve an individuality that is neither a falsely-unified egotism nor a disintegrated paranoid schizophrenia; a community that is neither an authoritarian hierarchy nor an ideologically-polarized tribalism. In fact, the idea in *Anatomy*, that we should expand our vision by subordinating value judgments to our experience of the whole order of words, canonical or noncanonical, popular or elitist, Western or non-Western, explodes the very idea of a canon as either the basis or the goal of our literary experience. Not a canon, then, but a tradition: an interpenetrating body of texts. The members of that body often disagree with, disapprove of, or dislike one another, yet they belong, even despite themselves, to a single community. The analogy with a possible social community is obvious. To say that such a thing does not and could not exist is beside the point. To wrestle against powers, one must possess power, and the vision's power to recreate those whom it inspires is what truly matters.

IV

In English departments at many American universities, 'theory' has come to be associated with opening the canon to previously excluded texts and with respecting difference in ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Critics aligned with theory are said to make up what Henry Louis Gates has called a 'Rainbow Coalition' (The Masti Pieces/95) of deconstructionists, feminists, and cultural-historical theorists. This coalition has been fiercely attacked by Dinesh D'Souza, Allan Bloom and others for subverting academic standards, politicizing appointments and reading lists, and fostering mind-numbing political correctness. D'Souza and Bloom, in return, have been
charged with racism, ethnocentrism, and even Fascism. Each side in this dispute accuses the other of intolerance, of repressing freedom while pretending to uphold it.

It is curious that Frye's work is rarely cited in this debate - because Frye not only did so much to champion theory, a key term in this dispute, but also advocated many of the values both theorists and antitheorists claim to be affirming: values like freedom, appreciation diversity, and democratic openness to other points of view. Here it is rewarding to reexamine Frye's work in light of the current quarrel over the canon and other issues, focusing especially on the 'residual anarchism' Frye inherits from the English Romantics (SR, 48). 'Residual anarchism' Frye's phrase for the feeling of the Romantic writers that a society advances only 'by individualizing itself, by being sufficiently tolerant and flexible to allow an individual to find his own identity within it, even though in doing so he comes to repudiate most of the conventional values of that society' (SR, 48). This Romantic commitment to individulizing society, to make it more receptive to personal difference, shows Frye's kinship with recent theorists as well as his distance from them.

At first glance, Frye would seem to be an important ally of theorists committed to diversity. Much of his writing favours an 'open mythology' over a closed one. According to Frye, a closed mythology results when a society feels that its myths of concern - its values, beliefs, and traditions - are the only right ones. Frye suspects that this seemingly arrogant assertion of superiority and correctness conceals anxiety about the form of life being defended. The very fact that a way of life needs defending, that it feels so threatened by fragmentation and discontinuity, testifies to an underlying vulnerability. Apprehensiveness, not confidence, thus prompts the nervous attempt to ward off the danger posed by difference. Frye's examples of closed mythologies include Naziism.
and Stalinist Marxism, each one uneasily defining itself by the brutal exclusion of purported outsiders.

Frye himself advocates an open mythology characterized by tolerance, with dialogue, and change. His well-known and still controversial uneasiness with value judgments in criticism is meant to shore up respect for university. In a striking statement in *The Modern Century*, published in 1967, he goes so far as to say that 'an open mythology has no canon' (18). Any canon, in this view, no matter how impartial or disinterested it may appear, is elitist; it projects onto literature a hierarchy that originates in social life. Commenting on how modern critical fashions promote some writers while demoting others, Frye writes, 'we can see that every increase of appreciation has been right, and every decrease wrong': 'criticism' he says, 'has no business to react against things, but should show a steady advance toward undiscriminating catholicity' (AC, 25).

For Frye, as he says in *The Critical Path*, 'there are no negative visions: all poets are potentially positive contributors to man's body of vision... Therefore... criticism does not aim at evaluation, which always means that the critic wants to get into the concern game himself, choosing a canon out of literature and so making literature a single gigantic allegory of his own anxieties' (127).

It is easy to read into these comments support for current critics interested in opening the canon to works by previously excluded writers. Frye feels in himself the longing for security that a critic like Bloom succumbs to. An open mythology he says at one point in *The Critical Path*, 'is by no means a panacea! Not only is there a constant pressure within society to close its mythology, from both radical and conservative wings, but the efforts to keep it open have to be strenuous, constant, delicate, unpopular, and above all largely negative' (156).
While explaining why even a democratic society has constantly to be kept open through strenuous opposition, it is to be noted that Frye is making a crucial Romantic point here: 'Romantic' because it results from the 'residual anarchism' that in his own view is Frye's chief inheritance from the Romantic writers who influenced him, especially William Blake. According to this line of thought, societies, even open and democratic ones, are apprehensive about perpetuating their values. They all feel tempted to close their mythology, to brook no dissent, and to claim that, finally, they have got things right. Blake expresses this scepticism towards politics when he notes in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, 'You cannot have Liberty in this World without [what you call] Moral Virtue & you cannot have Moral Virtue without the Slavery of that half of the Human Race who hate [what you call Moral Virtue]' (554). In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye similarly warns 'the idea of the free society implied in culture can never be formulated much less established as a society' (348). Drawing on how the Romantics viewed the failure of the French Revolution, Frye repeatedly cautions that political attempts to institutionalize freedom always fall short of their laudable aims. 'All forms of politics,' he concludes in *The Modern Century*, 'including the radical form, seem sooner or later to dwindle into a specialized chess game' (101).

