NORTHROP FRYE AND THE EDUCATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM

by

E. James Cunningham

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Department of Theory and Policy Studies, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

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Doctor of Philosophy
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E. James Cunningham
Graduate Department of Theory and Policy Studies
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

This thesis is a rereading of Northrop Frye’s literary theory within the current critical and cultural milieu. It addresses the charge by literary, social, and feminist theorists that Frye’s criticism constitutes an escape from irony into romance, one more concerned with the mediation of literature by convention than with literature’s disintegrative effect on the conventions of contemporary ideology. For his critics, Frye’s is a liberal criticism, eager for the expression of individual concern in literature, deaf to its radical social voice. Also, feminist critics argue that Frye’s liberalism is evidenced in his conflation of literary experience with the study of texts as spatial structures made familiar by the categories of patriarchal ideology: an understanding of literary experience that relegates engagement with literature in time to the status of a stock response.

According to this thesis, Frye’s critics can be answered through a comparison of his criticism with that of Theodor Adorno. On the basis of similarities between these two thinkers, Frye’s criticism is seen to go beyond liberal ideology, apprehending literature as an ironic recuperation of romance from its indoctrinating role in contemporary mass culture. But the ironic recuperation of romance as
literary form is also a remedy to the postmodern culture industry's neutralization of ironic response; that is, to mass culture's conflation of viewer savvy with world-weary resignation to there being nothing to experience beyond the self-interested slogans of patriarchal ideology.

Frye's prescribed education in literary convention, then, is prerequisite to the contemporary reader's literary experience being more than an unconscious affirmation of culture industry formulas. His criticism gives priority to the expression of individual concern in literature in order that readers might apprehend literature's capacity to resist contemporary society's reduction of social concern to expressions of ideology. And Frye's criticism insists that literature be apprehended as a spatialized structure to resist the unreflective linearity imposed on experience by the culture industry and patriarchal interpretation. Critical resistance to patriarchy, however, also entails a poetics of refusal, which the logic of Frye's system accommodates but which Frye, as critic, rejects.
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WORKS CITED.
CHAPTER ONE:
IS THE CRITICISM OF NORTHROP FRYE MERELY A PROPONENT OF LIBERAL IDEALISM?

Section A.
Frye and Adorno: Liberalism and Modernity.

1. Introduction.

In this dissertation I will defend the thesis that Frye's literary theory\(^1\) entails more than his self-professed expression of bourgeois liberal values (Cayley, 1992, 66). For, I contend that Frye's humanism, which sees in literature an "ethical instrument participating in the work of civilization" (Bogdan, 1990, 118 quoting Frye, 1957, 349), is more than what Frye's modern critics aver as simply a reiteration of the tired bromides of liberal idealism. My defense will rest on the argument for certain important similarities between Frye's criticism and the aesthetic theory of ideology critic and member of the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno.

Admittedly, the idea of there being important similarities between the ways in which Frye and Adorno theorize about art and society may seem prima facie to be outlandish; and not simply because theorists tend only to include Frye and Adorno as mutually exclusive alternatives (for example, see Jameson, 1971, 402 and Fekete, 1976, 40). While Frye and Adorno share a critical interest in the serious artwork's power of social critique, Adorno's famous pessimism and Frye's widely reputed optimism would seem to cast them as polar opposites.\(^2\) Likewise, Frye and Adorno are both concerned with artworks as purely formal — nonpropositional — expressions of meaning. But the notion of literary meaning that Frye derives from his conception of literature as a formally self-contained expression of imaginative experience is taken by his critics as idealist; that is, as espousing a meaning indifferent to and unconnected with social reality. On the other hand, "[Adorno's] thinking [is taken to] recognize an obligation to transcend the limits of specialized analysis at the same time that it respects the object's integrity as an independent entity. [That is, Adorno's thinking] presupposes a movement from the intrinsic to the extrinsic in [the art object's] very structure, from the individual fact or work towards some larger socio-economic reality behind it" (Jameson, 1971, 4).

\(^1\)For the purposes of this dissertation, I will be treating the terms, "criticism," "critical theory," "literary theory," and "aesthetic theory" as if they are synonymous.

\(^2\)While Adorno's argues that "[c]ultural criticism finds itself with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,"(Adorno, 1967, p. 22), Frye refers to himself as the latter of "two kinds of people: those who in the face of a new social phenomenon point out its dangers, and those who point out its opportunities" (Denham, 1991, 293).
At first glance, then, Frye’s conception about the relation of literature to society does indeed seem more like an affirmation of idealism than the stuff of Adorno’s tough-minded social critique.

There are, however, two related reasons, I think, for trying to discover important similarities between Frye and Adorno. First, as I will argue below, the liberal idealism in which Frye is accused of being implicated seems to be understood by his critics as the ideology of “enlightened societies” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979) under late capitalism, the ideology Adorno and other modernists identify as having co-opted almost all cultural criticism and production. If Frye’s criticism can be shown to exhibit the critical reflexivity capable of apprehending the requirements of what Adorno calls “responsible art” (Adorno, 1991d, 70), a reflexivity which, for Adorno, allows art and theory some resistance to modern ideology, then we have gone a good deal of the way to showing that Frye’s criticism is at some remove from liberal idealism. Second, in *The Modern Century* (1967a) and other writings, Frye has made comments suggesting that he sees the same reifying effect as does Adorno in the artifacts of what Adorno calls the culture industry, and envisions the same capacity for resistance to this reification in the forms of avant garde artworks. And, just as Adorno does in *Aesthetic Theory* (Adorno, 1984, 318), Frye has suggested that contemporary criticism must not apprehend the artwork as indifferent to reality but as an imaginative expression of its humane form, one capable of interrogating the validity of the transitory illusion that actual social conditions represent a progressive social reality (Frye, 1990, 97). If the contemporary illusion of reality to which Frye argues that criticism and literature must respond can be shown to be that of Adorno’s culture industry, then Frye’s theory may be more than a simply a bourgeois liberal reiteration of humanism, a humanism that resists reduction to an expression of liberal market ideology.

But I am getting ahead of myself somewhat. We will return to a discussion of possible similarities between Frye’s and Adorno’s conceptions of the relation of criticism and art to contemporary mass culture. Before we do, however, I want to establish that when Frye’s critics refer to his failure to confront the difficulties facing contemporary criticism — his failure to live up to contemporary criticism’s responsibilities — they are exhibiting the pessimism of Adorno and other modernist critics over the dehumanizing influence of modern society on art and experience in general. Modernist criticism is defined by its concern for the reification of art and experience in modern society under the universalist categories of the Enlightenment, a process which they see as resulting from the domination of society by developments in modern technology and the technological
reproduction of art as commodity form. If Frye’s response to his critics, as set forth in Northrop Frye and Modern Criticism: Selected Papers from the English Institute (1966), has failed to satisfy anyone who did not already find his argument convincing, it is because certain of Frye’s critical insights into the antagonistic relationship between literature and its reproduction by mass culture have not been sufficiently recognized — insights that can be recognized in an examination of the similarities between the critical theories of Adorno and Frye.

2. Liberalism and the Problem of Modernity.

As described by Adorno and other modernist critics, the problem of modernity is one of how — under modern social conditions characterized by rapid advancements in technology and the sciences — the "enlightened" employ of reason as the primary principle of social organization betrays reason’s initial promise — to set people free; of how it, instead, makes reason a tool in the ever increasing homogenization of human life under the master narratives of oppressive and hegemonic traditions for the benefit of managerial elites. The problem of modernity, then, entails a perverting of reason from the development of a universally intelligible explanation of nature based on an appeal to principles whose validity is universally recognized, to the reduction of nature to what is intelligible to the dominant logocentric and androcentric traditions of Western discourse. It is one of how reason promises to harness the diversity of social forms unleashed by modern development in the realization of a society wealthy enough to appreciate the value of that diversity, but, instead, reifies modern diversity into a dreary sameness of life tyrannized into a forced compliance with the demands of commodity form. In response to the problem of modernity, modernist theory seems to call on criticism to discover the disintegrative moment suppressed but inherent in the conventional practices of modern society. Their chief criticism of liberalism’s denial of the problem of modernity is that it entails a valorization of modern scientific, technological and aesthetic conventions as embodying

3 Of Frye’s critics, Geoffrey Hartman best articulates their shared concern with the dehumanizing influence that technology can have on the production of art and literature when he states:

Modern technology presumes to attempt a total transformation of man and his environment. This calls in turn for an inspection and defence of all human values ... Every greater critic has recognized this situation ... Ortega y Gasset writes of the dehumanization, and not the humanization, of modern art; and Walter Benjamin, in "The Work of Art in the Era of Its Technological Reproduction," sees more sharply than anyone the estranging influence of technology or culture. Technology, he asserts will transform works of art into exhibition pieces and consumer goods. (Krieger, 1966, p. 119)

4 The above summary of the problem of modernity is taken from Dialectic of Enlightenment (1979).
universal or enduring emancipatory truth, a valorization of convention which implicates Liberalism in a false idealism and individualism.

3. Idealism.

Much modernist theory criticizes the liberal assumption that the insights achieved by modern science technology are universally intelligible as being an historically specific expression of ideological self interest, designed to suppress dissenting points of view. As Charles Rosen points out, when liberal ideology was formulated in eighteenth century Enlightenment, it was not that Enlightenment ideas were universally intelligible but that the idea of universal intelligibility had taken on a central importance to Enlightenment ideology (Rosen, 1971). And speaking in a similar vein about the Enlightenment’s apprehension of the enduring truth in the arts, Theodor Adorno points out that "duration" itself is a "transient" bourgeois value "patterned on property," which becomes central only during the Enlightenment (Adorno, 1984, 254). Says Alvin Gouldner, "So while it was bourgeois property that, among other social forces, corrupted and qualified public rationality, it was also the bourgeois who brought reason to the fore" (1976, 204).

Speaking of rationality, Michael Foucault argues in the same vein as Rosen, Adorno, and Gouldner that universal "reason, even scientific bodies of knowledge" (Gutting, 1989, 2), "have a contingent historic origin" (3) in the development of modern society, functioning, more often than not as agents of "social control" (4); the sciences — especially those "more dubious disciplines (the human sciences) — "can themselves constrain and oppress human beings" (2).

For modernist theory, the Enlightenment configuration of universal intelligibility as a property of modern scientific and technological endeavour serves only to create the illusion that market society, whose development has given rise to modern science and technology, is both progressive and inevitable. And liberalism’s endorsing of this illusion implicates it in the idealist position that the proper goal of human praxis is limited to the understanding of nature and society as it is already — a natural progression toward conditions of utopia in which human want and conflict will be resolved.

The liberal recourse to idealism is criticized, then, for its conflation of the whole of the rational understanding and action, with the understanding of and action in market society which, in turn, reduces modern science and technology into administrative tools for that society’s maintenance. In Adorno’s words, the effect of liberalism’s idealism is to preclude conflict between "administrative, reifying science" and the "experience of the individual" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 84). Liberal idealism’s conflation of rational experience with that of a society governed by market conventions,
then, reduces the notions of universality and rationality as they are developed in the sciences to administrative conventions. In turn, liberal idealism relegates all opposing experiences of society to inarticulate gestures outside rational conventions under which experience is ordered. For liberalism's critics, then, modern conventions do not increase the individual's understanding of nature and society, they cloud it. For modernist criticism, the proper role of human praxis must be to approach experience in its radical particularity, as something that challenges modern conventions and their pretense to universal intelligibility.

4. Individualism.

The modernist critique of liberalism also addresses the problem of individualism as an ideology. That is, modernist criticism argues that because liberalism defines the individual subject in terms of its rationality, and the rational subject as experiencing objects solely in terms of their conformity to general categories, liberalism tends to characterize objective experience as measured or distanced in the manner of scientific scrutiny. Adorno refers to this tendency when he says that "for subjectivity, reason is the chemical agent which absorbs the individual substance of things and volatilizes them into mere autonomy of reason" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 89), so that "[e]verything — even the human individual, not to speak of the animal — [is reified] into a repeatable replaceable process, into a mere example for the conceptual models of the system (84).

Thus, liberalism sees the subject as understanding experience in terms of categories that are applicable regardless of historic period or social condition. It plays what postmodernist theorist, Donna Haraway (1988), calls the "god trick" (589) of equating subjective experience with a perspective unlimited by particular circumstances. Under this characterization of subjective experience, any experience which might be described as special or significant to a particular era or location must be regarded as irrational and without understanding — itself an objective phenomenon, to be understood be rational scrutiny.

From the perspective of modernist and postmodernist critics, then, liberalism uses its characterization of the subjective experience to rationalize its denial that the rational subject as conceived by the Enlightenment is a social construction of market societies, and to dismiss alternative social constructions as irrational. Thus, liberalism relegates the understanding of experience to a matter of purely individual insights and is implicated in market society's occlusion of the role that social construction places in experience and understanding.
In championing idealism and individualism, then, liberalism becomes an apology for the tyrannizing of human life by market economies. As such liberalism’s "rational experience" corresponds to the interests of the managerial elites who preside over those markets — who will submit to any tyranny so long as others have to suffer it (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1979, 88).

5. Frye’s Critics — Their Assault on the Problem of Modernity and Liberalism.

As Imre Salusinsky (1994), points out, Frye’s critics tend to approach his criticism from two opposing extremes. From the perspective of what Salusinsky calls "the linguistic nihilists" (81) of "New Criticism" (81), literary criticism is seen to be the specialized study of those qualities of verbal texture that make every literary work unique — a study unrelated to conventions of interpretation in other disciplines such as the social sciences. From the other extreme (that of what Salusinsky calls the "new determinists" (81) of left wing social criticism), criticism should properly be concerned with the unique nature of all texts whether they are called literary or not — their hidden expressions of historic, social, gendered, or racial specificity rooted out by a social critique which brings all the analytical powers of the social sciences into play.

What these critical oppositions share is the notion that the social significance of texts — their immediate relationship to modern experience — has to be understood in terms of what is unique about them. For, like Adorno and other modernists, contemporary literary critics and left wing social critics both confront the problem of modernity as one in which mediation by universal categories obscures the direct relationship of the text to experience and in which liberal discourse ignores the peculiar nature of the reader’s personal insights and feelings as irrelevant to their understanding of the text — in favour of the duty of readers to understand the text in terms of its correspondence to contemporary conventions of textual production and interpretation. Thus, challenges to Frye from what Salusinsky calls the extremes of both literary and social criticism criticize Frye’s theory on the grounds that it fails to apprehend the text as engaged primarily in a subversive deployment of universal conventions, a deployment that calls into question any attempt to define texts in terms of their shared characteristics, and that shows the immediacy of the reader’s personal experience reflected in the text’s unique nature.

Common to both these extremes of literary and social criticism is the notion that the categories of modern liberal discourse obscure the actual relation of texts to experience. From the perspective of contemporary literary and left wing social critics, criticism can only apprehend a totality of experience unmediated by the conventions of modern society if it understands texts as
subverting the modern operation of convention, thereby exposing as illusion the totality that modern conventions create. Postmodernist theory shares this critique of modernity and liberalism with the proviso that the extent of modern reification is so total that an alternative can be conceived only in its absence. But, according to postmodernist theory, that absence is to be pursued by the subversive deployment of convention, a deployment that challenges the claim of conventions that they reveal a definitive and final understanding of experience, and exposes the extent to which they have made that understanding impossible.

From the perspective of left-wing social and literary extremes of critique, what Salusinsky calls Frye's "middle way" between ideologies appears to be no more than a proponent of liberal ideology (Salusinsky, 1994, 82). For Salusinsky, Frye's criticism argues, in the manner of liberal idealism, that literary works derive their meaning, not from a direct relationship to the actual experience of contemporary life, but from a relationship to an imaginative experience of utopia, one that transcends all distinctions of race, class, and gender and one that is mediated by the repetition through literature of the mythic, archetypal and romantic conventions that give this experience its structure. As Salusinsky point out, Frye avers, in the manner of liberal individualism, that literary meaning is apprehended by the readers who are detached — liberated — from the moral evaluations of their contemporary condition, who engage in "a sane, balanced, judicious" (79) approach to texts that reflects a deep respect for all conventions, both literary and social.

To Marxists such as Terry Eagleton (1983), Frye's sanity is that of the liberal middle-class. Writes Eagleton, "Frye stands in the liberal humanist tradition ... desiring as he says, society as free, classless, and urbane. What he means by 'classless,'... is in effect a society which universally subscribes to his own middle class values" (94). In Eagleton's estimation, Frye is but another voice of modern "liberal humanism," itself "dwindled to the impotent conscience of bourgeois society" (199). That is, liberalism prescribes utopian values and sensibilities which modern capitalism ignores except to rationalize its own oppressive practices (199). For instance, Eagleton says that the concern of liberal humanism for "the unique individual is indeed important when it comes to defending the business entrepreneur's right to make a profit while throwing men and women out of work" (200).