This suspicion of political action and the possibilities of social life is intended not to discourage our quest for freedom but to unsettle our complacency. Efforts to keep a mythology open have to be strenuous, unpopular, and constant because the pressure to close a mythology speaks to our deep-seated fear of change and losing control, not to mention our ever-present readiness to declare things over and done with. Taking another Romantic step, Frye makes the individual the final custodian of freedom, the force that contests a society's closure. This appeal to the individual is a Romantic step because, as Frye points out, Romanticism licenses the individual to put pressure on society: the responsiveness of society to the self takes precedence over the socialization of
recalcitrant individuals. Frye shows how the Romantic writers consequently shy away from such literary genres as comedy. By 'the social emphasis of comedy, Frye means the compromise that results when individuals - obstructionist rulers, unhelpful parents, headstrong young lovers - give up insisting too stridently on their particular grievances, and the community in turn expands to accommodate their differences. From a Romantic point of view, the seemingly regenerated society affirmed by comedy is not regenerated enough because it still blunts the full discovery and assertion of personal difference. According to Frye, all societies do this, even ones we rightly feel some allegiance to Frye accordingly pictures a never-ending tension between individuals and the society that lays claim to them. Frye does not imagine these individuals coming into this world with an innate, prior sense of what is right. He sees them being detached from their society - critically distanced from it - but not separate; their efforts are largely negative because they react against a preexistent form of life that is constantly impinging on them. These terminally restless individuals see the boundaries of their culture and they chafe against its limitations.

Even though Frye places the individual in society, his Romantic privileging of the individual as the caretaker of freedom clashes with what contemporary literary theorists call the social construction of the subject. For him, individuals gain a critical perspective on society by assessing the objective truth of its values. These individuals compose a sceptical, often unpopular minority committed to what Frye calls the myth of freedom. They refuse to take their culture's claims at face value; they insist on measuring their society's concerns by the facts, reason, and evidence. According to Frye, the open society tolerates and even encourages this appeal to objective truth and the critical self-examination it promotes. A closed society, by contrast, discourages intellectual honesty, distorts history, and even falsifies the results of science, all in a desperate effort to exempt
its way from criticism. Put a bit differently, an open society has no fixed "value because it welcomes exposure to the endless diversity of literature. As Frye puts it, 'precisely because its variety is infinite, literature suggests encyclopaedic range of concern greater than any formulation of concern in religious or political myth can express' (CP, 103). An open society learns from the infinite variety of literature the limits of its own and the consequent value of making room for other points of view. A closed society, however, recoils from this discovery; censorship, indoctrination, and didacticism replace the wide-ranging, objective inquiry Frye favours.

It is mentioned earlier that Frye's respect for the individual as a guarantor of freedom places him at odds with tendencies in recent literary theory. So does his esteem for what he often calls the autonomy of scholarship or this recourse to objective truth, reason, and evidence. Much as current critics emphasize the social construction of the individual subject, they equate 'truth' with what a particular society or interpretive community happens to count as truth. According to that argument, a culture's myths of concerns shape what it calls objective knowledge; the latter disappears as a free-standing, culturally transcendent yardstick. What Frye wants to distance from society thus get reinscribed within society. Frye anticipates this argument and tries to answer it. In *The Critical Path*, he puts the problem of achieving objectivity this way:

There is also a philosophical issue involved which concerns the degree to which anything in words can tell the truth at all, in terms of the truth as correspondence. In truth of correspondence a verbal structure is aligned with the phenomena it describes, but every verbal structure contains mythical and fictional features simply because it is a verbal structure. Even the subject-predicate-object relationship is a verbal fiction, and arises from the conditions of grammar, not from those of the subject being studied. Then again, anything presented in words has a narrative shape (my/thos) and is partly conditioned by the demands of narrative. (119)
From this point of view, every verbal structure may have mythical and fictional features shaping its representation of things as they are and blocking its crucial access to extralinguistic truth. Access to objective truth is again crucial for Frye because it provides individuals with a vantage point for criticizing their culture's myths of concern.

Frye tries to salvage objectivity by conceding that the standards logic, truth, and evidence are 'approximations' and 'analogies' of that admittedly may not exist. This pragmatic recuperation of objectivity has many analogues in contemporary criticism. Jacques Derrida, for example, speaks of Claude Levi-Strauss's 'double intention' with respect to metaphysical concepts like origin and centre: Levi-Strauss wants 'to preserve as an instrument something whose truth value he criticizes' ('Structure, Sign, and Play/1120). Frye takes a similar approach to the truth of correspondence but, like Strauss he ends up needing to treat this truth as truth, as much more than a possible approximation or mere analogue. Frye, the truth of correspondence is indispensable to personal freedom; Frye's problem is that politically he cannot do without truth, evidence, and so on (lest he undermine his case for freedom), but philosophically he cannot support these ideals in the cognitive terms that alone would give them real authority. Dissent needs to have truth on its side: as Frye puts it in *The Critical Path*, 'the socially critical attitudes, which perceive hypocrisy, corruption, failure to meet standards, gaps between the real and the ideal, and the like, are antiritualistic, and cannot attract much social notice without the support of one powerful ally, the truth of correspondence revealed through reason and evidence' (45). By attenuating access to things as they are, his epistemology creates difficulties for his politics. Although Frye's argument is strained, his intent is clear. He means 'to show by example that beliefs may be held and examined at the same time' (CP, 109). At one point Frye observes parenthetically that 'in times of stress the inadequacy or impossibility of objective truth... is much insisted on' (CP, 119).
Theorists like Stanley Fish, for example, argue that having beliefs precludes our examining them, at least from some nonavailable objective vantage point, whereas neo-conservatives fear that critically analysing beliefs impairs our confidence in them. In his writing Frye steers between these two extremes. He achieves in practice the dialogue between commitment and self-criticism that he cannot quite account for in theory. As any reader of Frye knows, he has beliefs, takes stands, and makes assertions. But even as he insists 'this is so' he respects the voice that urges 'but suppose this is so'. Frye shows why this tension between belief and doubt has to continue, lest belief degenerate into fanaticism and doubt end up excusing inaction.

V

In a sense, The Modern Century (1967), is the obvious political manifesto of Frye: It contains his critique of totalitarianism, hegemonic rhetorics, the oppressive determinism of progress, the dehumanization of technology and the manipulations of the communication apparatus. He did not contest any of these with the stridency or aggressiveness of Jean Francois Revel or Raymond Aron; he scrupulously avoided any rhetorical, sentimental or militant temptations. On the other hand, he strengthened the readers belief in values, aptitude for assessing things in moderation, and confidence in hope.

The modern world is the first civilization in history to focus on the study of itself (MC, 18-20). It made attempts, and still does, to find out the presuppositions that direct its behaviours, and continues to try and understand its past, and thereby to control its' future.
This self-awareness, Frye believes, provoked the emergence, and then the deepening, of an antagonism between two attitudes: one of involvement, a critical examination of events and phenomena, an effort to struggle forward to a new acceptable way of life; the other, of indulging oneself in passivity, of living at random, without asking questions or seeking solutions.

We find this separation between those who accept the world as it is and those who want to change it, or at least to know it, in the mythologies governing our representations and faiths. According to Frye, since the nineteenth century Christian mythology has been replaced by one that rejects theology, as well as teleology. This modern mythology removes God from his position as the creator and legislator of the universe; thus human beings become the product of natural evolution and the authors of civilization and knowledge. Nevertheless, the modern mythology works, either in its closed or open version; the former is based on cliches and standard answers acquired in school and reinforced by the mass media and in illustrated by communist practices; but it occurs, as well, in less coherent patterns, in liberal societies, religious ritual, or even in the famous American Way of Life. The widely circulated texts comprise vestiges of Christian mythology in evasive or transgressive forms (the myths of Paradise, the Fall, Exodus, Apocalypse, etc.). The open mythologies, characteristic of democratic societies, are loose free structures - so much so that even the term structure, a metaphor of solidity, seems to be inadequate. They continue to enrich through the creations of some of our great minds, from Rousseau, Marx, Freud, up to the existential philosophers. Frye also mentions the so-called idea books, which hover over the intellectual world, helping us to coordinate and make sense of contratraclictory aspects of human existence. Among the authors he mentions in this connection are Spengler, Toynbee, Hannah Arendt, Whitehead, Fiedler, Eddington, Marcuse, Martin Buber, and Harold Rosenberg (The Tradition of the New),
among others. The common feature of these historians, scholars, critics, and philosophers is that they deal with human situations from an essential perspective, beyond the particular case of each field activity. Focusing on human beings as biological, social, and metaphysical entities, they assess knowledge and technique in relation to them ('myth of concern').

The active-passive distinction mentioned above separates the artistic creation from communication techniques and mass culture based on stereotypes and recurrent formulas. Creation requires the reader's imagination and involves his or her active collaboration. Communication addresses automatic comprehension; it implies preexisting answers and a passive response. This approach is a part of the modern theory of reader-response criticism. Frye's contribution (MC, 26ff.) seems relevant here, particularly in the discussion of advertisements and propaganda, two communicative techniques widely used in contemporary society. The way in which these techniques utilize shock and extreme and unexpected and sometimes absurd statements puzzles or discourages the critical conscience. Ads and propaganda insinuate themselves into the credulous, or childish minds – unfortunately, that of the majority - where they gain ground and finally settle their slogans, defeating any kind of resistance. They do not cause adherence necessarily, but, as it happens with drugs, they bring about an unmediated dependence on the versions of reality they provide.

Frye's idea can be applied in an interesting way, assuming that ads and propaganda represent activities specific to the two systems. Thus ads are relevant for liberal societies, since they imply a separation between economic and political structures. In the former socialist countries the political used to govern all else powerfully, and the products were the same in terms of range and quality;
throughout the home-trade, ads were mere simulacrum, as were the parliamentary institution and the liberties written down in the constitution. In contrast, propaganda was an effective weapon because of the generalized, obsessive nature of its impact. The simplistic slogans were uttered time after time by all the means available to the media, from the parliamentary rostrum, the elementary school, and academy. As Huxley, Orwell, and many others have revealed in their negative Utopias, what was intended was the ideological vaccination of the population, the replacement of education with training.

In this perspective, Frye's following statement is a surprise: 'Even propaganda based on the big lie, as when an American or Chinese politician tries to get rid of a rival by calling him a communist or a bourgeois counter-revolutionary, can establish itself and command assent if it makes more noise than the denial of the charge' (MC, 27). The situation described is only theoretically possible. In fact, the lie of the American politician can be denied at any time, whereas the lie of the Chinese politician can be denied only if the state is interested in having it denied. In a totalitarian country there is only the monologue of power. The alternative sources of information are forbidden. The logic of the system does not tolerate dissidence, opposition, or heresy. Nobody is allowed publicly to oppose the official allegations. The truth is only what the tyrant reckons as such.

One of the most characteristic features of the modern epoch, that Frye gives much prominence to, is the rapid pace of change. As a consequence of the acceleration of technological progress, a new perception of time has appeared. The steady motion is the fact that every day; every hour changes the daily landscape, dramatizes the individual's sense of existence. A lot of people feel a genuine
panic about change, so much so that they become incapable of putting up with the ceaseless mutations and metamorphoses in social life. They are not able to meet the presuppositions of progress: the dynamic is preferred to the static; the process to the result, the organic to the mechanical. Alienation insinuates itself into human minds: within all the mechanisms of progress, we are merely passengers travelling with an unknown driver.

A typical example (MC, 32) of 'a progressive machine' is, according to Karl Polanyi, the self-regulating market of laissez-faire. The market's independent functioning for more than a century, with indisputable successes as well as contradictions and failures, suggests a noncritical dependence on what Polanyi called 'the alleged self-healing virtues the unconscious growth' (MC, 32). This implies that the fulfillment of social progress has been transferred from human will to autonomous social forces. A similar example (MC, 32) is provided by 'communist theology' within which the historical process is granted the part of The Holy Spirit in the Christian faith, that of omnipotent force cooperating with human will without depending on it.