Fredric Jameson (1970) and John Fekete (1976) echo Eagleton's charge that Frye's is the voice of liberal humanist impotence. For Jameson, Frye must ascribe to the humanist ideals of literature a power to transform society which, as a part of society's superstructure, they cannot possibly have. Jameson argues that social progress and transformation can result only from changes in a society's infrastructure (its forces of material production), and that the values expressed in a
society's superstructure (its administrative, intellectual and cultural sphere) are mere "epiphenomena, the false consciousness we associate with the word ideology" (4). In ascribing causal efficacy to literature and its expression of imaginative ideals, Frye is guilty of what Fekete terms a "magical idealism where imagined satisfactions associated with given objects take the place of the social organization necessary to effect the genuine satisfaction of real needs" (44). Thus, it is Frye's mistaken liberal belief in the transformational power of literature and its expression of imaginative ideals that grounds what Geoffrey Hartman (1966), speaking for the literary critics, refers to as Frye's optimism about the success of his "totalizing approach" (119) to the problems faced by contemporary criticism.

6. Frye's Critics and the Responsibilities of Modern Criticism.

For modernist critics, Frye's criticism, its respect for literary conventions, and for their expression of an imaginative ideal must seem to be implicated in a liberal totalization of experience that is irrelevant to any authentic movement towards social transformation. At the same time, as an expression of liberalism, it is implicated in the rationalization of capitalism's reproduction and reification of modern experience in conformity with administrative categories. From the perspective of a truly modernist criticism, then, such an expression of liberalism as Frye's completely avoids the responsibilities entailed for any criticism that would confront the false generalizations imposed by ideology on modern experience and apprehend the relationship between texts and the realities — "the dreadful sundry of this world" (Wimsatt, 1966, 119) — hidden by the illusions of modern ideology.

As we will see in the following sections, literary theorists, Murray Krieger, W.K. Wimsatt, Geoffrey Hartman, and Angus Fletcher, and left wing social critics, Gerald Graff, Terry Eagleton, John Fekete, Fredric Jameson, and Ross Woodman detail the major responsibilities of a modernist criticism and the manner in which Frye fails to live up to each of them. While these theorists and critics disagree about the wisdom of advocating the existence of an autonomous discipline of literary criticism, one based on a distinction between literary and nonliterary language, all agree that the central aim — the telos — of responsible criticism must be the relating of written culture to life, a task entailing that criticism apprehend all texts as ironic corruptions of familiar interpretative conventions and generalizations.

In their struggle against the generalizations of modern ideology, then, we will see Krieger argue for the responsibility of criticism to apprehend the priority of irony in literary expression, Wimsatt for the specificity of the literary work, Hartman for the work as an expression of oral
culture, and Fletcher of historical detail. Left wing social critics, Graff, Eagleton, and Fekete, argue for the duty of criticism to give priority to the recuperation of realism and the relationship between the text and reality, while Jameson gives priority to textual expressions of negativity in ideology, and Woodman requires that criticism honour the role of the body in the experience of the text. With the exception of Fletcher, who defends Frye on the ground that he is a modernist critic like other modernists, theirs is an articulation of agreement that Frye’s inability to discharge the responsibilities of modern criticism derives from his refusal to relate literature to modern reality, and his subsequent subsumption of irony to romance. They contend that in apprehending literature as a flight to romance and myth, Frye has taken refuge in the illusions of liberal idealism, and is implicated in what for Adorno would be the modern day reification of experience under the categories of an administered society.

As I will argue, Frye holds that his criticism is not a romantic evasion of modern criticism’s responsibilities to irony and the relation of literature to life. But neither does his criticism discharge those responsibilities in the manner of other modernists. Rather, Frye’s critical system apprehends literature as an ironic recuperation of romance capable of exposing the generalizations of modern society as ideology and relating literature to the reality they conceal — the potential reality that is society’s true self and which is contained in all that has been accomplished by the arts and sciences. That is, Frye’s criticism operates on the assumption that it is only by way of the appeal to romance as the archetypal form of all literary experience that criticism can discharge its responsibilities², and so stands as an indictment of modernist critical practice.

7. A Digression on Displacement.

Before continuing with my summary of Frye’s critics, I want to comment on Frye’s notion of literature as an historic displacement of myth. Frye’s critics make reference to displacement as a sign that Frye has divorced literature from history by reinventing history in cyclical terms. That is, they charge that, as Frye would have it, literature and civilization both pass through historic modes, phases or periods which repeat themselves with the rise of a new civilization and which do not vary in spite of the differences between civilizations.

According to Frye, each historic mode is measured in purely literary terms concerning the relative strength of the dramatic hero: that is, in the mythic mode the hero is a god; in the romantic

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² see Bogdan (1980, 325).
mode, a hero (human but godlike in his powers); in the high mimetic mode, a leader of greater nobility than the common man; in the low mimetic mode, the same as the common man; and finally, in the ironic mode, of a condition worse than that of the common man (Frye, 1957, 35-39). In the corresponding history of civilization the modes progress from a tribal age of seers, to a feudal age of balladeers and recitais, to a Renaissance age of dramatists, to a highly individualized and bourgeois age of fiction and prose writers, and finally to a fifth age of alienation and ironic satirists (55-62).

While literature and civilization pass through five phases, each successive phase is a modulation of the same stories about the gods that are articulated in the mythic phase. The modulation of myth in literature is possible because of the development of romance, in which the mythic stories of the gods become easy to recognize as highly conventionalized or archetypal forms. In the later literary modes these conventionalized or romantic forms of myth are displaced in favour of realism. That is, the conventional storylines of romance become the implicit plot structures of literature otherwise concerned with the accurate depiction of contemporary reality. In the final ironic phase the concern with realism eventually fades into the literary background, and the highly conventionalized forms of romance and myth return to the fore of literary production (Frye, 1957, 51-52).

As we shall see, Frye’s critics interpret his notion that literature is a romantic displacement of myth as entailing a series of ahistorical categories into which literary works can be slotted without regard to their relationship to actual history (Eagleton, 1983, 92-93). According to his critics, if Frye relates literature to history at all, it is to an imaginary history of his own making (Wimsatt, 1966, 99). In chapters Two and Five, I will argue that Frye’s historic modes do not contain literary works, that they are contained by them. That is, the historic modes all operate simultaneously in every literary work, with each work foregrounding the historic mode of expression which their contemporary society finds intelligible as literary. In this manner literary works force contemporary society to accept the other historic modes operating in them as literary as well, so that they act as what Adorno would call an "tacit critique" (Adorno, 1983, 321) against their own time. This is to say that literary works illustrate how contemporary sensibilities apprehend only a small part of literary creation, but act outside of literature to suppress what they cannot apprehend. Frye’s criticism apprehends the relation of literature to history in the manner of Benjamin for whom literature details "the opposite of real history, and nevertheless history as it should be — prophetic and synchronic" (Rosen, 1988, 139).
Also, I will argue in Chapter Three that, while Frye describes the historic modes as repeating themselves through the history of every civilization, the particular manner in which works of different civilizations foreground historic modes details the differences between civilizations — especially the difference between social conditions of premodernity and modernity. Thus, Frye’s theory of historic modulation entails how what Fekete (1976) affirms as "naturally crucial" "conventions" of "transhistorical recurrence" (54) operate to make intelligible the development through history of what is new and different.

Section B.

Frye’s Critics and the Responsibilities of Contemporary Criticism.

1. Frye’s Literary Critics.


Until the presentation of the essays in Northrop Frye in Modern Criticism: Selected Papers from the English Institute (1966), Frye’s literary theory had been taken as a novel defence of poetry (Bogdan, 1980, 6); one that explained how, in an age where no one can any longer ignore the tendency of textual interpretation to fall under the province of specialties from the social sciences, literature could still be apprehended as an autonomous form simultaneously capable of instruction and delight (1980, 6). That is, Frye’s proposal for a greater "catholicity" of criticism (Frye, 1957, 28), one in which all interpretive disciplines would interpenetrate as necessary and complementary moments in the explication of literature as a form of hypothesis, was embraced by an entire generation (Krieger, 1966, 1) as preserving the autonomy of literature and criticism in modernity. Previously, the only voices of dissent came from outside mainstream criticism, mostly from extremes on the right and left which rejected defences of literary autonomy out of hand, lumping them all into the category of the critical mainstream.

But, in "Northrop Frye and Contemporary Criticism: Ariel and the Spirit of Gravity," Murray Krieger asserts that "Frye and the modern critical tradition ... should, in their opposition, come to be recognized as utter alternatives, indeed as very little less than mutually exclusive" (10). As we will see, Krieger takes this view of Frye because he sees Frye’s criticism as being at odds with the fundamental concerns of modern criticism: these being the apprehension of the relationship between literature to reality and the priority of irony in apprehending this relationship. For, as I will endeavour to show, Krieger’s understanding of modern criticism entails the view that the relation
between literature and contemporary life must be unmediated the generalizations of modern ideology. That is, according to Krieger, literature must be read as representing the rifts in the social fabric hidden by ideology from that "product" of the "dull brain" (7) — ordinary experience. For Krieger, the concern of contemporary irony with the depiction of disaster, "death," and "poverty" (21) makes it the ideal perspective from which criticism can apprehend the dissolution in literature of the false utopianism of modern ideology — a recording in literature of the obstacles that an authentic utopian vision of society must overcome.

Of the key concerns of modern criticism, Krieger writes:

About no claim are those I once termed "the new apologists for poetry" more constant than the claim that poetry should reveal, and should be limited by, our worldly experience: what Dr. Johnson called "the sublunary nature," product of what Keats called "the dull brain [that] perplexes and retards." These theorists speak with one voice of the true poet's capacity to respect the drag of material reality, to convert the handicaps of a finite existence and a finite language into victories for the imagination that never forgets or rejects its basis in common experience. (7-8)

Krieger argues that "the dedication to the existential is often accompanied, in the modern critical tradition, by the interest in the tragic and the ironic" (9). That is, by incorporating irony as the primary tool of modern criticism, critics hope to see the workings of modern reality correspondent in the internal workings of the poem, allowing the poem to illustrate for readers the problem of modernity — in which "death" and "poverty" are the most "convincing" archetypes (21). From the perspective of modern criticism, then, irony allows criticism to find success in its "failures." For Krieger, modern criticism's failure to find the authentic expression of utopia in literature "reflect[s] this fallen world's gaps, its yawning continuities" (25), and so apprehends in the ironic language of literature a representation of reality unmediated by the idealism of modern ideology.

By contrast, according to Krieger, Frye demands of critical discourse "a systematic irresponsibility, an abjuring of task of relating literature to life" (24). Krieger sees Frye proclaiming poetry's "obligation to minister to the creative human desire rather than to open for us the destructive realities of the human condition" (10). Writes Krieger, Frye's critical schematizing reconstructs "literature as made out of prior literature, not life, of yielding poetic, mythic categories, not existential ones" (10). For Krieger, then, Frye's criticism dwells on the symbolism in literature of rebirth and not death, not on the descent to the underworld but on the [romantic] return and the upward movement within the cycle which man uses to construct his destiny. Similarly irony, which has become so conclusive a literary (and existential) quality for critics before Frye, is seen as the lowest reach of the downward movement of displacement from pure myth, to be gone through almost before we arrive at it; for
irony derives its major excitement for Frye from our capacity to see in it, paradoxically, the beginnings of the upward movement that can return us to the undisguised gods (10).

In his critique of Frye's apparent devaluation of irony and his valorization of the romance, Krieger is casting Frye as an "utter alternative" (10) to modern criticism. From the perspective of Krieger, Frye's flight from the problems of modernity -- its insistence on systematic irresponsibility (24), its abandonment of modern critical standards; value judgements, existential categories, the limitations upon meaning imposed by textural analysis and the poem's unique character -- risk robbing critics of their capacity to apprehend the reality reflected in literature. But, if Frye breaks from "the bounds of critical discourse as agreed upon by the theoretical tradition from say Aristotle to -- shall we say -- Wimsatt" (24), he recognizes that he has still to cope with the problems of the relation between poetry and life that the traditional bounds of theory were established to address (6). To this end Frye has created schemata dedicated to the world, but a "world so transformed aesthetically, so commodious, so fit for human habitation that he can abjure the magic that was the agent of this transformation" (26).

Krieger sees Frye's schemata as assuming the existence of a world already transformed, and the status of poetic reflection as an agent of transformation. In the end, he charges Frye with "licensing" and "urging" "theoretical irresponsibility" (25). That is, Krieger argues, Frye's schema fails to confront the obstacles set up by contemporary existence to the poetic transcendence of "death" and "poverty," instead offering a solution that pretends to reduce the world to an expression of the literary imagination; thus, "Frye is led outward from literature to culture and civilization at large, all of them products of the imagination, nature ... given human form" (23).

I would argue that if Krieger is correct, then Frye has unwittingly implicated himself in a rationalization of the status quo: concentrating on the imaginative vision of a world transformed, his criticism's romantic vision of literary myth leaves real life obstacles to the world unexamined. For Krieger, it is in the literary record of those obstacles, hidden by modern ideology, that contemporary criticism must apprehend the negative image of humanity's transformation and so answer the question of how the poem both "reflects" and yet is more than a "transcriber" (24) of the world. But, for Krieger, such a critical apprehension gives priority to the perspective of irony, not romance, and to the relationship of literature to reality, not to other literature or its conformity to imaginative categories of myth.
As we will see in our examination of Frye’s other critics, the priority given to irony in the critical relating of literature to life is entailed in discharging all of criticism’s contemporary responsibilities, be they the responsibility to honour of the specificity of the literary work; oral culture in literature, historic detail, realism, negativity in ideology, or the role played by the body in literary response. From the perspective of his critics, then, if Frye abjures the need for criticism to recognize the priority of irony in literary expression, he fails also to honour these other responsibilities of contemporary criticism.


William Wimsatt’s critique of Frye’s criticism is concerned chiefly with Frye’s notion that literary meaning is primarily an expression of its centripetal structure, that is, of literature as an association of verbal figures which imitate each other, not life. It seems to me, however, that Wimsatt’s concern in "Criticism as Myth" is not only that such a view of literary meaning is false, but that it is one that Frye only "pretends" to embrace. For Wimsatt views Frye’s criticism as "moved" with all other contemporary critics by the "double difficulty" that has always faced literary criticism:

the double difficulty of poetry in relation to the world, and of criticism in relation to value — the so-far irreducible critical experiences: that literature is both more lively and less lifelike than the real world (this impossible pig of a world); that criticism cannot demonstrate value but is at the same time inescapably concerned with trying to do so. (Wimsatt, 1966, 79)

According to my reading of Wimsatt’s argument, the relationship of literature to life and of criticism to value can be understood only in terms of the poem’s specificity — its unique nature that makes it different both from other poems and life. That is, Wimsatt maintains that the poem is more lively than the real world because its concern with the texture of verbal representation gives expression to aspects of reality ignored by the commonplace generalizations governing real life experiences. And, for Wimsatt, literature’s expression of a lively reality is exemplified by Homer’s references to the "wine red sea," the "rosy fingered dawn," the "ox-eyed and white-armed women," and the variety of "crafty, sulky, proud, brave, cowardly men" that inhabited his audience and world. Because the greatness of poems such as those of Homer resides in their capacity to specify what details are hidden in the generalizations of real life, each poem must achieve its greatness differently lest they should themselves be implicated in generalization. Thus, Wimsatt, quoting Blake, argues that when it comes to the appreciation of poetry, "to generalize is to be an idiot" (Wimsatt, 1966, 92).
That the critic cannot generalize about poetry gives rise to the second part of what Wimsatt calls the double difficulty facing literary theory. This is to say that the critic cannot compare the value of two poems by showing that, while they are both doing the same thing, one is doing it better than the other. And yet the critic is impelled, nonetheless, to give an account of the poems' comparative values. For Wimsatt, the only course left open to the critic by this second difficulty is to examine the manner in which each poem establishes its unique relationship with the world. That is, criticism must explore the unique overlay of verbal texture developed in the "centrally structured image," the "dramatized theme," or the "persistent verbal technique" of each poem for that expression of meaning unmediated by the generalizations of ordinary language. From Wimsatt's argument, I take it that the relative excellence of poems is to be measured in terms of the extent to which they succeed in establishing an unmediated relationship to reality. This is why Wimsatt is of the opinion that poetry should be interpreted as primarily an ironic use of language against its inherent tendency to generalize, and why Wimsatt takes such umbrage at what he sees as Frye's tendency to cast irony and with it New Criticism into "the wintry cellar" of literary interpretation.

Wimsatt's umbrage at Frye's seeming lack of concern with irony brings us back to Wimsatt's true objection to Frye's criticism: Frye's defence of his tendency to generalize about literature and the consequent lack of priority he gives to irony, a defence made on the grounds that literature is not related to reality nor criticism to value, is nothing but pretence. And his defence is revealed as pretence by its lack of any serious effort at consistency.

Frye ... involves himself in the oddities, implausibilities, even the patent contradictions, required for this detachment [of literature from life]. Thus, literature, on the one hand, has no reference to life; it is autonomous, like mathematics, and sufficient unto itself; it "takes over" life, envelops and absorbs it, swallows it. Literature is made out of other literature. At the same time literature does refer to life, it must; it began with real life in a primitive situation, and it is concerned with promoting values for real life, the vision of an ideal society (unless we mean that this is only a dream — as perhaps we do — but then why all the talk about the difference between the genuine and the phony? (Wimsatt, 1966, 81)

For Wimsatt, Frye's criticism does indeed understand literature to be related to life; to the banal generalizations (stereotypes) of ordinary experience which have nothing to do with literary value. But because Frye is aware of the responsibilities of contemporary criticism — that they entail the apprehension of literature as an experience unmediated by the categories of ordinary reality — he dresses those same categories up in a fictitious pedigree of transhistoric myths, archetypes, and
seasonal cycles and tries to pass them off as the proper objects of a primitive response unjaded by life in civilization.