Frye wonders (MC, 34-5): whether we can know that we made for the right direction, and ensure that tomorrow will be superior to today; whether it is worth sacrificing the present to the future as communist leaders have us believe; are not, the most awful aspects of contemporaneity likely to be accounted for by the desire to 'achieve better'; whether the massacre of civil populations 'helps' to win wars and to settle peace; whether the racial crimes 'solve' the Jewish problem or the problems if other persecuted minorities; whether the starvation of millions of people 'keeps up' the farmers' living standard.
Technology does not represent in itself a means of improving life. It can change the world without altering people's souls. Furthermore, it works within a mechanism that swings between advantages and disadvantages. Any improvement in a field gives birth to a lack of balance, which stimulates strains, followed by further disturbances. Neither does science, abandoned to itself, develop automatically towards excellence. It does not exist outside society, and society, either openly or secretly, directs the course of science. When the direction is open, there is competition between relatively autonomous factors. When it is secret, as in totalitarian countries, there is little competition. In both cases, society, deliberately or unawares, directs the development. In this perspective Frye rejects McLuhan's speculations (MC, 39-40), in whose rigid determinism he finds an oversimplified form of rhetoric. Thus, the identification between medium and message has to be interpreted according to the active or passive response of the receiver. Television's 'coolness' and radio's 'hot' character are not intrinsic: 'All forms of communication, from transistors to atom bombs, are equally hot when someone else's finger is on the button' (MC, 40). The quality of the medium results from the way it is used. Another disadvantage of progress is the oppressive tendency towards standardization (MC, 36). The hideous outskirts of the huge metropolises all look alike, irrespective of the country to which they belong, as do the standardized products of big industries. In everyday's speeches the cliches sound the same. Everything seems to symbolize an alarming tendency towards spiritual conformity, a proliferation of the passive response.
Displaying a view which reminds one of *A Brave New World*, Frye reminds us that, if some tendencies inherent in our civilization are not put to an end, they could lead rapidly to a society 'which like that of a prison, would be both completely introverted and completely without privacy' (MC, 38). The new electronic media could penetrate the ultimate fortresses of the inner mind, making a short circuit in its associative structures and replacing them with the prefabricated ones of the media. A society wholly controlled by slogans and cliches would become completely, introverted, because people would no longer have anything to say: 'there would only be echo, and Echo was the mistress of Narcissus.

While true, this viewpoint does not seem sufficiently clear in the subtle shades of meaning. In the former Eastern socialist countries dictators tried manipulating the media in order to control education and make existence ritualistic: to make everyone think alike. In spite of the huge effort expended, they failed. At night, behind locked doors people were listening to Free Europe, the BBC, or the Voice of America; many authors had become used to transgressing the rigid censorship by using an Aesopic language, and wide masses of redears had acquired the ability to read between the lines. Everybody, from young to the old, realized that the dictator lied. That is why, in the years preceding 1989, the genuine problem was not one of conditioning from the insidious reiteration of the same silly slogans, but one of schizophrenia, having to live a double life: at work people had to keep silent or lie, but at home they could 'speak'
The myth of progress received a nasty blow with the stock market crash and financial bankruptcy of 1929 (MC, 42-3). Since then other dramatic events have occurred, helping to open the eyes of the naive. Frye mentions H.G. Wells who had bet for a long time on the self-developing capacity of science. Wells’s last book, *The Mind at the End of Its Tether* (1940), is permeated with the bitterness and fury of a disappointed idealism. But he is still far from the nightmare recalled Orwell, and by so many other authors of distopias who describe culture, technology, science, and language operating in demonic or perverted forms.

The optimism about progress cherished by the eighteenth century seems completely out of date today. After the catastrophic collapse of communism, it is difficult to believe that a pure and reasonable society could be reborn and cleansed from an accumulation of injustice and absurdities by means of a purifying revolution. “Is not Swift more realistic when he holds that slavery is at least as natural for beings as freedom” (MC, 43)? At present, we understand that progress means march towards a target that may be closer to disaster than to perfection. Once a sense of alienation and anxiety were contemplated as a fear of Hell: nowadays this fear is attached not to the world of the dead, but to the future of our own world. The collapse of belief in progress intensifies the sense of anxiety originating in the consciousness of death. In this context, the very ontology of Nation-State comes under interrogation.

A less sceptical Frye, on this question paradoxically, supports the idea that the nation is an out-of-date category: “it seems to me... quite clear that we are moving towards a post-national world.” What
is important about the last century, in this country, is not it we have been a nation for a hundred years, but that we have had a years in which to make the transition from a pre-national to a post-national consciousness” (MC, 17).

It is true that in 1967, when Frye was writing this book, there were plenty of people who thought that, with interplanetary communications and economic interdependence on a world scale, the nation was an anachronistic reality. However, at that time, nationalism in Eastern Europe was in full swing. It was cultivated by the leading bureaucracy to create a diversion; it was meant to distract people's attention from economic hardships and isolate dissident movements. Examples abound in the mid-1980s and Romania under Caucescu serves as Frye's burning example: how it exported food while its citizens starved; how the villages were 'systematized'; old urban centres were destroyed; the women were required to submit to periodic gynaecological examinations. In exchange, under colour of the so-called policy of independence from Moscow, the dictator acted out an aggressive, primitive, megalomaniacal nationalism with Manichean connotations. Other Eastern leaders kept pace with him; the Bulgarian Jivkov put into practice the plan of denationalizing Turks, and the German Honecker invented the existence of a socialist German nation, different from the bourgeois German. The disastrous effects of this policy meant to homogenize people by force and rouse intolerance towards minorities is quite palpable. Under the circumstances, when the hazard is disguised retrospectively by some people as necessity, history sometimes preserves the ridiculous on its stage, rehabilitating what is marginal and generally having fun refuting our expectations. The loss of faith is, of course a religious problem. Yet it has a political dimension as well. Frye expresses this in the question: To whom do we owe our loyalty in society? In fact, this
is a transposition of Dostoyevsky's and Nietzsche's terrible question: if God does not exist, is anything permitted?

To clear up these points, Frye quotes an apologue of William Blake; (MC, 120-1). In the poem The Lamb,' from the cycle Songs of Innocence a child asks the first question of the catechism: 'Who made you?' The answer is reassuring: Jesus Christ made the lamb because he himself is both a child and a lamb, joining the human and the subhuman world within the divine personality. But in the poem 'The Tyger,' from cycle Songs of Experience, the question 'Did he who made the lamb| thee? is left without an answer. The vision has disappeared of a world created by a reasonable, beneficent power, in which there live only the lambs. The world we live in is that of the tiger, the one trivial of the blind instincts, of alienation, and the rush to power; it is not the one of reason, tolerance, and reliability. In it, men and women are only creative beings, but, as with the iceberg, the good part floats over unfathomable depths, populated by the forces of evil and destructicyion. Nevertheless, in trying hard to imagine or create a better world beyond everyday troubles and trivialities, there seems to survive something of the child's innocence. We feel obscurely that the dream of the impossible creation, which gives sense to human action is not altogether lost. The ideal exits but something of it is still there, hidden under the slime of reality. The hidden side of America emerging from Thoreau's or Whitman's works, as well as from Lincoln's personality is the height of the iceberg's tip. 'All nations have such a buried or uncreated ideal, the last world of the lamb and the child' (MC, 122). Only the poets reveal to us what is hidden. Only they find what has not been; and and hear what the noise of the world prevents us from hearing. In this respect, Frye concludes: The Canada to which we really do owe loyalty is the Canada that we have failed to create' (MC, 122-3). And further on: 'I should like to
suggest that our identity like the real identity of all the nations is the one that we have failed to achieve. It is expressed in our culture but not attained in our life' (MC, 123).

Frye's idea can be applied to a larger area. Since democracy is a self-referential system and its exercise is not guaranteed by any transcendence, there is only one legitimate alternative: to save freedom without falling into anarchy, we have to develop an autonomy based on consensual solidarity. The only reasonable behaviour would be to hope to fulfill that identity of democracy we know from books, but which we have failed to achieve so far in practice.

VI

The last few decades appear to have witnessed every possible extreme of response to, and evaluation of, the work of Frye; but few commentators on the cultural scene have been able to ignore it. As early as 1976, Malcolm Ross claimed that Frye 'caught up all our national anxieties, all our moral and metaphysical concerns, all our critical and formal queries about the nature and purpose of arts, reordered them, transubstantiated them, made of them a great *Summa*, made of criticism itself a total *gestalt*, a substitute for religion' (*Critical Theory* 167-8). Frye's largely occasional pieces on Canadian cultural topics find their place in this *Summa*, but they too are not exempt from extremes of response. For some, the 'dean of Canadian critics' was responsible for proclaiming 'the merit and grandeur and existence of a vital Canadian literature/ defining 'the Canadian imagination for this century.' (St Andrews, 'The Canadian Connection: Frye/Atwood' 47) For others, his influence on Canadian literature and criticism was 'pervasive' but 'bad, destructive of 'the distinctive qualities of the Canadian identity'.(Jackel, 'Northrop Frye and the
Cotinentalist Tradition', 228) For still others, his impact was 'minor' and 'overestimated.' (Cameron, 'Frye Talking' 114) Most have noticed the discrepancy between Frye's grand systematic structures of literary myth (in general and in the literature of the past) and his more 'immediate and formally more fragmentary pieces on the literature of his own country.' (Woodcock, 'Diana's Priest in the Bush Garden', 227) The approach of this chapter is to one particular part of Frye's corpus - his Canadian writings, and in particular his Conclusion to the first (1965) and the second (1976) editions of *Literary History of Canada*. It is what some would call a typically 'postmodern' one that eschews this kind of binary opposition in order to explore the both/and logic of the middle ground. On the surface, that is where the similarity ends between Frye - the modernist and the humanist - and many of those who followed - the postmodernists and the poststructuralists or feminists or 'postcolonialists.'

It is not hard to see why Frye has been located in the modernist camp. (Cook, 'Northrop Frye: A Vision of the New World' 14) Even in his Canadian writings, Frye insisted upon an 'international' style (reminiscent of architectural modernism's 'international style') and upon an antimimetic, modernist view of the autonomy of art: as he taught, 'the poet's quest is for form' (BG, 176). But aesthetic modernism is a particular manifestation of modernity: a broader cultural and social 'paradigm' (Huyssen via Kuhn) or 'project' (Habermas) or 'episteme' (Foucault) or 'condition' (Lyotard). Nevertheless, what philosophers and social analysts seem to agree upon is that what all call modernity began with the shift from Renaissance humanism to Cartesian rationalism, with a move onto what Stephen Toulmin characterizes as 'a higher, stratospheric plane, on which nature and ethics conform to abstract, timeless, general, and universal theories' (*Cosmopolis*, 35). It is on this
general, universal, totalizing plane that are born and flourish both Frye's totalizing, visionary order of myth and his fervent humanist belief in the value and function of art.

Frye's work has been seen by some either to anticipate or actually to be itself an example of structuralism at work. While both obviously share this modern systematizing impulse, the nature of the system and its derivation could not be more different. This difference, however, is less with structuralism - which, arguably, very much a product of modernity - than with those diverse theories grouped together under the label of poststructuralism. Edward Said had already contrasted Frye's centred theory with the decentred ones of Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze (Beginnings, 375-7). There are some critics who see Frye as prefiguring, or even initiating, certain poststructuralist notions. They do not take sufficiently into account what Andreas Huyssen calls the major 'shift in sensibility, practices, and discourse formations which distinguishes a postmodern set of assumptions, experiences and propositions from that of a preceding period' (After the Great Divide, 181). Dealing with the most general of terms, in the postmodern (non-)scheme of things, foundational concepts like system, order, and rationality are called into question by nonfoundational notions like contingency, ambiguity, and provisionality. The universal, the general, and the timeless are undermined by a valuing of the particular, the local, and the timely.