Observes Wimsatt, Frye adorns his generalizations with a multeity of archetypal hues and shades by which they appear as the details of an experience at odds with ordinary existence. For instance, in response to "This is a good comedy," Frye would reply, "Oh no, it isn't. It's a good satire in the third comic phase" (Wimsatt, 1966, 88). But Wimsatt objects that Frye offers not a shred of evidence for the attribution of this type of variety to literary experience. Nor, he argues, do Frye's explanations of how this archetypal variety coalesces into a transhistoric mythic unity of literary expression hold water. For Wimsatt, Frye's claim that the archetypes and myths of literature operate within a thematic cycle mirroring the four seasons is contradicted both by his own theorizing and by an analysis of how different historical and cultural traditions saw the seasons mirrored in literature:

Frye is really, in the long run, not very careful with his diagramming. In the very complicated third essay of the Anatomy, on the mythic cycle, spring is comedy, and summer is romance. And much turns on that analogy. But in the essay on "The Archetypes" of 1951, spring had been romance and summer had been comedy. (102)

Likewise, with respect to different historic conceptions of the role played by the seasons in literature, Wimsatt writes:

The truth is that man's consciousness of seasonal change has varied much in various ages and climates. The ancient Greeks ... distinguish only three seasons ... Winter and summer are the continuous, ancient, and Germanic names of seasons in English, and these two seasons prevail in Old English heroic poetry. The astronomical and Roman sophistication of the four-seasonal system finds its way only later into the English popular and poetic consciousness. The four seasons, as they function in Frye's system, are just about as primitive as the four strokes of a piston in a Rolls Royce engine. Except that Frye's Rolls Royce will not actually roll. (105)

According to Wimsatt, then, Frye's archetypal Rolls Royce will not roll because it does not actually represent a transhistorical unity of mythic forms which predate and are at odds with the categories of contemporary experience; neither is it the object of a primitive response that predates, is at odds with, and so is unmediated by contemporary experience. Stripped of its questionable pedigree, Frye's archetype is a stereotype of ordinary experience. And, argues Wimsatt, while such stereotypes and clichés do find their way into literature, they are irrelevant both to its meaning and its value. Thus, Wimsatt sees Frye's archetypal structure as "divided between truism and ad libitum fantasy" (99).

At this juncture, we may note that Wimsatt has, in effect if not intent, accused Frye of implication in liberal idealism: of dressing up the contemporary categories governing the experience
of the status quo as timeless and universal truths of literary experience (archetypes); of pretending that their apprehension constitutes a "primitive response" to literature that allows individuals a critical distance from which they can distinguish between illusion and reality in contemporary society; of making the claim that such a distinction constitutes the knowledge, "the possible, ideal 'real' world" (78) capable of changing society. In other words, Wimsatt has tried to show how Frye, when confronted with the responsibilities of contemporary criticism, has acted like a liberal idealist. For Wimsatt such responsibilities can only be faced through criticism's concentration of the specificity of literary works, their essentially ironic deployment of language by which they detail those aspects of contemporary life overlooked by the generalizations of ordinary experience. Only thus apprehended can the work express its literary value as an unmediated experience of reality.

c) Geoffrey Hartman and the Priority of Oral Detail in Modern Criticism.

As expressed in "Ghostlier Demarcations," Geoffrey Hartman's concern is that contemporary criticism should preserve literature from the dehumanizing effects of écriture (written culture) and its infection by ratio (the totalizing calculatedness of modern rationality). Hartman maintains that to reclaim its humanity — that is, its authenticity as a spontaneous expression of human concern — literature must "be led back [by criticism] to its source in oratio" (Hartman, 1966, 129). Writes Hartman:

This surely is what the great work of fiction (or criticism) achieves: it recalls the origin of civilization in dialogic acts of naming, cursing, blessing, consoling, laughing, lamenting, and beseeching. (129)

I take Hartman to be arguing that only by apprehending the verbal minutiae recorded in literary works can criticism resist the tendency in modern society to impose a uniform and predetermined shape upon the particulars of literary experience. As Hartman avers, by acting in literature as the voicing of attempts (attempts as mutually as unlike as they are persistently human) to "mediate" (129) — change — historically specific realities for the better, the verbal minutiae of literature militate against the tendency of écriture to treat literary expression as an imitation of transhistorical reality. Hartman apprehends the oral details of literary expression as performing, in effect, an ironic undermining of the categories of modern écriture and of their suppression of the authentically "mythic [heroic] attributes" (126) that persist in "secularized man" (126). His is the search for an unmediated relationship between literature and society, one that hears progressive forces for change registered in the historic differences suppressed in literary expression by the rationality of modern ideology.
Hartman, then, understands the character of myth in literature to be simultaneously enduring and historically specific. That is, myth is the persistent expression of the hope for a truly humane condition. But, according to Hartman, literary myth is expressed only in historically specific attempts to verbally mediate social realities — through naming, blessing, beseeching, etc. — that do not live up to the humane ideal. Because Hartman believes that there is no pure form of myth which all literature imitates — that myth persists only in its different literary expressions — he is ambivalent about his assessment of Frye’s critical use of romance and myth.

There are two reasons why Hartman is full of praise for Frye’s critical deployment of romance and myth. On the one hand, for Hartman, Frye’s view of romance as the displacement of myth in literature enables us to revalue what grosser histories of literature see merely as secularization. For the movement from myth to realism does not infer the sad decline of hero into antihero or of an ancestor’s great seal rings into Belinda’s hairpin. We discover that secular man is not devoid of mythic attributes … [T]he notion of displacement … reveals the permanence of Romance. One no more remove the romance element from art than natural instinct from man. (Hartman, 1966, 126)

On the other hand, Hartman sees Frye’s use of romance and myth as imposing "ghostlier demarcations" upon the interpretation of the literary work. Hartman holds that Frye’s criticism is like that of "[s]tructuralist critics in Europe and America" (123) in apprehending the work as part of a "total form" (123) which demands that "the bounding lines of the individual work are to be subordinated to larger patterns revealed by decomposing those outlines" (123). That is, Frye’s notion that the literary work is part of a larger structure of romance (a structure expressing itself in literature as historically distinct displacements of myth) works against familiar critical evaluations of the work as conforming to conventional norms whose validity transcends the bounds of history.

Frye would seem, for Hartman, to bridge the gap between the false universalism of modern liberal ideology and the despair of such critics as Ortega y Gasset, Walter Benjamin, and Erich Auerbach at the spread of technology’s dehumanizing influence to the work of art (Hartman, 1966, 119). His romantic categories act against the totalizing conventions of modern ideology: first by calling up the verbal minutiae that differentiate between the historic displacements of myth; second by bearing witness to the persistence in society of the will to effect progressive social change.

But there is also a reason why Hartman has grave reservations about Frye’s appeal to romance as a displacement of myth. To Hartman, Frye seems to believe that all the displacements of myth in literary romance refer to or resemble an "unaccommodated state" of myth — a myth "[Frye]
posits when he mentions "the pure myth of death and revival" (Hartman, 1966, 126). And yet, as Hartman notes, literary myth is "never found in this unaccommodated state" (126). In Hartman’s view, Frye’s criticism subsumes the literary work’s "verbal" mediation of the particular historic reality with which it is confronted "in what is called the verbal universe" (128), within which all verbal utterance is potentially identical in its resemblance to the "myth pure of religion or literature" (126-7). Argues Hartman, "this concept [of a verbal universe] prevents a definitive description of the very element after which it is named" (128):

We find no myth pure of religion or literature; it comes to us institutionalized from the beginning, and though it may also be a body of structural principles there is no point in underplaying the war in the members of that body. For, historically, some structural principles seem to exclude others. (127)

For Hartman, in other words, the virtue in the critical study of literary displacement must be in its recognition of the difference between the verbal utterances of each displacement, not their similarities. The verbal utterances in the different displacements of literature detail the imperfections of the historic reality they seek to change for the better, and so render up to criticism a vision of reality unmediated by the false generalizations of modern ideology. That is, literary displacement opens to criticism, not only the mythic elements in secular humankind, but also the obstacles that actual conditions of society must overcome in aid of the mythic quest.

In Hartman’s estimation, however, Frye is more concerned with the similarities than the differences between displacement, and so "does not specify what has separated man from his vision or into what temporal errors the vision has fallen" (123). For Hartman, Frye recognizes the ironic nature of romance as a form of displacement: its reference of the literary work to a "total form" of literary experience dissolves the boundaries established for the work by the conventions of familiar interpretive practice. But Frye subsumes the irony — and with it the essentially oral, verbal, nature — of the literary work into conformity with a new generalization — that of all literature under pure categories of myth. Frye’s subsumption of displacement, orality and irony in literature to an idealized version of myth implicates him, for Hartman, in false generalizations of écriture, and with them the ratio of modern society of which écrite is the expression.

Near the end of "Ghostlier Demarcations," Hartman warns that to gain a perspective on the reality of which literature is a mediating but unmediated expression, Frye would have to acknowledge that myth is first and foremost

imbued with the acts, the gesta of speech; and if there is a mediator for our experience of literature, it is something as simply with us as the human body, namely
the human voice. It is here that one possibility of progress lies: in honouring the problematic relation of words to a reality they mediate rather than imitate. To envision [the] "ghostlier demarcations" [set on the interpretation of literary work by total form] a poet must first utter "keener sounds." (129)

Hartman's argument is that if Frye's criticism were to listen for keener sounds, it might honour the place of orality in literature as an ironic critique of modern écriture and rationality. In so doing, Frye could redeem himself, discharging his responsibilities as a contemporary critic.

d) Angus Fletcher and the Critical Induction of Historic Details in Literature.

In "Utopian History and the Anatomy of Criticism," Angus Fletcher seems to distance himself from the criticisms of Krieger, Wimsatt and Hartman, defending Frye's criticism as compatible with the practices of what Krieger calls the "modern critical tradition" (Krieger, 1966, 10). But, if Fletcher understands Frye differently from his colleagues, he shares with them the same understanding of the priorities and goals of modern criticism: the priority of the ironic perspective in literary production and critical analysis, and the goal of apprehending the unmediated relation of literature to reality. Thus, Fletcher sees modern criticism as characterized by "the 'high seriousness' of the Iliad, whose subject is wrath and tragedy, whose fiction attempts a close correspondence with physical reality" (Fletcher, 1966, 72).

It seems to me that, as Iliad critics in the sense described above, the proponents of the modern critical tradition also honour and concur with what, for Fletcher, is the primarily empirical and inductive practice of modern historians. That is, the modern critical tradition echoes that distrust of premature and sweeping generalizations articulated by the typical historian who "enters an historical period and looks about at the scattered remains, the endless minutiae which at least since the invention of the printing press have been available for study" (Fletcher, 1966, 55-6). Writes Fletcher, such "[e]veryday historians, working inductively, do not want to gain their detachment [from detail that allows them a sense of their subject as a whole] at the price of losing palpable realities" (56). But Fletcher also observes that even what he calls everyday historians "must give a shape to their mass of data, so that even when they do not write what Frye ... calls 'metahistory' their works must have an informing pattern of some kind" (56). "When a historian [or an 'Odyssey critic' (71) such as Frye, that is, a critic 'at home with the middle distance of comic response' (71)] frankly admits that mythos or plot does govern his selection of detail, he is admitting to a form of
thought that is only partly inductive" (56). For Fletcher, "such is the metaphistory of Essay I [in Frye’s *Anatomy*]; it is no less a type of history for combining induction and deduction" (56).

Fletcher maintains that, as *Odyssey* critic, Frye exercises a "belief in the value of experience" (Fletcher, 1966, 71 [emphasis mine]): that is, his appeal to myth and its operation through historic modulations and literary cycles constitutes not a rejection of historic details in literature but an appreciation of the Utopian heuristic that operates within them, rendering literature an account of history at odds with that of modern liberal ideology.

For Fletcher, then, Frye’s criticism apprehends the same relation of literature to life as that of the modern critical tradition, except that, as an *Odyssey* critic he is more self reflexive about the deductive categories that inform his understanding of the relationship between literature and life than are the critics of the modern critical tradition. Fletcher points out that Frye is with modern criticism in recognizing the capacity of irony to challenge the "exaggerated linearity" (73) of modern ideology. But he also shows Frye arguing that criticism can apprehend such an ironic challenge by witnessing literature’s "introduction of ‘sacred time’ into linear history, [in which] the critic accepts all regular, recurrent, traditional, inherited goods" (73).

To Fletcher, Frye’s notion of sacred time does not so much deny the linear in history, imposing periods of mythic modulation and cyclical return upon history in its stead. Rather, sacred time provides evidence that man operates within linear history as a "creature and creator of the imaginative period" (73). For Frye, "Imagination resists dictation [by the ideological myth that history must follow a particular linear course] and the history of literature must be the chronicle of that rebellion" (73). Frye’s criticism records a rebellion in literature against the *a priori* imposition of linear categories on the form of history — a rebellion launched to achieve a inductive linearity. And, adds Fletcher, because Frye’s criticism has recorded the literary achievement of this inductive linearity — the same recorded by the modern critical tradition — his criticism constitutes a "new vision" of time "entailing a constant management of run-away historical forces: to tame the future, to know in order to predict and control, to change the world — but always in accordance with its historical destiny" (63). As "utopian" critic, Frye uses the "new vision" of literature "to illuminate the significance of the actual past" (63).

Fletcher understands Frye’s criticism, then, as identical to the modern critical tradition in its concern with relating literature, in a manner unmediated by the determinism of modern liberal idealism, to the actual past, and to the relationship of that past with present day social forces. Fletcher further illustrates this point by showing how Frye’s deductive and utopian criticism is
different from what he calls "mere futurism" (Fletcher, 1966, 73). By futurists, Fletcher seems to be referring — not, he hastens to add, to "the Futurist school of art" (73) — but to idealist thinkers who "use the terminology of historic cycles, but do not believe in them. [They] want to stop time, rather than bring any period of it to fulfilment, and [they] want to get off the world" (73). I would add that Fletcher’s description of futurists suggests that they would also like to get out of history, viewing it as if from afar as an inevitable progress to utopia. In this sense, Fletcher’s futurists are also liberal idealists.

Fletcher argues that, unlike futurism, Frye’s utopianism is more than a mere affirmation that the historic tendency towards an ascendency of technology over human freedom constitutes the fate of humankind. According to Fletcher, Frye’s perspective as an *Odyssey* critic is romantic in that it deals with the "special untruth" (Fletcher, 1966, 72) of literature: its capacity to act not only as a teller of stories but also as a commentary on different story types (myths) and their recurrence (72). It is this capacity that allows literature to operate in "sacred time" — to repeat through linear history the literary clustering of recurring story types into ritual and cyclical affirmations of human community (mythologies) — even as it acknowledges the increasingly dehumanizing effects of modernity on its historical development. For, with each historic repetition of the literary cycles there is a modulation, a decrease, in the power of the fictional hero (46). And this modulation or displacement of mythic form signifies that the reaffirmation of humanity in literature persists even as literature adjusts to the increasing constrictions that modernity imposes upon its freedom of action (47). For Fletcher, Frye’s critical understanding of history as sacred time — that is, Frye’s understanding of history as an affirmation of humanity — does not challenge the existence of a linear tendency in history so much as it does the futurist idea that the particular linear course towards the supremacy of technology over human freedom is inevitable. That is to say, sacred time does not deny the increasing dehumanization of social conditions, nor does it seek an inevitable resolution to this dehumanization that, as futurists have it, would stop history. But sacred time does place literature squarely at odds with that dehumanization.

Fletcher argues, then, that, unlike the utopianism of futurism, Frye’s utopianism focuses not on the future but on a new or alternative vision of the past, ones that challenges the view of destiny that pervades social development — that allows readers to predict a different destiny in literary development. For Fletcher, there is nothing inevitable in Frye’s vision of the future. It is a future that humankind has the freedom to shape, that humankind risks destroying, that, if humankind allows social development to continue on its present trajectory, it certainly will destroy.
Fletcher has argued that Frye's synoptic organization of literary history into an overall structure is an honest endeavour to account for the particulars of past experience in a manner that the futurism of liberal idealism does not, and thus amounts to nothing more nor less than the employment of metahistory implicit in all legitimate historical practice. Thus, for Fletcher, Frye's critical view of history does not preclude an examination and explanation of the richness of detail that constitutes the data of literary history. Frye's employment of generic cycles reveals how the history of literary creation can, through its accommodations to changes in style "indicate how each work is slanted in such a way as to meet a particular audience on a particular occasion" (Fletcher, 1966, 39). States Fletcher, "Newspaper critics perform this service every day, advising audiences on the likelihood of getting their money's worth at the box office or the book store" (39). That is, by analysing the work as a particular displacement of myth, Frye is like popular critics in showing how the work meets historically specific situations halfway — incorporating concerns broader than those of literary form while preserving its distance from those concerns as an expression of myth.