To begin with the obvious and move to the more contentious is, in this context, to move from the general and theoretical to the specifically Canadian. Despite Terry Eagleton's views of Frye's classificatory scientificity as antihumanist (Literary Theory, 91-6), it would be Frye's passionate humanist commitment that likely marks the greatest divergence from such postmodern stances as Derridean deconstruction with its emphasis, to use A.C. Hamilton's terms, on 'difference not
identity, temporality not spatiality, fissure not fusion, gaps not continuity, dissemination not polysemy, fragmentation not unity, aporias not vision' (Northrop Frye, 218). In a very different sense from Derrida's much discussed challenge to Western metaphysics, Frye's system of mythic patterns is also vast in its implications, because it is 'epistemologically constitutive, conditioning our basic perceptions of the structure of the universe.' The teaching of literature, therefore, becomes the teaching of 'the ability to be aware of one's imaginative social vision, and so escape the prison of unconscious social conditioning' (BG, 29). The step from humanist educational mission to certain kinds of feminist or poststructuralist teaching may not seem a great one: all share a desire to defamiliarize the 'givens' of culture and to raise consciousness. But Frye's 'mythological universe, a body of assumptions and beliefs developed from... [human] existential concerns' (GC, xviii) is conceptually quite distant from a Barthesian or Althusserian postmodern concept of ideology. Indeed, what Frye called 'ideology' was always secondary to the mythic, derivative rather than creative.13

This emphasis on the imaginative and the creative (rather than on any postmodern stress on the subjection to, and seduction of, ideology) is a sign of Frye's roots in a tradition that is both idealistic and romantic. However, it also signals his modernist faith in the autonomy of art that is the core of his 'militantly non-referential view of literature' (Gorak, 'The Making of the Modern Canon). In his discussion of Canadian literature before 1965 - in his Conclusion to the first edition of Literary History of Canada - Frye asserted that the 'forms of literature are autonomous: they exist within literature itself, and cannot be derived from any experience outside literature' (347), but that Canadian literature is still 'more significantly studied as a part of Canadian life than as part
of an autonomous world of literature' (334). This particular judgment exemplifies one of the major tensions in Frye's work, a tension that is arguably postmodern in its paradoxical recognition of both the reflexivity and the worldliness of literature.

This is, obviously, the modernist frame of reference of Frye's detached and autonomous mythology (349), a frame that shows (as did Eliot's before it) romantic roots and classical aspirations: 'the imagination is the constructive element in the mind' argues Frye, while noting that its 'intensity cannot be conveyed except through structure, which includes design, balance, and proportion' (Conclusion[1976], 330-1). Frye's mythic theorizing, as many have pointed out, is itself definable in these terms as a high modernist work, a triumph of the totalizing, organizing imagination; of course, a postmodern view might well see such an 'Apollonian' ordering impulse as also manifesting a certain 'will to power over the field of contemporary criticism.' (O'Hara, 'The Romance of Interpretation). Frye's 'elaborate and beautiful structures,' as they have been called, are nothing short of a total, and overtly Utopian, scheme for interpreting the universe. In other words, in direct opposition to what Jean-François Lyotard calls the postmodern 'incredulity toward metanarrative,' and in strong contrast to the postmodern suspicion of the power behind such hermeneutics and its possible suppression of difference. Frye's inclusive 'master' or metanarrative could be seen to elide difference in the name of both the commonality (indeed universality) and the coherence characteristic of the paradigm of modernity. Aiming to reconcile, rather than foreground, differences, this 'synoptic' view (AC, 3) of literature and criticism may well be an 'artistic achievement, but its achievement would have to be defined within a very particular context - that of the modernity. In that frame of reference, the postmodernly plural - the contingent, the provisional, the multiple, the different, and the indeterminate - would have to be homogenized.
Frye, the humanist, the modern, argues that 'the imagination is occupationally disposed to synthesis' (BG, x). When Hamilton interprets this synthesizing disposition as a 'distinctively Canadian response to an overwhelming, alienating, and therefore self-alienating physical environment' (Northrop Frye, xiii), he is therefore aptly interpreting Frye very much in his own terms.

But are all tensions and contradictions really resolved so easily? For example, Frye may indeed debunk the notion of the romantic genius in the first Conclusion (335), but he simultaneously invokes (over thirty times in as many pages) an equally romantic notion of the imagination, interpreted in characteristically liberal humanist (paradoxical) terms as both individual and universal. To complicate matters even more, Frye also adds something called the 'social' or the 'Canadian imagination' - and this is where things start to get interestingly postmodern.

Of all the theoretical positions that Frye took over the years, perhaps none caused more debate than his famous stand on the danger of making value-judgments the goal or starting point of criticism (AC, 18-24; 'On Value Judgments'). Almost everyone who has written on Frye has had his or her own (mis)understanding of this position. The Anatomy of Criticism is a 'memorable and influential piece of counter-axiology' as Barbara Herrnstein Smith makes it out to be (Contingencies of Value, 12). The view Frye offers in two Conclusions to Literary History of Canada is not so far from Smith's own theories of mutual implication of criticism and the 'history of taste' (22). And thus of the historical relativity and contingency of values in intellectual, social, and institutional contexts. In 1965, Frye was willing to make a judgment call- to say that there was not yet any 'classic' writer in Canada, classic in the sense of 'possessing a vision greater in kind than that of his
Having done so, however, he could then safely deny that *Literary History*, as a whole, was evaluative: it could not be an act of canonization because there was nothing yet worthy enough to canonize. The postmodern challenges to canon-formation over the last decades might make Frye's contradictory remarks about evaluating the quality of Canadian writing seem disingenuous to some. But they represent precisely what has come to see as the postmodern tension between the local and the particular versus the universal and the general. This and other tensions forced Frye into the seemingly contradictory position of valuing in our literature that which 'pulls us away from the Canadian context toward the centre of literary experience itself' (Conclusion [1965], 334), and yet being unable to ignore the Canadian 'social and historical setting' (334). By 1976, when he published the second Conclusion, Frye could happily celebrate 'a bulk of good writing,' with an 'extraordinary vitality and morale behind it' (Conclusion [1976], 319): 'Canadian literature is here' (319), he proclaimed, but still added: 'perhaps still a minor but certainly no longer a gleam in a paternal critic's eye' (319). By 1991, just before his death, Frye could go even further: 'English Canada, the land nobody wanted, the land that seemed unable to communicate except by railways and bridges, began, from about 1960 on, to produce a literature of a scope and integrity admired the world over.'