Like Krieger, Wimsatt, and Hartman, Fletcher sees Frye's criticism as attempting to give an account of the relationship of literature and reality. But, whereas, the other critics criticize Frye's attempt to relate literature to life for being a reaffirmation of liberal idealism, Fletcher endorses Frye's attempt on the grounds that it recognizes the priority of irony and so avoids implication in liberal rationalizations of the status quo. Thus, Fletcher sees Frye's criticism as successfully discharging the responsibilities of modern criticism, especially its responsibility to honour historic detail. If Fletcher sees Frye as true to the responsibilities of modern criticism, however, it is because he sees him as accepting the tenets and following practices compatible with those of the modern critical tradition. He does not regard Frye's recourse to the categories of the imagination as at odds with the responsibility of criticism to apprehend the relationship of literature with actual reality.

2. Left Wing and Social Criticism.

a) Terry Eagleton, Gerald Graff, and John Fekete on the Obligation of Criticism to Realism and the Representation of Perceptible Reality.

In the decades since the Northrop Frye and Modern Criticism: Selected Papers from the English Institute were presented, the challenge to Frye by literary critics has been superseded by those who can best be described as "left wing" social critics. These are critics who dismiss literary criticism as reducible to a branch of specialties and disciplines -- "linguistics, history, sociology and so on"
Gerald Graff and Terry Eagleton, for instance, reject the validity of literary criticism as an "autonomous discipline" (Graff, 1970, 76) on the ground that it is a discourse without an object (Eagleton, 1983, 197), that it merely inhibits the recognition of literary text as primarily a social document. As we shall see, while Graff and Eagleton, as well as other critics such as John Fekete, agree with many of the criticisms levelled at Frye by Krieger et alia — especially that Frye rejects the relation of the text to reality as the primary test of its validity — they see Frye's appeal to myth and metaphor, not as a deviation from the traditional defence of poetry, but as yet another failed attempt to legitimate it. Writes Graff:

Many commentators have expressed disapproval of Frye's reckless abandonment of evaluation. ... It should be noted, however, that Frye is only being absolutely consistent in following to their logical implications the principles of organicism and autonomy to which so many contemporary critics — Wimsatt, Brooks, and Krieger among them — have committed themselves. The view that the imagination is a law unto itself is incompatible with any theory of the proper nature and function of poetry. Theoretical generalizations purporting to characterize an autonomous discipline are inherently superfluous and irrelevant. If poetry is truly autonomous, then Frye is right and critical discriminations and meaningless. (Graff, 1970, 76)

That being said, it is also fair to say that Graff, and with him Eagleton and Fekete, view the responsibilities of modern criticism in much the same way as do the proponents of literary autonomy. That is, they require that a valid criticism would relate the text — that is, any text, whether it is classified as literary or not — to a reality at odds with the one described by the status quo, a reality that can only be apprehended by viewing literary conventions in an ironic light. Though Graff says of literary criticism that "theoretical generalizations purporting to characterize an autonomous discipline are inherently superfluous and irrelevant" (76), he and other left wing social critics such as Eagleton and Fekete do not dispense with such generalizations. Rather, they assign a different significance to the generalizations of literary criticism, thereby performing an ironic undermining of the meanings assigned them by literary critics. In so doing, they try to show that Frye is like all defenders of literary autonomy: he is an advocate of liberal idealism and formalism, who uses the rhetoric of literary autonomy to promote an acceptance of the cause of the liberal status quo.

(1) Gerald Graff.

Gerald Graff argues against the notion common to Krieger et alia that a literary work is a verbal unity of form from which a meaning denotative of reality cannot be abstracted without a reduction in literary meaning on the ground that such a notion is anti-propositionalist. Says Graff,
even if the propositional meaning — meaning that denotes extrinsic reality — is not the whole meaning of the work, still, it is a real part of the work's meaning and a very important part. For, Graff maintains that it is the denotative content of the work that determines whether or not the work functions as a "unified utterance" (Graff, 1970, 145). That is, the verbal unity of a literary work is measured in terms of whether or not its rhetorical -- expressive -- form is appropriate to the "dignity" (161) -- the seriousness -- of its propositional meaning, and in terms of the maturity and linguistic resources that the author is able to bring to the rhetorical treatment of that meaning (157). But Graff also argues that the verbal unity of rhetorical form and propositional meaning is not a distinguishing feature of literature, that the search for unity of rhetorical form and denotative content is evident in the "ordinary speaker" as well as in the "poet" (147).

Graff does acknowledge that the rhetorical form of text gives a specificity -- a unique cast -- to its representation of reality, that while criticism can describe the rhetorical characteristics of a given text, description does not constitute reproduction, only understanding (Graff, 1970, 150-1). Specificity, however, is a quality that Graff would see as being equally applicable to both literary and non-literary writing, and he puts neither beyond the evaluation of their form in terms of their propositional content.

The problem of evaluating literary representations of reality in terms of their propositional content is, for Graff, a central one, one, he maintains, with which Frye, like Krieger et alia, never grapples. Graff describes Frye's criticism as relating literature to an imaginary world divorced from reality and constructed on the pleasure principle (Graff, 1970, 77). From Graff's perspective, such a view of literature is not consistent. Graff reasons that if a world built on the pleasure principle is one in which all conceivable desires are satisfied, that world must also satisfy the very human desire to know how things actually stand (75). According to Graff, Frye inadvertently argues as much when he says that the greatest literature contains both the "tragic and the comic -- 'the up and the down views' -- often at the same time as different aspects of the same event" (77). As Graff states, the obvious inference is that the "more pleasurable" (77) literary presentation is that which is "truer to reality" (77). But such an inference betrays Frye's initial premise that literature must be divorced from life, "subsuming the pleasure principle by the reality principle" (77).

For Graff, "Frye is forced, at critical points, to abandon the doctrine of autonomy [of literature from life] which, most of the time, he is content to expound in the most extreme terms (Graff, 1970, 78). Thus, Graff concludes his analysis of Frye with the observation that "Frye's writings reflect evidence of the vacillation, ambivalence, and evasiveness which we have found to be
characteristic of antipropositional theorists in general" (77). That is, Frye tries to avoid the hard work of understanding how texts represent reality, a task that, to say the least, would cast what "antipropositional" (77) theorists see as the features that distinguish between so-called literary and nonliterary writing in an ironic light. But since his theory cannot do without the reference of literature to reality, Frye smuggles in that reference through the ambiguities of his critical system. In so doing, Frye leaves the assumptions of literary criticism about the autonomy of literature unchallenged, thereby upholding the contemporary status quo.

(2)Terry Eagleton

Graff does not give up entirely on the difference between literature and ordinary language which he distinguishes in terms of the poetry’s "highly developed and systematic employment of rhythm" (167). By contrast, Eagleton sees no inherent difference between literature and other types of writing, arguing instead that literature is "writing which embodie[s] the values and ‘tastes’ of a particular social class ... a valuable instrument for their deeper entrenchment and wider dissemination" (Eagleton, 1983, 17). In other words, literature is "ideological" (17) rhetoric — the means by which a social group tells its own story, does so in its own language, and so promotes its own interests as truth.

Eagleton argues that, just as there is no "nonideological" or absolute category of literature, "the idea that there are non-political forms of criticism is simply a myth" (Eagleton, 1983, 209). All literary traditions (indeed all writing: for, there is, in principle, no difference between literature and nonliterature) are rhetorical forms of expression that are of "use" (208) in forwarding different ideological points of view. Thus, the critical acceptance of liberal humanism’s dictum that literature is "useless" (that is, that one type of literature or tradition of critical reading expresses the universal truths about the human condition which transcend ideological purposes) is itself the acceptance of one ideological position among many (209). Likewise, the acceptance of the formalist contention that textual meaning is apprehended through the disinterested "interest in the formal devices of language" (206) is, in truth, the acceptance of formalism’s "preoccupation with discourse as a form of power" (206). Akin to the liberal humanism and formalism is their conflation of status quo "values" (209), sensibilities, and the social arrangements that embody them with supposedly universal rules and structures. In what he calls "Frye’s mighty ‘totalization’ of literary genres" Eagleton sees both the conflations of liberal humanism and formalism at work.
For Eagleton, Frye’s critical system is roughly formalist in alienating literature from life: Eagleton says of Frye, "[He] insists that literature is an ‘autonomous verbal structure’ quite cut off from any reference beyond itself, a sealed and inward-looking realm which ‘contain[s] life and reality in a system of verbal relationships’" (Eagleton, 1983, 92-93). But, if Frye is formalist, Eagleton argues, he is also humanist. If Frye cuts literature off from the representation of society and history, in his literary cycles and repetitions Frye finds a "substitute history" (92), a literary realization of social "utopia" (93) composed of "preurban [romantic] images of the natural cycles, nostalgic memories of a history before modern industrialism" (93). Such a bucolic and tranquil paradise seems to leave room for the expression of all values, so that any work can be "slotted" (93) into its expression. But, as we have seen, for Eagleton, the values of Frye’s tolerant universe are less universal and all inclusive than they are those of the middle class: that is, his tolerance demands a balance between conservative and liberal tendencies that leaves no room for social revolution (94).

Thus, Eagleton sees Frye’s essentially premodern and imaginative vision of a "society as free, classless and urbane" (Eagleton, 1983, 94), as entailing a denial of the progress modern society has made to that same end. Writes Eagleton, “Actual history is for Frye bondage and determinism, and literature remains the one place where we can remain free” (93). At the same time, argues Eagleton, Frye’s literary utopia — a utopia transcending actual social conditions — is cast in the image of middle-class liberal ideology (94). By pretending that literature articulates a disinterested concern for human welfare extending beyond the confines of any ideological interest, Frye’s view of literature has, in fact, affirmed the values of modern liberal capitalism. His is a relating of literature to reality that fails to cast its conventions in an ironic light, and so presents its ideological content as universal truth. For Eagleton, there is nothing inherently wrong with Frye’s using literature to express liberal ideology. After all, every type of criticism uses literature. But he sees Frye’s "use" of literature as wrong-headed because, like all liberal humanist criticism, Frye is dishonest about what he is doing (208). That is, Frye’s criticism purports to describe a universally intelligible cultural experience when in fact he is describing an experience of the privileged few that is won through the sacrifices of the many.

True to his Marxist credentials, Eagleton advocates a criticism recognizing, first and foremost, that the making and study of culture has been a minority pursuit: a privilege built on the sacrifices of the many who have not been able to participate in literary experience (Eagleton, 1983, 214-215). The goals of such a criticism are two fold. First, it proposes the inclusion of political points of view hitherto excluded from cultural expression, and therefore, the honouring of writings
and readings by women and the working-class as expressive of progressive forces actually at work in modern society (215-216); second, the defeat of "the Left or Right mythology of the [modern mass] media as impregnably monolithic" (216) and the establishment of "democratic control over these ideological apparatuses" (216), a control which counters their tendency to destroy the sensibilities of any consciousness at odds with that of the status quo. Such a criticism would, in effect, cast the so-called literary universals of what we have seen Eagleton refer to as "literary theory" in an ironic light, an irony that recuperates literary categories as "valuable concepts for a different kind of discursive practice altogether" (206). The result would be criticism's apprehension of a more honest inclusive relation of literature to politically diverse reality.

(3) John Fekete.

John Fekete seems to concur with Eagleton that criticism should subject to ironic scrutiny the nonhistoricist and apolitical readings of literary criticism. He maintains that the aim of criticism should be to relate texts to a view of social reality unmediated by the illusions of modern market ideology, one which gives expression to the progressive class forces that market ideology has suppressed. Thus Fekete argues that criticism should give priority to a revolutionary — an ironic — realism capable of representing the rough edges of modern life and their significance to class struggle.

In turn, Fekete criticizes both formalist and humanist criticism on the ground that they turn the reading attention away from the depiction of reality and with it the problems of class struggle, with the effect that these problems remain unremedied. At the same time, formalist and humanist criticism incorporate literary traditions that hitherto have been taken as expressions of opposition to modernity into modern taxonomies of interpretation. Fekete is not arguing, then, that humanism and formalism do not relate the text to reality. Like Eagleton, he is arguing that under the pretext of apprehending literature's universal intelligibility, formalism and humanism relate the text to the view of reality taken by modern market ideology — even those texts that hitherto were taken as expressing opposition to such a view. It is Frye, in Fekete's view the formalist and humanist par excellence, who succeeds in neutralizing the capacity for resistance in romance by incorporating its categories and symbols into the modern market's depiction of reality.

Fekete does not see Frye's valorization of romance as a deviation from such mainstream defences of poetry as New Criticism (Fekete, 1976, 40-41). Rather, Fekete sees Frye's championing of romance as part of a process which began with New Criticism and culminated in the media theories of Marshall McLuhan: one in which romance — formerly a reaction to critical and literary trends that
abetted the capitalist rationalization of modern life — would itself become part of the system of modern rationalization. Fekete maintains that by representing in purely conventional terms the conflict in romance between desire and modern conventionality (49-50), Frye’s system neutralizes what was, in effect, an ironic perspective on modern life, one maintained in the “tension [between the romantic cultural space and] what nineteenth century diction called ‘civilization’” (41). Within Frye’s system, romance acts, instead, as part of the purely “structural” (41) relations designed to “capitulate totally to the prevailing material reality by abandoning [any attempt to confront] it” (51). Thus, Frye completes the severing of literature from its "content" (50): his is the last abject surrender to contemporary capitalism’s "destruction of systems of reference to perceptible reality [that is, realism] (involving the disappearance of perspectival space from painting and the tonal system from music)" (49). It remains for McLuhan to rationalize this alienation of literature from life as the true content of experience, so that nothing is left of the message but the medium (41). Concludes Fekete, after Frye and McLuhan, all that is left of the literary work is "the technological picture of a form that is independent of all content, but able to absorb all content" (50).

Fekete’s concern is that Frye’s view of literature as a self-referential structure is of a piece with formalism and humanism alike in failing to give priority to irony — the "subversive, defetishizing capabilities" (Fekete, 1976, 47) in art — and in suppressing the “denotative” and "connotative" (49) qualities of a realism capable of giving voice to the progressive forces at work in society. In Frye’s failure Fekete sees that of any criticism which purports to treat literature as the object and criticism the practice of an autonomous — value free (47) — discipline of literary criticism. Like the "literary theorists" among Frye’s critics, however, Fekete also sees Frye as having failed in his obligation to relate literature to reality and to view generalizations from the perspective of irony: a view which motivates Fekete to condemn the suppression of realism by modern ideology.

b) Fredric Jameson and the Negativity of Ideology.

Like Graff, Eagleton, and Fekete, Fredric Jameson would agree that the distinction drawn by literary critics between literary and nonliterary language is false. He would concur that any critical system will employ literary texts as an allegory of an ideological version of reality. And he would maintain that any socially responsible criticism will give voice to the progressive forces in their society through its apprehension of textual representations of reality at odds with those of the status quo. But Jameson differs from these other left-wing social critics in arguing that Northrop Frye comes very close to meeting the requirements of a socially responsible criticism.
Jameson maintains that criticism can only meet its obligation to represent the reality seen from the perspective of society’s progressive forces if it reverses Benjamin’s great dictum that “there is no document of civilization which is not at one and the same time a document of barbarism,” seeking in every work an affirmation of the proposition that “the effectively ideological is also, at the same time, necessarily Utopian” (Jameson, 1981, 286). For Jameson, every work is an expression of an ideological false consciousness which conflates particular perspectives — the perspectives of narrow class interests — with a universally intelligible account of the “perfected community” (74). But, at the same time, every work is also part of a record of the “historic differences” (130) between ideological accounts of the good life, differences that texts, when read as affirming the universal validity of particular ideologies, both suppress and deny. These differences reveal a statement of negativity within every affirmation of ideology; that is, they bring ideological expressions of narrow class interest to the fore of reading consciousness. Mirrored in these expressions of privileged self-interest, the reader apprehends the image of "sullen resistance" (290) by the excluded other, the "collective solidarity" (291) of oppressed classes in the struggle for a just society that makes even the most hegemonic expression of ideology intelligible as an expression of Utopia. Thus, Jameson requires of criticism an ironic scrutiny capable of discerning voices of solidarity between the oppressed as the negativity of the work’s ideological expression.

Jameson argues that contemporary critical theory’s need for an irony capable of perceiving an authentic Utopian moment in the negativity of ideological expressions puts it in something of a double bind. That is, critical theory cannot find such an ironic perspective in Marxist criticism. For, while Marxist criticism has excelled at exposing the false consciousness in statements of ideology, it has failed to apprehend the Utopian moment hidden in their differences (Jameson, 1981, 291-2). But, neither can critical theory find such irony in what Jameson calls the positive hermeneutics of liberal humanist critics, which have been quite good at locating Utopian moments in the literary work, but at the expense of affirming as true what Marxism has exposed as expressions of false consciousness (292). What is needed, Jameson argues, is a critical synthesis of the Marxist capacity for exposing the negative side of ideology — and — that capacity for apprehending the Utopian moment usually associated with liberal humanist criticism. This synthesis Jameson calls the "social hermeneutic" (74). And he suggests that such a synthesis is almost realized in the critical hermeneutic of Northrop Frye.

Analysing the “Second Essay” in Frye’s Anatomy, Jameson sees Frye’s archetypal level of interpretation criticism as studying those archetypal symbols — “the city, the garden, the sheep-fold, and the like, as well as human society itself” (Jameson, 1981, 72 quoting Frye, 113) — through which
"a symbolic or heightened consciousness of the collective expresses itself" (72). Jameson acknowledges that the archetypes represent a heightened consciousness of the collective because they are symbols of community — the products of endeavours requiring human solidarity. That is, in Frye's cosmology, archetypes represent the realization of the perfected community as resulting not, as liberal ideology would have it, from the achievement of individual heroes, and not once and for all time, but from social solidarity through conditions of society characterized only by their differences as displacements of myth. What Jameson sees happening at Frye's level of archetype is, in effect, an historicized view of myth and community expressing the consciousness of solidarity amongst the oppressed of every age — a view that constitutes a vision of history's progressive forces. For the differences represented in the displacements of myth are those which ideological affirmations of myth as ahistorical expressions of universal truth suppress. And in these differences — these negative moments of ideology — criticism apprehends what we have seen Jameson call "a heightened consciousness of the collective" — in search of the "perfected community" (74).

For Jameson, then, Frye interprets texts at the level of archetype as expressions of the consciousness of social forces — collectivities — engaged in the struggle for human community, expressions from which readers derive their own consciousness as a moment in that collective struggle. Writes Jameson, "only the community ... can dramatize that self-sufficient intelligible unity ... of which the individual body, like the individual 'subject,' is a centred effect" (Jameson, 1981, 74). But Jameson warns that, what Frye foregrounds at the level of archetype, he subordinates at the highest level of symbolic interpretation — the level of anagogy. When Jameson is confronted with Frye's anagogic interpretation of the text in the image of the "infinite man" (72), whose creations are "not reality, but ... the imaginative limit of desire, which is infinite, eternal, and hence, apocalyptic" (Jameson, 1981, 72 quoting Frye, 119), he assumes that this image signifies Frye's reaffirmation of the primacy of individual insight over social solidarity as the ground of consciousness and knowledge. Jameson sees Frye as giving priority to individual insight, a move that implicates his criticism in the politically unconscious affirmation of liberal ideology as truth. Frye's apparent implication in the political unconscious explains why his criticism cannot identify the emancipatory forces at work in modern and postmodern popular culture. Having resolved that texts should be "reprivatized," that is, interpreted ultimately in "purely individual terms of an isolated body and merely personal ecstasy" (73), Frye remains an exponent of cultural artifacts as a private property or commodity.

As Jameson also argues, another effect of Frye's reprivatized textual experience is his emphasis on romance's dramatization of human action as of conflict between individual hero and
personal foe (Jameson, 1981, 112-113) as a principle of historic identity (130). That is, Frye treats the action of the romantic hero as the formal constant, whose displacement through the history of literature links modern society with origins in its primitive origins (130). Frye's valorization of romance can be seen as nothing more than a "positive hermeneutic" (130), a system of interpretation affirming the ideology of individualism, an ideology whose forms have no applicability to the premodern myth plays upon which Frye has imposed them (113). In effect, Jameson sees in Frye's use of romance the reduction of myth from the property of collective consciousness to an item of individual or private property.

Jameson writes that unlike Frye's positive hermeneutic, "[a] negative [social] hermeneutic ... would on the contrary wish to use the narrative raw material shared by myth and 'historical' literatures to sharpen our sense of historical difference" (130). That is, criticism's obligation to discern the negativity in expressions of ideology requires that it give priority to irony, which discerns the historic and social differences hidden by the claims to transhistorical validity that any ideology would make. For Jameson, Frye's archetypal level of interpretation moves towards discharging this obligation. Even if Frye's archetypal criticism denies the connection of literary Utopia with reality, Jameson sees this Utopia as the ironic expression of desire and struggle by actual social forces, a struggle which ideology tends to obscure and suppress. But, at the level of anagogy, Jameson sees Frye's "recontainment" (71) of the social hermeneutic opened up by archetypal criticism, and in so doing engaged in the unironic affirmation of liberal capitalist ideology.

c) Ross Woodman and the Role of the Body in Textual Experience.

True to his affiliations with Freudian psychoanalysis and Derridean deconstructionism, Ross Woodman's criticism is part of the postmodern reaction to the patriarchal logocentrism of modern interpretative traditions. Woodman sees logocentrism as the textual attachment of the word to canons of modern rationalism, which demands that language be taken as a vehicle of communicating clarity of thought, one designed to resolve -- even foreclose upon -- contradictions and ambiguities. And, for Woodman, the Cartesian clarity and distinctiveness of modern logocentrism bleaches language of what it was most naturally designed to express: the intimate, tangled and mysterious feminine relations between human bodies and of humans to their own bodies. Banished from the interpretation of meaning by traditions of logocentrism, bodily experience persists as that referent which the text can approach only in the absence of meaning. Woodman's deconstruction shares with other of Frye's critics the assumption that contemporary criticism must give priority to the textual play of irony in
search of the relation between text and a reality at odds with that of the contemporary status quo. But, for Woodman, this obligation to relate texts to reality entails the obligation of criticism to honour the text as an expression of bodily experience.

Thus, Woodman cites Julia Kristeva, Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida as proposing a deconstructionism that exposes the absent referent in every textual association, that is, a referent whose absence occasions the unravelling of associations into their opposites, i.e., their deconstruction. Woodman sees the Freudian element in this deconstruction is to see the origin of language as being in the flesh. He has it that, according to Kristeva and de Man, cognition and communication have their roots in the infant's "incestuous bonding with the mother's body" (Woodman, 1994, 319); in the discrete and unregulated "pulsions" (320) that are expressed and transmitted within this relationship. This pre-Oedipal relationship (317) is "prior and superior" (320) to all the cognitive relationships and communication of textual language, a "speaking to the heart" (320) that constitutes language's maternal essence. But this essence has become subverted under conditions of patriarchy (323) where cognition is rooted in the authority of the father imago (318) and language is understood to be an imposition of foreclosure, hierarchy and order upon the disorganized data emanated from a world that is yet to be understood. Under the domination of patriarchal logocentrism, writes Woodman, "language becomes more exact and clearer, but more prolix, duller and colder" (320). As an expression of the tactile connection with the mother, language is in constant struggle with the logocentricism of patriarchy, which seeks to reduce the feminine character of language to a passive ground "answerable to 'all judging Jove'" (318) -- an unformed matter or dissonance that is mute and in need of ordering, definitive interpretation, resolution and foreclosure if it is to speak (323).

In accordance with the views of Kristeva and de Man, then, Woodman sees Derrida's deconstruction to be less an interpretive practice imposed upon the text than the actual subversive action of the feminine in the patriarchal text (Woodman, 1994, 319). Deconstructionism does not unravel the text towards a resolution so much as bear witness to the text in the act of deconstructing -- in which the patriarchal ordering of the passive mater in language is revealed to be a facade hiding the warring parents-in-coitus (323). In every association and in its unravelling through deconstruction, language reveals the absent referent, the maternal impulse, upon which the patriarchal notions of concept, order, harmony and resolution impose a silencing foreclosure.

Woodman understands that Frye's literary theory tries to counteract the foreclosure of patriarchy upon the feminine impulses in language. As evidence, Woodman cites Frye's incorporation of Beulah -- the Blakean emblem for the feminine principle in literary creation -- into his critical
system of interpretation. Frye’s Beulah presides over a reading of literature from which judgements about the incompatibility of works and their conventions have been expelled, one in which "Bunyan and Rochester are met together and Jane Austen and the Marquis deSade have kissed each other" (Woodman, 1994, 317, quoting Frye, 1966, 143). But, in his efforts to banish foreclosure from patriarchy, Frye has inadvertently let it back in as a harmony of images so cloying, so lacking in dissonance and contradiction that foreclosure is achieved before literary experience even begins. In effect, Woodman argues that Frye has tried to expunge patriarchal foreclosure from textual interpretation by importing an equally patriarchal image of the feminine as the submissive helpmate — saying "I hasten to obey" (323) — dedicated to expunging linguistic dissonance within the total form of literature.

Beulah, then, acts in Frye’s criticism as what we have seen Woodman describe as the feminine bleached of the biology — a biology exhibited in the image of warring parents in coitus. Desexed by logocentricism, Beulah allows texts into her peaceable kingdom only as primarily verbal patterns — as conventions — disembodied from the historical and biological impulses that occasioned them. Yet, for Woodman, biology and historical specificity — something that informs the "introspective experience of the reader" (Woodman, 1994, 321) — inform the absent referent that language and, with it, Woodman’s criticism seeks. The ironic effect biology and historic specificity have on patriarchal interpretation must be treated as being at the essence of language by any criticism that would honour the expression of the body in the text. Yet it is just this effect that Woodman sees subordinated by Frye’s use of critical deployment of Beulah. Woodman would say that for Frye, biology and historical difference are without structure, and without structure the text and the reader’s experience of it is fleeting and mute.

Except in its most undisplaced form as that of "pure" myth and metaphor, Frye regards literary experience without structure as fleeting and in need of articulation (Frye, 1990, 74) — a critical position that occasions all his critics’ objections. That is, Frye’s notion of literary structure seems to entail the unironic affirmation of literary conventions at odds with the critical necessity of relating literature to reality. Of course, these critics argue that Frye’s system does relate literature to a kind of reality, if only inadvertently. But that reality is an imaginary one — a result of the illusions of the status quo. To relate literature to life Frye would have to honour the priority of irony, the specificity of the art work, the primacy of orality over écriture, the induction of textual meaning from historic details, the recuperation of realism and the role of the body in the experience of the text. For these are the obligations of contemporary criticism.
3. Frye Responds to His Critics.

In his 1966 response to Krieger, Wimsatt, Hartman, and Fletcher, "Reflections in a Mirror," Frye argues, in effect, that while it is fine for criticism to explore the connection between literature and life, and necessary that criticism view the text ironically as unrelated to any external generalizations about reality (Frye, 1965, 139), there is, however, no experience of reality unmediated by conventional structures, and no conventional structures capable of expressing a reality independent of the conventional shapes humans impose upon that reality. For Frye, then, the relation of literature to life, that is, the reader’s lived experience of the text as the object of a "primitive response" (141), lies in the reader’s unmediated response to the text’s structuring of reality. Writes Frye, the primitive response is "neither naive ... nor so sophisticated as to be indifferent, but is the type of response that is only possible when one stands inside a structure of literature, and is neither confusing it with life nor building up an emotional barricade against it" (141). That is, Frye maintains that the aim of his criticism is to achieve a relationship between the reader and the text that breaks down not only the reader’s confusion of literature and life, but also their confusion of life with what we will see Frye call the stock and kinetic responses to it as a reproduction of the myths of ideology. Frye argues that the primitive relationship which his criticism seeks is not, as we have seen Wimsatt, Hartman, and Eagleton assume, to some pure form of myth from the distant past that is divorced from its social incarnations (140). Frye's primitive response is rather to the different use to which literature puts those incarnations. That is, as elements of a centripetal structure, literary myths cast the connection of myth and ideology in ironic light. As such, literature liberates myths and readers alike from their thrall to ideological illusions of an objective reality beyond human control exposing these illusion for what they really are, what Frye, in "The Developing Imagination," calls

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6As this section unfolds, it should become clear that Frye’s 1966 response to Krieger, Wimsatt, Hartman, and Fletcher is in character with his 1992 response to Jameson (in Cayley, 90), and would apply to Graff, Eagleton, Fekete and Woodman as well. More specifically, Frye would maintain that Jameson, Graff, Eagleton, and Fekete are no more able to distinguish between myth as ideology and literary myth than are his critics from the field of literary theory. Thus, they also are unable to discern how literary myth is the only remedy to the unconscious conditioning of contemporary individuals by their social mythology, especially as it is presented by mass culture.

7David Cayley notes that Jameson also argues as much. (Cayley, 1992, 90)
"the transient appearance of society" whose real form is "the total body of achievement in the arts and sciences" (Frye, 1990, 97).

In "Reflections in a Mirror" (1966), Frye argues that if myth is liberated by its expression as romantic archetype in literature, "it also works in society as a reactionary force, providing for prejudice and stock response what vision they have, producing what Mr.[sic] Wimsatt calls the cliché, the literary formula that ought not to be repeated" (Frye, 1966, 143). For Frye, myth is realized both in literature and in social reality and gives meaning to both. But in social reality, myth operates as a reifying or excluding element as it is only ever realized in structures of belief and prejudice. Its tendency is to isolate the community in which it is realized from other epochs and communities and the perspectives that they offer. So, whereas literary mythology acts as the imagery that gives meaningful shape to the disinterested hypotheses of literature, social mythology acts as a vehicle for concerned truth, telling the community’s members what it is important to know and do. Writes Frye:

literature has the pastoral; social mythology has the cottage away from it all or nostalgia for the world of one’s childhood. Literature has the quest; social mythology has the gospel of getting on. Literature has comedy; social mythology goes out to win friends and influence people. (Frye, 1966, 143)

Because social mythology yields — in its very structure — to demands that it represent nonliterary reality, it has its "own kind of literature" (143); a sort of sub-poetry that caters to the clichés of current fashion as an expression of concerned truth. Thus, social mythology tends to engender a passivity in its audience (144). The uninhibited response to social mythology — the one that recognizes and accepts social mythology's verbal structures — also accepts the emotional and intellectual content of social mythology as a second nature or an expression of necessity. And it does so because precisely because the verbal structures of social mythology are those of belief and commitment.

In the current modern age, Frye argues, this passivity of response to social mythology as second nature has become almost universal: a result of the ubiquity of popular entertainment and of its capacity to ape literary convention in a manner that reinforces popular perceptions of literature as an "alien structure" (Frye, 1970, 78). To students brought up on a steady diet of "comic books and television programmes" (Frye, 1966, 141), their uninformed response to literature will indeed be to that of an alien structure: a response that "has every conceivable kind of inhibition attached to it" (141) so that it will "mean nothing, or infinitely less" (Frye, 1967a, 19). In other words, Frye is arguing that the approach of contemporary students — indeed of most individuals in contemporary society — to the literary work is reduced to that of a "stock response [which] cannot read a poem, but
can only react to the content of a poem, which it judges as inspiring or boring or shocking according to [the] anxieties [articulated for it in contemporary social mythology]" (Frye, 1963a, 124-5).

As social mythology, then, literary myth, for Frye, becomes reified into a rhetorical form of those beliefs which contemporary ideology deems important. Reified by ideology into a form of belief, the experience of social mythology becomes conflated in the minds of contemporary individuals with that of unmediated reality -- a second nature. Frye, commenting on the modern reification of myth -- actually a human artifice -- into second nature says that "[m]ythology is curiously like technology in its development: the more man invents of it, the more strongly tempted he is to project it into something that controls him" (Frye, 1966, 146).

Frye sees criticism as a means of exposing readers to the difference between the structures of belief -- out of which the popular literature and entertainments of social mythology are constructed -- and the hypothetical structures of literature itself. In opposition to the passive response required by social mythology, Frye argues that criticism must cultivate the active response demanded by literature. For Frye, such an active response to literature would also be capable of recognizing how the social myths of contemporary society comprise but a partial form of the social experience expressed by literary myth and archetype, and that literary myths and archetypes form the "reservoir" of imaginative potential out of which civilizations and our beliefs about them are constructed (Frye, 1967a, 115).

In other words the active response demanded by literature recognizes that the value of myth is evidenced, not in a hidden wisdom that only modern society is able to extract, but in the art revealed by every work of literature (Frye, 1966, 140-1). Such a response takes literary romance, not as a flight from irony, as do Frye's critics, but as an ironic recuperation of romance from the unconscious structures of interpretation that modern social mythology has erected in the unconscious of every individual. As such, literary romance is capable of expressing myth as a vision of "the unity in various things" (Frye, 1957, 127). That is, in literary romance myth envisions a unity of experience expressed only in the historic and social details of human existence. When, in literature, the reader is exposed to the multiple ways in which romantic conventions express myth -- manners as often ironic (Frye, 1965, 140) as they are straight (139) -- they are confronted with the insight that all human endeavour, even the ironic overthrow of convention, tends to become conventionalized. This insight forces into conscious view the fact that even the ironic overthrow of convention can become something of a convention which ideologies reproduce for their own purposes, purposes which individuals in modern conditions of society have come to accept at an unconscious level (Frye, 1967a,
73). In *Northrop Frye: In Conversation* (Cayley, 1992), Frye argues that only the literary vision of romance as that of diverse incarnations of literary myth can act as a form of counter-environment from which to critique modern society’s employ of romance to "twist and skew myths into patterns of ideological authority" (90).

I would argue that Frye has tried to show how, without the critical apprehension of literary language as a romantic displacement of myth, the ironic corrosion of literary convention endorsed by Frye’s critics leaves modern society’s hold over convention undisturbed. In fact, irony becomes part of that society’s rationalization. For, as I tried to show in my explication of Frye’s critics, the ironic dissolution of convention they propound assumes the existence of forces in society at odds with and beyond those controlled by the conventions of the social status quo. As Frye argues, however, that such forces exist is part of "the illusion of our own time" (1982c, 161). Only the imaginative possibility of such a society remains, and that is the one contained in our literary tradition.