Frye did steadfastly refuse to rank Canadian writers, saying: 'The differences in value will emerge after a century or so and we don't need to hurry about them.' But he thereby obscured his own, very considerable role as reviewer, critic, teacher, and editor in that very act of canonization and differentiation. Indeed, he has been called one of the most significant canon-makers of postwar criticism, and not only within Canada. It has been pointed out that many of his so-called factual terms are in fact value-judgments - 'naive allegory/ superficial convention,' His reviews are obviously full of evaluative statements (see P.J.M. Robertson), especially his 'Letters in Canada'
reviews of Canadian poetry in the 1950s. There, aware of writing for a specifically Canadian readership, not for 'invisible posterity' (BG, 126), Frye chooses to deal with 'the positive merits of what is before him' rather than with 'vague relativities of "greatness"' (BG, 126). His reason is stated in the first Conclusion as: 'while much Canadian verse could be honestly described, by the highest standards of the best twentieth-century poets, as metrical doodling, it could also be described, just as honestly and perhaps more usefully, as the poetic conversation of cultivated people' (57). This tension between his humanist/universalist or his modernist/internationalist 'standards' of the 'classics' and the Canadian contextual specifics is what brought about the diverse responses to Frye's position: on the one hand, he was praised for honestly judging the quality of Canadian writing and thus being in 'the grandest Western tradition of self-criticism'; on the other hand, he was called, in Heather Murray's memorable image, a 'wolf in sheepdog's clothing/standing guard 'over a fledgling Canadian literature, protecting it from the ravages of evaluation - but is he really the leader of the pack?" ('Reading for Contradiction/ 73).

This very argument, however, can only be carried on within the frame of reference of the modern paradigm, where foundational truth supports firm and accepted universal standards of judgment. But this is not simple if we chose to examine Frye's position from a postmodern perspective, which, in Zygmunt Bauman's terms, 'does not seek to substitute one truth for another, one standard of beauty for another, one life ideal for another... [but] braces itself for a life without truths, standards, ideals' (Intimations, ix) In other words, if the perspective is changed, instead of sounding like a failed nation with a deficient or at least immature culture according to the model of modernity, Frye's Canada might start to sound postmodemly open and provisional. When the universals are undermined and were shown, in fact, to be very limited in terms of class, race, and
gender Frye asks 'Where is here?' (Conclusion [1965], 338). This is to position oneself locally and specifically.

Perhaps what the modernist, progressivist) Frye disliked as Canada's romantic 'fixation on its own past' (338) could be recoded in terms of the postmodern queries about the ontology and epistemology of history itself. In short, the contradictions that Heather Murray ('Reading for Contradiction,' 73) wants us to read for in Canadian writing by means of Marxist, deconstructionist, psychoanalytic, and feminist theories are to be seen in Frye too; postmodern eruptions break through the modernist order of his thought. That these eruptions occur most often in his Canadian writings is not an accident.

For Frank Lentricchia, Frye is 'half-structuralist, half-aesthete' (After the New Criticism, 10). In his Canadian writings, Frye gives us, according to A.J.M. Smith, 'paradoxes which, as he presents them, seem like truisms' (Towards a View, 202). Eli Mandel reads the simultaneously 'nationalist, internationalist, regionalist' Frye as inconsistent (Another Time, 158) and contradictory ('Northrop Frye,' 284). Indeed, within the modern paradigm, any postmodern inclusive, both/and thinking - that would accept and seek to value such seeming opposites is literally inconceivable. The modern is the realm of the binary either/or. But if one is willing to accept the multiple and the tentative instead of the single and the sure, and if one can live with the relational instead of the oppositional, then the tensions that are so (modernly) troublesome can become the (postmodern) complexities. That might enrich one's understanding both of Canadian culture and of Frye's position on (and in)
The most obvious of these tensions are the non-evaluating Frye evaluating Canadian literature, both reinforcing and calling into question the validity of universal standards of judgment. Part of the tension here results from the two different - but often simultaneous - roles Frye played in Canadian letters: he was at once an 'academic critic' and a 'public critic,' the detached analyst of autonomous art and the Tory radical, concerned with the social and historical function of art, and particularly of Canadian art.

So, often at one and the same time, Frye was the Olympian, detached theorist and the engaged field-worker as teacher and reviewer. His faith in humanist universals and his modernist inter-nationalism sat side by side with his belief in the power and value of Canadian regionalism; his view of art as autonomous rubbed shoulders with his commitment to the local roots of imagination: 'Poets do not live on Mount Parnassus, but in their own environments, and Canada has made itself an environmental reality,' he wrote in The Bush Garden (10). Typically these contradictions are expressed in the same sentence: he mentions his 'writing career which has been mainly concerned with world literature and has addressed an international reading public, and yet has always been rooted in Canada and has drawn its essential characteristics from there' (BG, i); at other times, he is referring to Canadian poetry, where he has seen how 'the echoes and ripples of the great mythopoeic age kept moving through Canada, and taking a form there that they could not have taken elsewhere' (BG, ix). In either case, the paradoxes remain.

Some have argued, like P.M. Cummings, that Frye actually managed to synthesize disinterested aesthetic criticism with socially conscious humanistic criticism; but perhaps that too is a modern, totalizing position that resolves the tensions instead of dealing with them. Readers of Frye have often chosen to ignore one half of the contradiction, on the grounds that it does not fit their
particular vision of consistency and right order. For instance, some see only his interest in the Canadian social and historical context, and then either celebrate that or condemn it as a reduction of the 'study of literature to that of various aspects of Canadian life'\textsuperscript{32} or, worse, as the founding principle of the much derided 'thematic criticism' that is said to have dominated Canadian literary thinking, leading to what Frank Davey once called 'sociology -usually bad sociology… extra-literary, normative and polemic' ([Surviving the Paraphrase, 5]. Others have seen only the other side, the interest in 'literature as some kind of separate, total system.'\textsuperscript{33} There is no doubt that Frye believed in the 'order of words the 'total structure of literature itself' (SS, 88); but he also said that the role of criticism was 'to examine first the literary and then the social context of whatever it's studying.'\textsuperscript{34}

The subtitle of The Critical Path, after all, was *An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism*; that of The Stubborn Structure was *Essays on Criticism and Society*. But it is in his writings on Canadian culture that this side of his work comes out most clearly, and those critics who have not looked at these writings frequently miss this important tension in his thought.