We see, then, that, for Frye, his critical embrace of myth and romance places him with his critics in arguing for the priority of irony, the specificity of the literary work, the attention to oral and historical detail, the negativity of ideology, and the relation of the lived experience of the body to the text, but also entails a critique of their own commitment to these priorities.

Section C.

Frye and the Feminist Response.


As we have seen, Frye’s critics charge that his poetics is a flight from the responsibilities of criticism into romance and idealism. He responds with the rejoinder that only by apprehending literature at the level of anagogy as an ironic recuperation of romance as myth can contemporary criticism discharge its responsibilities. Yet, in their attention to the details of modern experience, it is this very recuperation of romance by irony that his critics have somehow missed. But, as I will show below, feminist critic, Deanne Bogdan, is one of Frye’s critics who has not missed Frye’s insights into the recuperation of romance by literary irony (Bogdan, 1980, 242-3). Yet she, also, is no longer convinced that Frye can discharge the responsibilities of contemporary criticism through an appeal to literature as an imaginative and ever broadening vision of "unity in multeity" (Bogdan, 1980, 150). For, such a vision of unity requires an ideal reader (Bogdan, 1992, 142), one capable of recognizing the potential identity of all literary experience with their own, one willing to accept that literature is
free to say anything "to anybody at any time" (Bogdan, 1992, 153). For Bogdan, Frye's appeal to anagogy ignores the effect that the reading of literature has on "real bodies" (97). He ignores the "power," "location" and "feeling" problems (143-148) anagogy creates when it demands that all readers apprehend literature as the "total form" (Frye, 1957, 115) of imaginative experience, irrespective of their situatedness.

2. Romance as Two Removes from Reality, and as Effecting a Double Disassociation from Actual Conditions of Society.

In her doctoral dissertation, Instruction and Delight: Northrop Frye and the Educational Value of Literature (Bogdan 1980), and subsequent writings (Bogdan 1981, 1982a, 1982b, 1986), Bogdan records how Frye's interpretation of literature at the level of anagogy, which apprehends literature as a structure of myth and metaphor, shows that literature's extrinsic value — as instruction — is entailed by its intrinsic value — as delight (Bogdan, 1982a, 205). At the same time, she shows that Frye's insight into the relationship between the intrinsic and extrinsic value of literature recasts the appreciation of literature as a type of knowledge (Bogdan, 1980, 149) capable of discerning the difference between illusion and reality.

Thus, Bogdan argues that the effect of Frye's insight into literary knowledge is to turn Plato's famous problematic of poetry as three removes from reality on its head (Bogdan, 1982a, 208). That is, Plato also accepts that the value of poetry as a form of instruction — its power to influence results from the capacity of its form to delight. But, Plato does not consider literary form to be knowledge, only appearance. Rather, he sees, in its power to instruct, the danger of indoctrinating uncritical minds, incapable of discerning the difference between their rapture at poetry's conjuring of delightful appearance and the experience of truth (Bogdan, 1980, 110). Bogdan points out, however, that by interpreting literature as a structure of myth and metaphor, Frye takes romance — the literary form of experience in a human world — as a collection of hypothetical images to be contemplated (Bogdan, 1980, 150-1), not a reenactment of truth demanding the audience's uncritical participation. Delight at the unified spectacle of the conceivable — not the plausible or possible — in human experience results in knowledge capable of discerning the hidden possibilities in what current sensibilities would have us believe is simply true or false (Bogdan, 1980, 130). For Bogdan, then, Frye's literary knowledge is produced through the association of myth and metaphor with romance, an association which transforms romance, first, into an ironic separation from life through literature as archetypal creation and then into an ironic and comedic return through archetypal response (1980, 171-183, 196).
Bogdan argues that Frye’s shift from archetypal to anagogic criticism transforms romance from a structure of plausible or believable experience — experience of what "should" be — into that of conceivable images — experience of what "may" be (Bogdan, 1980, 122). That is, as divine experience rendered human, romance becomes the image of human experience presented at the conceivable limits of desire — transcending the limitations imposed on the attainment of human desire by ordinary reality. This transformation is achieved through anagogy’s ironic deployment of romantic images primarily as verbal ornaments (1980, 189), identical to centripetal structures. This move relegates their denotative capacity to secondary importance, thus separating romance from life.

On Bogdan’s account, romance becomes the vision of human freedom from the bondage of ordinary experience, a vision which the reader possesses as an inspiring image to be applauded. And the drive of romance to produce, and of readers to possess, a vision so separated from life is fuelled by a Promethean discontent with the frustrated potential for divinity in ordinary — fallen (Bogdan, 1980, 169) — existence and the desire for an erotic fusion of divine and human achievement. As ironic separation, romance records the journey of divine vision into fallen existence and its quest to rescue both that existence and the reader as fellow "mental traveller" (Frye, 1957, 322) from the ordinary conditions of life. As fellow traveller, the reader not only apprehends but inhabits romance as the transformation of the individual and their surrounding reality into the divine vision of experience and its inhabitant.

Within the anagogic relation of literature to life as described by Bogdan, romance rescues ordinary experience from fallen existence, transforming it from brazen to golden through a double irony, setting itself at two removes from reality (Bogdan 1982a, 211). That is, romance is not simply separate from reality but separates the content of ordinary experience from reality as well (205-6). Rendering literature into a primarily centripetal and ironic structure, romance transforms literature’s depiction of reality into irony as well. As irony, the literary depiction of reality tends to an objective concentration on details that transcends any concern for their decorum, moral suitability, or validity. Thus, the literary depiction of reality sees beyond what the details of reality merely are, to "what they might be, a reality that is brought into existence by a certain kind of creative activity" (204).

The details that most suggest this reality alternative to ordinary experience are those discarded by social standards of actual society, which is to say that the Promethean drive of romance is fuelled by the frustrated potential for creativity in those details deemed demonic by contemporary social prejudice. Romance teaches us that in order "to return to his creator, man has to come down again, return on himself, seek the source of creative powers which are close to the sexual instincts, and are
therefore in the place of excrement" (Bogdan, 1980, 308 quoting Frye, 1970, 271). By apprehending romance as a centripetal structure, at "two removes from reality" (199), the reader experiences its inherent value as a transformative experience. But, Bogdan points out that the transformation is not only of the individual but of their surrounding reality. This suggests a corresponding transformation of society needed to bring this new reality about. It is this suggestion, in romance, of an entirely new fusion of experience with social life — the effect of Eros — that makes romance a comic return to action in actual experience and so determines its extrinsic value as a statement of what should be done. Thus, the extrinsic value of literature to instruct follows directly from its intrinsic value (197).

But, at the level of anagogy, even the comic return of romance to life as the vision of the achievement of a new society remains an hypothetical expression of conceivable experience (Bogdan, 1980, 197). That is to say, the reunion of romance with life is ironic; this entails that, before such a union could occur in actual life, actual social conditions would themselves have to be transformed into the achievement of a social vision that cannot "be treated" by literature, but only "pointed to" (Bogdan, 1980, 123).

Thus, Bogdan understands Frye's anagodic criticism as pointing to a "third order" (1980, 179) of human fulfilment or endeavour, beyond that of the romantic separation with life and its comic "reunion" with ordinary society (195-6). In so doing, anagodic criticism forces the reader to recognize that the anagodic reunion of literature and life "does not mean actually constructing the city of God but only envisioning the open-ended set of premises upon which it is built" (197). That is, the reader is to recognize that the literary vision of the perfect community would require more than a change in social alignments to realize. It would also require an education designed to align individual consciousness with an "open" or literary "mythology" (321) capable of embracing all dissonant social perspectives as imaginative components of its own. Like Virgil guiding Dante, literature alone can only take the reader to the threshold of paradise; it remains for the Beatrice of applied criticism to transform the reader into a "spectator of his [sic] own life" (195), as one capable of a "social sanity and a genuine perception of reality rather than collective hysteria and hallucination" (322). In appealing to Frye's "third order of experience" (Frye, 1971, 170), anagodic criticism shows that literature is not simply something to be studied, but, as Frye says, a power to be possessed, that gives the reader the power to change reality.
3. Romance and the Spatialization of Experience.

For Bogdan, Frye's recuperation of romance as a centripetal structure rendered as double irony is essential to the integrity of literary truth in what Frye calls this "postlapsarian" (Bogdan 1980, 206, 296 & 1982a, 209) "post-Copernican" (Bogdan, 1980, 236) age. That is, in contemporary social conditions dominated by "Newtonian" (174) "science and the industrial revolution" (116), knowledge entails that the expression of human value must be subordinated to the search for objective fact. Subsequently, words are more likely to be associated with unironic or centrifugal relations to the facts of nonliterary experience, than with literature as a purely formal expression (229-245). Such facts are already ordered into a totalizing world view of dominant social authorities, who co-opt the authority of romance and comedy, associating both with their own interests (242-3). But, at this "kinetic stage of civilization" (298), the totalizing structures of ideological authority are hidden from individuals through the "magic" (302) of accelerated presentation (271) by which the romantic and comic diversions of mass culture induce in their viewers a kinetic -- stimulus (Frye, 1957, 350) -- a response that is unable to discern between the bromides of ideology and unmediated reality.

In her gloss on Frye's "Charms and Riddles" (Frye, 1976, 123-147), Bogdan argues that, for Frye, the acceleration of presentation "charms" (Bogdan 1980, 271) viewers into attributing the effects of romance and comedy to magic rather than to its construction is something common to literary experience -- for instance, when watching a play (271) -- as well as to the experience of ideology. But Bogdan stresses that, for Frye, the primarily spatial nature of the literary image as riddle (272) -- its organization as a simultaneous centripetal structure of imagery, which readers can revisit at different points throughout the text -- acts as a counter to the ambiguity created by the temporal experience of the work. Frye's conception of the essential spatiality of literature, then, and the responsibility of postlapsarian criticism to approach literature as primarily a spatial structure, according to Bogdan, remedies the tendency of readers to confuse the temporal experience of the literary work with stock and kinetic responses determined by the interpretive structures of their society.

Thus, the response to literature as a spatial structure is an inherently active one (265), countering the passive response to interpretive structures of society as unmediated embodiments of truth entailed in the kinetic response (266). At the level of anagogy, romance as irony coalesces into simultaneous patterns of possible experience, opening the reader's consciousness to a vision of "unity in multitude" (208), and exposing the tendency in the temporal experience of literature to associate literary works with the chaos of nonliterary existence. Thus, the postlapsarian critical response
distances the reader from the tendency of temporal experience to confuse literature's continuity of form with "the shifting ground of value systems to which centrifugal meaning points" (236), and so exposes the difference between illusion and reality, thereby turning Plato's problem with the poets on its head.

For the above reasons, Bogdan argues that Frye puts little trust in the reader's temporal experience of the work, or the intensity of involvement that is often connected with temporal experience (263). While she takes it that Frye conceives the critical act to be predicated upon the possibility of an ideal reading experience, in which the reader's temporal experience of the work comes to rest in "stasis" (Bogdan 1980, 291-2 & 1986 52), Bogdan points out that, for Frye, the experience of the work as stasis is rare (Bogdan 1980, 260 & 1986, 53).

Instead, Frye's anagogic criticism calls for the "ideal reader" (Bogdan, 1992, 142), who, through an every widening succession of intense readings, comes to align their temporal experience of the work — and of other works with which it is related conventionally — with the experience of it as a spatial structure. Thus, intense reading ("nous" [Frye, 1970, 74]) becomes mixed with the accumulation of knowledge about literature ("dianoia" [Frye, 1970, 74]), to produce in the reader a critical "bodying forth" of literary experience, that is, a bodily experience of the text divorced from ordinary experience and the confines of ideology within which that experience operates.

Frye's prescription for wider reading also counters what Bogdan, following Frye, calls the "centripetal fallacy" (Bogdan 1981, 37-39), the aesthetic absolutism of critics and teachers who present their favourite literary readings and experiences as definitive of the text's literary truth. A spatialized structure of hypothesis, the romantic imagery of literature shows itself, upon repeated acquaintance, to be larger than any number of readings by even the most "expert" critics. Like the stock and kinetic response, the centrifugal fallacy is revealed by criticism at the level of anagogy to confuse the literary work with its centrifugal associations, and so never to get near it (36-37).

For Bogdan, Frye advocates the wide reading of anagogic criticism as the only means of appreciating that bewildering romantic structure of ironic and thus hypothetical experience that climbs the heights of human experience and plumbs its depths in order to transform it into something new (Bogdan, 1980, 309). All other approaches fall into centrifugal and centripetal fallacies which apprehend literature as only a partial form of experience. According to Bogdan, it is his ironic recuperation of romance that Frye offers as the means of apprehending literature as "spatial unity" in "temporal mutlineity" (232) and thereby discharging the responsibilities of criticism in the postlapsarian world of modern society.
4. Beyond Wide Reading to the Poetics of Refusal.

But Bogdan does not rest satisfied with Frye's critical offering. For, in her later work, she has learned that feminist criticism already knows what Frye says literature has to teach (Bogdan, 1992, 138), that it has already undergone a form of "bewilderment" (145) at the hands of a patriarchal society that forces women to identify against themselves. The "bewilderment" of feminist readers makes it impossible for feminist critics to passively accept the stock and kinetic associations of patriarchal ideology (138). Thus, the feminist experience of literature in time comes pre-aligned to literary form; its intense readings are in no danger of association with the partial form of patriarchal ideology (139). Rather, they are as we have already seen Frye describe them (Frye, 1947, 426) — readings that engage the text at a pitch of intensity which ensures that irrelevant associations disappear leaving only the essential form of the work intact. Writes Bogdan, quoting Laurence Lipking,

Under the gaze of a woman reading with the passion of her subjectivity, a subjectivity formed by self-conscious awareness of her post-tragedic quality of bewilderment, literary taxonomies topple, aesthetic categories dissolve, and "strong writers turn pale." (Bogdan, 1992, 145; Lipking, 103)

In the face of a (pre) educated feminist imagination, Frye's dictum that criticism must be a matter of wider reading becomes a mixture of stock response (Bogdan, 1992, 141) and the centripetal fallacy which, once again, forces the woman reader to identify against herself (142). Once again, the feminist reader is required to undergo the pretence of travelling as disengendered "mental pilgrim" on what in truth is a journey designed by and for the needs of men (159).

For Bogdan, wide reading is the critical injunction that women should, once again, undergo a form of reading that assumes their response to be the stock response of a "closed mythology" (Bogdan, 1992, 144), and that presumes to remedy a passive relationship with ideology in which women are not actually invited to participate. As such, the call for wide reading will almost inevitably assume that the refusal of feminist poetries to participate is a sign of stock and kinetic responses to literature as a hostile and "alien structure" (138), an assumption that will lead to even more exhortations that feminist poetries should participate in wide reading.

But, as we have already seen Bogdan argue, a feminist poetics of refusal has already distinguished itself from stock and kinetic responses, operating instead as a poetries responding to the need of women for a "consolidation of identity" (1992, 144) as an expression for which no other voice in literature has ever been heard to speak (146). Bogdan would have it, then, that if Frye is right, and literature is primarily a structure of potential or hypothetical — not actual — identities, then it must be one in which no voice can be seen to actually speak for another. Yet the critical call for
wide reading — in which the dissociation of sensibility, suspension of judgement, spatialization of experience and ironic response to ordinary experience all entail a neutralization of identity — presumes to do just that for women. Thus, wider reading discounts the inequities detailed in what Bogdan calls the "power, feeling, and location problems" (153) special to women and minorities trying to express and read for an identity unconditioned by patriarchy. This necessitates the refusal by women readers to identify against themselves and to embrace each reader’s situatedness as a precondition of anagogic reading.

In response to wider reading, the poetics of refusal privileges the woman’s body, her temporal experience of the text, and her right to take literature personally — to deploy her personal response as a disintegrative moment which disrupts the continuity of patriarchal and ideological readings, conventions and taxonomies within the literary text (Bogdan, 1992, 146). Because Frye’s reading of romance at two removes from reality subjects women to bewilderment — ignoring their previous experience of bewilderment in actual life on the assumption that they need it just as much as the boys — we must assume it should be one of the first patriarchal concretions to be eroded by feminist reading. Argues Bogdan, feminist reading does not need to remedy a tendency to passively accept the stock and kinetic associations of ideology. That remedy has already been provided by the experience of women in patriarchy.

5. Bogdan’s Response Reconsidered.

The persuasively authoritative quality of her reading of Frye notwithstanding, I think that Bogdan’s analysis of stock, kinetic, and passive response fails to grasp the distinction made in Frye’s criticism between the operation of irony in contemporary society and its relationship to literary romance. That is, for Frye, literature is not only an ironic recuperation of romance, but also a romantic recuperation of contemporary irony. But this opens up the question: From what does irony need to be recuperated?