Those who have studied these texts, though, often take a postmodern stance, accepting the tensions and seeing them, in fact, as productive. Ian Balfour notes that Frye's writings on 'Canadian culture qualify and complicate (for his readers) the rest of his oeuvre,' because they force a 'reconsideration of many sides of his work, especially with regard to the status of history and the role of regionalism in cultural production' (*Northrop Frye*, 79). However contradictory it may seem within the paradigm of modernity, Frye's Canadian writing displays postmodern
both/and thinking, offering both a theory of archetypes and the autonomy of art and a theory of the 'rootedness' of texts in social, political, economic, and cultural terrain. Similarly, his analysis of the Canadian cultural situation was usually much more provisional than later commentators have wanted to grant. As Russell Brown has pointed out, most have conveniently forgotten that even the most infamous concept of the first Conclusion - that of the 'garrison mentality' - was introduced with the words: 'what we may provisionally call' (342). But even granting that postmodern gesture to the provisional, we would not be wrong to see the defining of the overarching concept of the garrison mentality as a most modern act: 'Small and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological "frontier," separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources: communities that provide all that their members have in the way of distinctively human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting - such communities are bound to develop what we may provisionally call a garrison mentality' (342).

It is also within the paradigm of modernity that Frye is here defining the garrison - as a 'closely knit and beleaguered society' within which one can be 'either a fighter or a deserter' (342). The general context for this structuring either/or binary opposition of the human and the natural can only be a modern one. In other words, it is not simply the description of a state of mind in the past but with an entire frame of reference that excludes other possible conceptualizations of the social. This totalizing metanarrative of the historical garrison image describes living and creating in Canada of the 1990s. Typically, however, a few words of problematizing caution are in order. Taking off from his theory of nation as 'imagined community Zygmunt Bauman points out that
'community is now expected to bring the succour previously sought in the pronouncements of universal reason and their earthly translations: the legislative acts of the national state' (Intimations, xix). But perhaps Canada, as a nation state whose fragile legislative identity has been under severe scrutiny recently, already is itself a community that defies 'the pronouncements of universal reason' to define itself in terms of linguistic and cultural duality, even multicultural multiplicity. But such a community, Bauman insists, 'does not grow in the wilderness: it is a greenhouse plant that needs sowing, feeding, trimming and protection from weeds and parasites' (xix). Somewhere between the garrison and the wilderness, then, is the greenhouse community, precarious and in constant need of loving care'. Bauman continues: 'It is precisely because of its vulnerability that community provides the focus of postmodern concerns, that it attracts so much intellectual and practical attention, that it figures so prominently in the philosophical models and popular ideologies of postmodernity' (xix).

Frye too had seen that artists drew strength from their community (DG, 24), but for him this was regionally and historically defined: 'No Muse can function outside human space and time, that is, outside geography and history' (31). As Bauman illustrates, within the postmodern paradigm community lacks that kind of 'stability and institutionalized continuity' and so requires 'overwhelming affective commitment' even to come into being (Intimations, xix); put in other words, the postmodern community is as likely to be organized around the fluctuating and shifting allegiances, loyalties, obligations, and responsibilities as it is to be defined by gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual choice, or religion. Region does not go away, but takes its place as one of
many variables that define community. "The E-mail computer network or the social or medical support
group would therefore be as much a community, in this postmodern sense of the word, as Pratt's Newfoundland (see BG, 194)."

Of course, community is a word that appears often in Frye's writing, whether the focus is generally liberal humanist or specifically Canadian. He often speaks of 'fraternity/ of 'a society of neighbours, in the genuinely religious sense of that word' (MC, 102). Marxist critic Fredric Jameson has located the 'greatness of Frye' in 'his willingness to raise the issue of community and to draw basic, essentially social, interpretive consequences from the nature of religion as collective representation' (The Political Unconscious, 69). Based on what David Cook has called an 'educational contract' (Northrop Frye: A Vision, 83), Frye's view of the university was also one of a scholarly community that could 'play an active role in the national intellectual life. In the seventies and eighties, Frye also wrote about ethnicity and community in Canada, about how the postwar immigrants found their place in the larger community of largely Scots-Irish Toronto 'with a minimum of violence and tension, preserving much of their own cultures and yet taking part in the total one' (DG, 68). Acknowledging that this ease of communal integration was possible by the already double nature of the Canadian self-definition, Frye also came to value the resultant 'decentralizing rhythm that is so essential to culture' (DG, 68). But that very 'decentralizing' is what makes the notion of multiple postmodern communities unintelligible within the context of modernity's totalizing and centering rage for order.
The postmodern writing being done from within the plural and shifting communities of Canada today, cannot be understood within the modernist terms of reference Frye set up, for example, in the first Conclusion to *Literary History of Canada*. There is no use for a feminist or gay, socialist or conservative, native or black or Asian writer of Frye's distinction between the 'rhetorical' and the 'poetic between the 'impulse to assert' and the 'impulse to construct'. (346) The modernist Frye believed that the genuinely 'imaginative writer' might well begin 'as a member of a school or group' but would 'normally' pull away from it, as he or she develops (354). Within the postmodern paradigm, such a pulling away would be illusory: the particular and the local cannot be left behind. Today, to write from such a 'situated' position is not to produce 'propaganda' (345) or 'reportage' (348); it is to produce Daphne Marlatt's *Anahistoric* or Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*.

There are obviously differences between the stances of Frye, the modern and the postmodern; between the garrison and the community. To his insight into class structures - that the garrison mentality was the 'conservative idealism of its ruling class, which for Canada means the moral and propertied middle class' (Conclusion [1965], 350) - one would have to add today a self-consciousness about that class's race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and European culture. In other words that Frye was a not a closet postmodernist. But there are postmodern moments in his writing, most especially in his Canadian writing. These are moments in which the postmodern erupts into the systematic and rational order of modernity - moments in which both/and thinking is the only way to explain, without explaining away, the paradoxes and the contradiction: and the tensions between autonomy and historical/social context, between evaluation and explication, between detachment and engagement, between the universal and the local, between the international and the national. Eli Mandel once said that Frye's Canadian criticism was 'cogent and
powerful' but 'still ... puzzling, widely misunderstood.' He added that 'misreadings of it form one of the fascinating chapters of Canadian literary history' (Northrop Frye/284). It is a true postmodern critique of his fearful symmetry.