Bogdan is right when she argues that the experience of feminist readers has rendered them incapable of a purely passive response to the stock and kinetic associations of ideology. But, in Chapter Five of this thesis, I hope to show that Frye believes the same to be true for almost every member of contemporary society. I mean to say that, for Frye, even under postlapsarian conditions, humans have not so lost that capacity for imaginative creation that they are capable of nothing but a passive acceptance of the stock and kinetic stimuli of ideology. In other words, there is no such thing within Frye’s cosmology as a totally passive response.
If modern individuals reacted passively, it is because they have been subjected by consumer society and mass culture to an effective campaign of pacification — similar in aggression if not in tactics to that employed by the Romans against the Germanic tribes — which employs a ubiquitous and subliminal tumult of images to bludgeon the individual imagination into quiescence. This pacification of the imagination has rendered individuals inchoate and bereft of memory. But, for Frye, even the gestalt of mass culture is not sufficient to suppress individual resistance to ideology, or the bewilderment that is the natural response to its outrageous claims. Thus, mass culture and consumer society must have recourse to what Frye calls the "misuse of irony" (Frye, 1957, 350).

To reduce resistance to the hysteria that seeks a victim, mass culture and consumer society transform the insight of critical irony that "all is not as it seems" into panic at the prospect that there is nothing beyond the drudgery of consumer society. Bereft of any memory of experience outside conditions of mass culture, and made hysterical by the fear that there is no alternative to even the dubious benefits of a consumer society, what is left of the individual’s capacity for unbelief is diverted to the rejection of conventions that mass culture has designated out of date or old hat, a rejection that embraces what mass culture designates as new by default.

Thus do mass culture and consumer society neutralize the power of resistance, a power otherwise inherent in the capacity of individuals to respond ironically — in bewilderment — to ideological indoctrination. In spite of the continued capacity to see through the bromides of mass culture, every aspect of a person’s experience in contemporary society — even that of the body, subjectivity, and intimacy — is stereotyped, caricatured and diminished. The effect of mass culture and consumer society, then, is to align individual experience with a structure of prescriptive experience, one which gives them total freedom to be consumers, but nothing else.

For Frye, the only remedy to that misuse of irony by propaganda and advertising, which seeks to turn thought into a conditioned reflex, is the reestablishment of memory. This is Frye’s strategy for recuperating the capacity for resistance in irony. In a literary or centripetal operation of romance and comedy, irony is given a critical backdrop against which its resistance to ideological indoctrination can take substantive and conscious form. Thus, Frye says that, in literature, the imagination apprehends not only the past, but "our [own] buried life" (Frye, 1957, 346), with which it can construct its total cultural environment. Against the cultural environment of literature and the arts, contemporary social reality seems to be but a thin slice of experience. Only when individual experience is counter-aligned with an imaginative structure of experience that excludes no variety of
intimacy — of subjective or bodily response — can it be free of its reduction to caricature by ideology. Only, then, can the body come to literary form.

I must acknowledge, even if Frye will not, that if consumer society and mass culture asks every individual to identify against themselves, it does so doubly of women and minorities. That is, if the goods on offer by consumer society are supposed to be the consolation for an existence in which there is no alternative to those goods, then surely women and minorities have less to lose in rejecting those goods, geared as they are to the interests of white middle-class males. Surely, the dislocation of women by consumer society is so extreme that even the mass culture’s form of the new will come as a source of bewilderment, providing no solace for the disappointment produced by earlier commodity forms. Maybe, as Bogdan says, women are positioned by contemporary patriarchy to come to literary form as true primitives, after all; that is, as readers they come to literary experience pre-educated.

But, I would argue that if consumer society and mass culture require that women identify against themselves in ways it does not of men, the consumption of culture also make it much more dangerous for women not to do so. That is, the sense that there is nothing to existence beyond participation in mass culture and consumer society is heightened for women by a consumer society which regularly leaves women with nothing, whether or not they acquiesce to its demands. For instance, even women who acquiesce to the demand of consumer society that they act as the ground of their spouses’ adjustment to that society — giving moral and physical support to their spouses’ careers even if that means taking up a career themselves — regularly end up divorced and living in poverty. This sense that, as a woman, the individual is but one wrong step from the nothingness that lies beyond the consolation for experience offered by mass culture — a step they cannot even predict — can breed the kind of reactionary consciousness that exhibits itself in organizations such as “Real Women.”

In the context of this kind of coercion, many women regard the poetics of refusal as a denial of all that they had better hold dear if they know what is good for them. For it demands that they tear their bodily experience of life away from its alignment with a commercial construct when they have learned so well that such a tearing can be bad for their health. Against the context of life in consumer society, then, wide reading may be an important and relatively safe first two removes away from the bromides of consumer society to a more inclusive totality of experience within which women can acknowledge that they are identifying against themselves without the sense of dire consequence such an acknowledgement would entail in real life. And being what Bogdan has called, "a father’s
daughter" (Bogdan, 1992, 284-285, 292) – one attracted to the education of the imagination that results precisely from wide reading — may be not be so much a betrayal of sisterhood as the necessary prerequisite in contemporary society to engaging in the poetics of refusal when — as is widely recognized — society has made women an offer to identify against themselves which they could not otherwise refuse.

If feminists can bring their bodily experience — the result of their bewilderment at the hands of patriarchal society — to literary form, then they may well have learned to do so from literature. That is, their educated imaginations have freed their bodies to take advantage of the lessons that only women could learn at the hands of patriarchy. I hope to show in Chapter Seven that such an advantage will call for new readings — readings that Frye shows himself singularly unwilling to acknowledge as critical responses at the level of anagogy. Nonetheless, the validity of these "new" readings as forms of critical response is grounded in what Frye describes as the education of the imagination that takes place at the interpretative level of anagogy. That is, anagogy, regarded as the widest possible level of interpretation, grounds the feminist insight that, under conditions of patriarchy, the spatialization of literary experience, reading from a critical distance, and the suspension of judgement by readers can, at times, be a form of stock response.

In this thesis I want to argue, then, that Frye’s poetics apprehends literature as an ironic recuperation of romance, one which also recuperates the capacity for resistance in contemporary irony. If Frye’s nonfeminist critics do not see how his poetics has done justice to the ironic stance demanded of contemporary criticism, it is because they do not know that he engages romance in ironic recuperation. If his feminist critics charge him with simply demanding that women identify against themselves, it is because they do not see that the recuperation of romance is in turn a recuperation of contemporary irony.

But the case for Frye’s reversal of the neutralization of irony by contemporary experience has yet to be made, so that, at this point Bogdan’s feminist critique of Frye remains unanswered. Unanswered, Bogdan’s case against Frye forces me to revisit the questions raised by his nonfeminist critics. Does Bogdan’s critique entail that Frye’s criticism fails to respect the irony of life as "the other" in contemporary conditions, the connection of the text with contemporary mutleity, the temporality of oral influences on contemporary literature, the subversive connection between texts and the dark reality of ideology’s negativity, and the peculiar intersection of text and body at which the structures of patriarchy pale?
Is Frye’s theory up to facing the text as a moment that is primarily disintegrative of established convention? Or, by refusing to recognize the need to confront the text with the bodies of modernity’s dispossessed, is Frye not, after all, committing the centripetal fallacy, presetting the conditions of wide reading and the forms of experience it will discover in advance? If so, under the guise of aesthetic exploration, Frye may be conducting an ideological indoctrination of his own. That is, the hypothetic status of literature notwithstanding, the a priori and utopian nature that Frye ascribes to literary forms of myth forces them to set the terms for the emancipation of subaltern groups and perspectives in advance. In portraying literature as such a “top down” emancipatory discourse, Frye may well be guilty of what Jane Roland Martin (1994) cites as de re essentialism (636) — of employing symbols and images that define emancipatory experience in terms of what the perspective of patriarchy understands to be emancipatory. Whatever other terms or perspectives are added to the definition of these symbols, the centrality of the patriarchal perspective to what constitutes emancipatory experience is retained.

Section D.
Reading Frye through Adorno.

1. The Need to Read Frye’s Criticism in Tandem with the Aesthetic Theory of Theodor Adorno.

In order to show that the recuperation of irony from its neutralization by mass culture is an essential, even a defining, moment in Frye’s criticism, I need to cast new light on his commentary on social mythology, ideology, advertising, propaganda, and mass culture. Appearing in asides from forty years of published material, and as a central theme only in The Modern Century, Frye’s examination of the reification of experience — especially literary experience — by the contemporary mass media and its deployment by market ideology has the appearance of untheorized observation, an anxious nod to problems that are endemic to liberal society, that a criticism implicated in liberal idealism should but cannot address.

The closest Frye seems to come to a sustained commentary on this subject is his treatment of the antagonism between social and literary mythology. But the special nature of this antagonism under conditions of mass culture is something to which Frye rarely refers. If Frye had done so, the appeal of his criticism to literary myth as embodying the total form of experience and to a continuity of literary convention at odds with and resistant to historical aging would also be seen to entail an appeal to literature as being essentially disintegrative of convention — as corrosive of the ideological
"concretions" (Frye, 1990, 215) that impede engagement with the literary text as expression of experience inclusive of all humanity. Frye would be shown, in effect, to be primarily part of a critique of contemporary society from the perspective of literature and the arts, a critique that frees irony from the neutralization of its resistance by mass culture.

What is needed, then, is to show that Frye's observations about the antiarts of advertising, propaganda, and mass culture are indicative of his inclusion in a critical trend towards the recuperation of literature as an art, and with it literary experience, from their reification by contemporary society. This trend is most clearly recognizable in the aesthetic theory of critical theorist, Theodor Adorno. I propose to illustrate how Frye's criticism is entailed in this trend by showing that Frye's critical system is designed, like that of Adorno, to counteract the neutralization of literature as an art and the consciousness capable of apprehending it by contemporary ideology and mass culture.

As mentioned earlier in this first chapter, Northrop Frye seems an unlikely bedfellow for Theodor Adorno. After all, Frye was the liberal humanist and champion of a criticism which recognizes the structural continuity of literary conventions within an order of words that swallows up all social life (Bogdan 1990, 118). Adorno, by contrast, was a proponent of Western Marxism, head of the Frankfurt School for studies in social research, and propounder of a criticism which gives priority to the dialectical relationship between artistic development and the development of socio-economic structures (Jay, 1973, 1984).

But what strikes me, when reading Adorno, is his insistence that mass culture — in his parlance, the culture industry — while posing as the popularization, even the democratization of culture and the arts, actually neutralizes the capacity of the arts to express popular or democratic resistance to the domination of society by market ideology (Adorno & Horkheimer 1979, 120-168). And, I take it that, by insisting on the anti-artistic and anti-democratic nature of the culture industry, Adorno is advocating the notion of an incompatibility between the experience of art as such and its experience under the culture industry. Ostensibly, then, Adorno's statement about the diremption between art and its experience under the culture industry seems much like Frye's analysis of the difference between the active response to imaginative form demanded by literature as an art, and the passive response demanded by the bromides of contemporary social mythology, a response to which, as we have seen Frye say, literary form would "mean nothing, or infinitely less" (Frye, 1967a, 19). In other words, Frye seems to be concerned with the persistence of the appreciation of literature as a
form of art under social conditions that, in Adorno's parlance, condition a "regression" (Adorno, 1991b, 26-52) in the capacity of individuals to listen, to read, and to view.

Also, in his uncompleted and posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* (1984), Adorno shows that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, he does not think that the triumph of monopoly capitalism and the culture industry mark the death of art (356). Quite the opposite: Adorno's study of criticism is concerned with the persistence of the artwork and of its apprehension into contemporary conditions of society. But, Adorno understands the persistence of artistic production into contemporary conditions to be predicated on meaning in the contemporary artwork being primarily an expression of artwork's own "figuration" (Adorno, 1984, 216, 327), not that of some discursive, "significative" (167) content. And, as Sherry Weber Nicholsen (1993) observes, for Adorno, the continued possibility of art's apprehension depends on the understanding by viewers that the expression of artistic form is at odds with easily communicated content and discourse — in Adorno's parlance, with whatever is prevailing in culture (91). Nicholsen understands Adorno to be arguing that the reader's apprehension of the contemporary artwork requires intense engagement with its richness of detail (93), one in which the formal associations between those details realign associations from the reader's lived experience of reality into an imaginative unity — into a "glimpse of utopia, a glimpse of what the nonidentical, the nonrepeatable would be" (93). That is, the reader's engagement with the work causes irrelevant associations with the "repetition" (93) of experience as represented by contemporary ideology to fall away, revealing an imaginative and utopic vision of history and society at odds with the status quo. This same requirement for an intensity of engagement is echoed by Frye in *Fearful Symmetry* (1947), where he reaffirms Blake's understanding that literary expressions of totality are diametrically opposed to conventional generalizations, that literary engagement is with "the poem's quality of whatness, the unified pattern of its words and images" (426). Writes Frye,

> if the [poet] does indicate a central symbol, a scarlet letter, a white whale or a golden bowl, he [sic] forces [the reader] to consider his [sic] story as an imaginative unity. And at a certain pitch of concentration peripheral and random images begin to disappear. (Frye, 1947, 426 [emphasis mine])

Thus, writes Frye, commenting on the work of Boehme but with reference to all literature, "books are like a picnic to which the author brings the words and the reader the meaning" (Frye, 1947, 426).

Adorno's observations about the persistence of aesthetic production and experience find resonance in Frye's *Anatomy* as well. There, Frye would concur with Adorno that literature in this, the ironic age (Frye, 1957, 47), does indeed express a distrust of easily communicable conventions (103). Frye argues that, since contemporary literature worthy of the name goes out of its way to draw
attention to itself as textual expression, not to be confused with the discursive rhetoric of direct address, contemporary criticism must require that the reader approach even the most chaotic literary work as having a formal whole in it, seeing through the lack of a coherent discursive meaning to the underlying formal relations that give the work its structure (Frye, 1957, 77).

Of course, we could already object that I am making too much of apparent affinities between Adorno and Frye, that Frye’s is not simply an argument for the persistence of artistic production and its apprehension in contemporary society, but also a concern for the persistence of past literature within contemporary culture and for its continued appreciation by readers. I maintain, however, that the same is true for Adorno. In Aesthetic Theory, Adorno argues that artworks from the past can be apprehended as purely formal structures. However, he says that, because past art does not eschew easily communicable conventions in the same manner as contemporary artworks, it must be understood differently. That is, the respondent must apprehend the formal workings of easily communicable conventions in past art as ”pointing at” — participating in — a figurative totality in the artwork, one at odds with its discursive content (Adorno, 1984, 365-6). Likewise, from his comments on archetype, in Essay II of the Anatomy, we see Frye arguing that all literature, including that from the past, can be appreciated by contemporary criticism, only if its conventions are apprehended as participating in a unity of form ”at a distance” from its associations to extraliterary discourse on morality, beauty, and truth (Frye, 1957, 115). For Frye, like Adorno, the apprehension of a formal unity in past literary works does not, as in contemporary literature, so much involve the rejection and falling away of associations with what is easily communicable, as it involves a discernment of how ostensively discursive — centrifugal — elements function within the form of any work past or present (113). Yet, Frye and Adorno seem to agree that the appreciation of both past and contemporary works requires that they be apprehended not as expressions of discursive meaning, but as formal totalities whose meanings are the expression of their own coherent and autonomous structures.

That Frye, commenting on literature as an art, and Adorno, commenting on the arts in general, would argue that contemporary criticism must apprehend the work as a formal unity or structure at odds with what is easily communicable in contemporary discourse is made all the more interesting by their shared notion that, as formal unity, the work acts as a ”monad” (Frye, 1957, 121 & Adorno, 1984, 64) containing — in Frye’s parlance — the ”total form” (115) of — what for Adorno is — ”history and society” (64, 126). For, as I will try the show, both thinkers’ notion of the artwork as monad entails art and literature in what for Adorno would be the recuperation of the ironic as
"imminent analysis" (258) from the culture industry, and in what for Frye would be resistance to the passive response demanded by the "antiarts" (Frye, 1967a, 69) in contemporary society.

Adorno’s understanding of the work as monad allows him to argue that the artwork can be simultaneously an expression of extreme "particularization" (Adorno, 1984, 259), immune to reproduction and reification as a formula of the culture industry, and of "universalization" (259) capable of expressing an experience or vision of history and society that transcends the confines of contemporary ideology (337). For Adorno, works, as monads, speak because they employ elements of familiar convention (296). Yet, Adorno also sees that, as monads, works are nonreproducible; for they employ familiar conventions only in the form of atomized "reminiscences" (295), shattering their association with external meaning and forcing them to act as "linguistic" (263) — to act as though their primary function were that of "linking elements" of figuration together according to a purely "associational logic" (353). That is, within the monad, elements of familiar convention resonate with and so draw the viewer’s attention to the work’s containment of every convention and technique in the history of society (64), a containment recorded in influences registered on the work’s form.

Like Frye’s conception of the literary work at the level of anagogy, Adorno’s conception of the artwork as monad is at the centre of a totality (Adorno, 1984, 257) of formal influences giving expression to a totality of history and society. That Frye and Adorno see the artwork as monad does not mean that they regard it as being indifferent to the experience of history and society, only as being at odds with the contemporary formulation of history and of social experience by monopoly capitalism and the culture industry. Hence, Adorno avers that "the reason there is still progress in art is that there has been no progress in the real world" (Adorno, 1984, 297). Treating the contemporary formulation of truth as something made up of conventional elements, to be organized within a totality of form, the artwork as monad becomes what Adorno calls a "tacit critique" of contemporary society (321). The work, then, exposes contemporary society’s illusion of truth by showing that any authenticity it has derives from its being part of a much larger truth contained in the formal expression of the artwork’s "nonidentity" with society (6).

Likewise, Frye’s criticism sees the language of ordinary experience as deriving its meaning from an ideological appropriation of the expression of the mythic or total form of experience recorded in the literary work as monad (Frye, 1990j, 23; 1990i, 91). For Frye, then, the literary work as monad "swallows" ordinary experience by showing that experience to be a partial form of the experience contained in literature (Frye, 1963, 33). And Frye holds that the literary work as art is capable of swallowing ordinary experience because, as monad, the literary work employs words
primarily for what we have seen Adorno call their "linguistic" tendency to "hang together" in Frye's parlance. It is the language-like nature of the arts which renders literature and the arts into what Frye's terms an essentially ironic deployment of language. That is, by literary irony, Frye is referring to the tendency of literature and the arts to employ linguistic and imagistic expressions of truth or falsehood — of knowledge or belief — as though their only association is with other forms of imagery and language (Frye, 1957, 120).

For Adorno, the language-like nature of what Frye thinks of as literary irony makes the appreciation of the arts the last venue from which to apprehend the capacity for resistance in contemporary irony. Elsewhere, irony's capacity for resistance has been neutralized by the culture industry. In society under the culture industry, mass audiences are capable of an ironic scrutiny that sees through the formulas of mass culture as expressions of empirical reality. And yet, as Adorno says, people continue to buy (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 167). This is because the culture industry has preprogrammed the mass audience "to listen according to formula" demanding "in advance" the shape that mass culture will give to empirical reality (Adorno, 1991b, 40). Even if they are conscious that the promises of material satisfaction that come with the artifacts of the culture industry are false, the unconscious minds of mass audiences are conditioned to demand new artifacts that conform to the same formulas (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, 128).

Only a literary irony apprehends the real falsity of the formulas of mass culture, that is, their rendering of empirical reality into "a self-duplicating ideology which is the epitome of domination" (Adorno, 1984, 362). The irony of the artwork shows the formulas of mass culture and their reproduction of contemporary empirical reality as ideology to be but part of a much larger expression of social and historical truth as possibility, one that imitates the language-like associations of literature and the arts. Thus, Frye's literary irony, a notion most fully realized by the critical apprehension of the work as monad at the level of anagogy, seems to concur with Adorno's apparent concession that the power of irony to resist the culture industry can only be realized in the artwork and its apprehension as a monad.

I think, then, that Frye's and Adorno's shared notion of the artwork as a formal totality at odds with the easy communicability of discursive content is made more interesting by entailing the artwork's operation as a monad, especially because of what that entailment tells us about Frye. First, Frye's notion of the artwork implicates his criticism in a critical trend that understands literary and artistic expression to be fundamentally language-like. Second, this trend sees the formal totality of the literary work as an ironic expression of history and society capable of disintegrating the epistemic
concretions of mass culture and the thrall under which these concretions hold modern audiences and irony alike.

Finally, I recognize in both Adorno and Frye a common understanding that the apprehension of the artwork as "exposing the untruth" (Adorno, 1984, 346) in conventions of ideology and corroding the hold those conventions have over contemporary consciousness (Frye, 1957, 127-8) entails an education in the difference between literary experience and the experience of ordinary reality (Adorno, 1984, 344), what Frye in general refers to as the object of the educated imagination. Without such an education, viewers will remain, in Adorno's parlance, "alienated" (Adorno, 1976, 113) from the artworks, confusing it with the interpretive formula imposed upon them by mass culture. What is needed, according to Adorno, is an education in the operation of aesthetic form, one that distances viewers from what in Aesthetic Theory he calls the "preaesthetic twilight" (Adorno, 1984, 344), in which that form is confused with the depiction of ordinary reality, and that calls into question the reality of ordinary experience, exposing it as an ideological construct. I take that Adorno sees such an education as the prerequisite, under conditions of the culture industry, for the type of intense engagement under which irrelevant assumptions would fall away leaving only the structure. Without such an education, the individual respondent approaches the work as part of a mass audience capable only of seeing the culture industry reflected in whatever they engage.

Of course, just as Frye's treatment of literary education is a central and well known theme of his critical writing, Adorno's views on aesthetic education will have familiar resonance with anyone who has read Frye. It is a commonplace that Frye's is a call on the reader to distinguish between literature and life, to postpone response, to refrain from value judgements, and to follow convention through its operation in the form of the literary work, with the intent of remedying the stock and kinetic responses to literature. For, Frye contends that, without such reading strategies, literature will remain an "alien structure" that can be made intelligible only by attaching it to more familiar — more relevant — structures of meaning of interpretation. In turn, Frye holds that this educational remedy casts the reality represented by familiar interpretive structures in a new light — as "fossilized former human creation[s]" which contemporary society has come to confuse with necessary conditions of existence (Frye, 1990, 85).

I have argued that the criticism of both Adorno and Frye addresses the conflict in contemporary conditions between the active response to experience demanded of individuals by literature and the arts and the passive one to which mass audiences are conditioned by ideology. I have tried to show that the criticism of Frye and Adorno respectively responds to contemporary
circumstances by demanding that the artwork be taken as a formal totality at odds with and
disintegrative of discursive conventions in aesthetic production and interpretation. As such, both Frye
and Adorno see the artwork operating as a monad, containing in its form an ironic or language-like
totality of experience capable of giving expression to contemporary irony's capacity for resistance in
the face of the culture industry's neutralization of that capacity. Finally, Adorno and Frye concur
that the apprehension of the artwork's operation as monad requires an education into the difference
between the experience of artistic form and that of ordinary experience under the culture industry. I
contend, therefore, that the comparison of Frye with Adorno shows Frye's criticism to be part of a
trend in which criticism seeks to remedy the reification of experience by the culture industry through
an appeal to a formal totality in the artwork. It is in terms of this appeal to aesthetic form that the
call by contemporary criticism, even Adorno's, to apprehend the artwork as a primarily disintegrative
moment should be understood as one that is consonant with Frye's criticism.

2. But are not the Differences between Adorno and Frye Insurmountable?

If earlier we might have objected that I was making too much of the affinities between Frye
and Adorno, we might now want to call a halt to this comparison on the ground that I have become
so enamoured with the apparent resonance between Frye and Adorno that I have become deafened to
the differences between them. For instance, Adorno might acknowledge that the disintegration of
convention by the artwork entails its appeal as monad to a formal totality. Adorno might grant that,
as a monad, the artwork employs conventional elements in the expression of the whole of history and
society. But it does not seem to follow that Adorno thinks, as does Frye, that literary form is
expressed in the identity between conventions and in the continuity of conventions as literary myths
throughout literature. Neither does it appear that Adorno would concur with Frye that literary form
can be apprehended by following unquestioningly the operation of literary convention, even through
the artworks of the contemporary avant-garde.

In addition, while we might agree that Frye is like Adorno in seeing artistic production and its
apprehension as persisting into and as capable of resisting the reification of experience by monopoly
capitalism and the culture industry, we might also ask where Frye evidences any of Adorno's concern
with the commodification of experience in contemporary society, and with art as engaged in a
dialectical relationship with commodity form that is unique to art under conditions of modernity.
According to Adorno's understanding of the artwork, the distance between artwork and ordinary life
was determined, in the modern West, by its historic relationship to commodity form so that, as the
relationship of art to commodity form changes with the passage of history, so does the distance of art from life (Adorno, 1984, 336-9). But, we saw earlier that, inasmuch as Frye's criticism seems to be concerned with the historic differences between literary works, he measures this difference in terms of their displacement of the mythic constants at the centre of literary form. That is, given that Frye understands every literary work to be an expression of literary myth, he measures the historic difference between literary works of various eras by the extent to which their expression of literary myth conforms to contemporary standards of plausibility. It is true that he does not at all seem to be concerned with the relationship between literary works and commodity form.

As well, although Adorno's criticism might recognize that the totality in the artwork is expressed in its containment of the language-like relations between conventions and techniques of the whole of artistic production, this is not to say that Adorno conceives of the artwork as part of what Frye would call a centripetal structure (1957, 73). In Frye's conception of literature, words hang together in verbal structures, just as images do in Adorno's language-like expression of art. But Frye holds that the totality into which literature coalesces as a centripetal structure is an imaginative one -- a structure of possible experience orbiting around certain universal constants (118) -- and not an expression of the reality contained in actual historic and social conditions. Such an appeal to an imaginative and mythic totality would seem to implicate Frye's criticism in the apprehension of literature as what we have seen Marxists such as Jameson, Eagleton and Fekete call a type of superstructure. In that case, the literary expression Frye's criticism apprehends is contingent upon the developments in actual social production which give society and experience their shape, with no power to effect or resist change in society. Adorno, on the other hand, seems determined, in Aesthetic Theory, to understand the workings of art as an integral, what in Adorno's parlance would be a "real" part of social production (Adorno, 1984, 7) -- of the material reality out of which history and society are produced -- and to see the workings of art operating ironically even in contemporary ideology. Thus, as Jameson suggests, Adorno's criticism may be using its formulation of the appreciation of artistic form as an example of how to discern "the effectively ideological as at the same time necessarily utopian" -- a reading, Jameson argues, that should extend beyond the arts to the culture industry itself (Jameson, 1981, 286).

Finally, we have seen, in Aesthetic Theory, that Adorno clearly believes in the need for an education in the difference between the experience of aesthetic form and that of ordinary experience. And, in various writings on technique, Adorno has, like Frye, seen this education as entailing a spatial understanding of the artwork. Thus, in his essay "Music and Technique" (1977), Adorno
argues that the basis of contemporary orchestral performance is formed by the score (87), as a spatial and therefore simultaneous representation of the music (86). Unlike Frye, however, Adorno does not seem to believe that the necessity of understanding the artwork spatially not only comes prior to the apprehension of the form of the artwork in time, but also has priority over the temporal. In the same article, "Music and Technique," Adorno is equally clear that, if the essence of the work is in the score apprehended as a simultaneous whole, the full understanding of the work is not.

As Adorno observes in Aesthetic Theory (1984), the conductor’s understanding of the work can be enhanced by breaking the work down into a study made up of minute fragments (305). And, he argues, in his article on technique mentioned above that the engagement with the work as a live performance is just as essential to its understanding as the grasp of the score (Adorno, 1977, 90). That is, as Adorno argues in "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" (1991b), the form of the orchestral work cannot be said to have been appreciated if the live performance fails (as it does under the culture industry) to create the work anew, and if in listening to the live performance the listener fails to recreate the form of the work as a unique listening experience (39). For, each performance produces new mistakes, all of which have the potential to be the innovations that will yield up hitherto unappreciated aspects of aspects of the work’s form.

Adorno may argue for the spatialization of aesthetic experience, but that is only as a prelude to a temporal experience capable of appreciating the work’s real meaning. Thus, Adorno theorizes for an educated experience of music on the basis of mistakes and imperfections. Would Frye do the same?

Extending Deanne Bogdan’s theory about the priority Frye’s criticism gives to the spatiality of literary experience (which we have seen articulated in her dissertation Instruction and Delight, and which she rearticulates in Chapter Five of Re-Educating the Imagination, 1992, 102-109) I would argue that Frye may acknowledge the role of temporal experience in the apprehension of literary form, but he theorizes a view of spatiality at odds with temporality. Frye seems to want to postpone indefinitely the critical experience of the work in time, and, with it, the intensity of engagement he cites in Fearful Symmetry as being at the heart of literary experience. As such, Frye does not trust "the gambling machine of an ideal experience" (Bogdan, 1989, 34; Frye, 1971, 32) appealing instead to a visual "scholarship" (30) which apprehends literature as a spatial structure. And while Frye understands that literary experience in time may make the same connections with literary form, he argues that it does so below the level of consciousness (Frye, 1957, 85-6).

Adorno, then, seems to be at odds with Frye in seeing the appreciation of form as resulting from the apprehension of conventional discontinuity within the artwork, a discontinuity that the
respondent can meet only in their temporal engagement with the work. With such differences between them, could ever the critical twines of these two theorists be said to meet in a significant manner?

3. The Comparison between Adorno and Frye Revisited.

Adorno is concerned primarily with the relationship of artworks to commodity form. But I contend that the same relationship is entailed in Frye's concern with literary works as the historic displacement of myth. In Chapter Two, I will argue that Frye’s historic modulations in literary displacement of myth map most neatly onto the history of western culture. For, as I will try to show, the historic modes record the same parabolic trajectory — the same historic development towards a narrowing and then towards a broadening of the distance between literature and life — that, Adorno avers, is effected by the historic relationship between art and commodity form from early modern times to the present. Also, I will also try to show that, in effect, Frye’s levels of symbolic interpretation act to strip away the interpretive obstacles to the reader's apprehension of literary form imposed by a society reproduced in the image of commodity form.

Adorno argues that, as a form capable of resisting the commodification of society artistic production must be "real" (1984, 7), social production in which the artwork is related to and capable of changing society as a whole. But, at the conclusion of Chapter Two, I will argue that Frye’s anagogic view of every literary work as part of and containing the potential totality of human community is the view of their relationship to Adorno’s "real" society. And, Frye’s acknowledgement of the imaginative power in literary works to change society — a power they can pass on to the reader — entails their containment and relation to real society.

Adorno’s understanding of the specificity — the uniqueness — of each artwork entails their expression of a conventional discontinuity. But, I will argue that the discontinuity to which Adorno refers is also entailed in Frye’s critical attachment to conventional continuity in literature as an expression of literary myth. For, as I will try to show, in Chapter Three, both thinkers evidence an awareness that both the expression of conventional discontinuity and of conventional continuity have been incorporated as polar opposites into modern ideology. Therefore, both Frye and Adorno aver that, if either the expression of conventional discontinuity or of conventional continuity are to be apprehended as something other than expressions of ideology, then the expression of conventional discontinuity in literary form must entail its participation in a continuity of convention, and the
participation of works in conventional continuity must entail the expression of conventional discontinuity as well.

Finally, Adorno embraces temporal engagement with the form of the artwork as something to which spatialized understanding of form is only prerequisite. But, in Chapter Four, I will attempt to demonstrate that the seeming hesitance on Frye's part to advocate a move from the study of literary form as spatial structure to temporal engagement as a type of critical apprehension of literary form is really his insistence that the work be engaged in what I would call virtual time. For Frye, experience of the text in virtual time is made up of an indefinite number of encounters between text and reader at different points and on different occasions. Such an experience results in a deep acquaintance with the work, an acquaintance that, as I will try to show in Chapter Five, is capable of appreciating the work's difference from the culture industry's mindless diversions and what Adorno would describe as their reification of time into an extension of work (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, 120-160). That is, experienced in virtual time, the literary work exposes as illusion the presentation by monopoly capitalism and the culture industry of real time as a seemingly endless cycle of alternating drudgery and idleness. The consonance between Frye's and Adorno's conceptions of how the work of art should be experienced in time will be evidenced, in Chapter Four, around their agreement on how literature and the arts should be expressed and read in contemporary conditions of society. In Chapter Five, their agreement on how the work should be experienced will be evidenced in their analysis of how contemporary experience of the arts can recuperate irony from its neutralization by the experience of mass culture.

In indicating a consonance between Frye's and Adorno's understanding the specificity of artworks and of their experience in time by contemporary readers, Chapter Three serves also to show that Frye's criticism entails embodied readings detailed in Chapter Four, readings from the subaltern perspectives of racial minorities and women. That is, Frye's criticism is shown to recognize how the critical demand that contemporary reading and writing of literary works should emphasize their specificity is one generated by the need to express perspectives contained in details of literary production, perspectives suppressed and obscured by readings that associate literature with mainstream conventions. For Frye, the details of literary works give expression to an hypothetical unity of perspectives capable of being expressed only in the details — all of the details — of every literary work.

In Chapter Six, I argue that the comparison of Adorno's and Frye's views on mass culture — discussed in Chapter Five — entails a view of Frye's criticism which confounds the charge by his
critics that his theory is an escape from ironic critique into idealism. According to my argument the comparison of Adorno and Frye shows that Frye’s appeal to literary totalities and conventions are more than a rejection of the primacy of the ironic perspective in criticism, that his appeal to totality is, in fact, a recognition of how the ironic recuperation of convention in literature resists the implication of unconditioned irony in mass culture. That is, mass culture employs irony as the means by which mass audiences are conditioned to reject and forget its tired conventions, which mass culture can then recycle in slightly more dehumanized forms as the shock of the new. Literary irony, on the other hand, recuperates conventions by presenting them to the reading consciousness as elements of a potential expression of experience at odds with its formulation under conditions of ideology. Thus, I will argue, Frye’s recognition of the literary employ of irony allows criticism to act as a poetics of resistance, discharging those responsibilities occasioned by criticism’s confrontation with contemporary society by discovering the progressive perspectives and trends that are suppressed and obscured by contemporary ideology and mass culture. According to the poetics of Frye, as with the aesthetic theory of Adorno, such trends and perspectives are expressed only in literature and the arts.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, I will explore the ramifications of Frye’s recognition that literature is an expression of the potential identity between readings and texts within which every reading is crucial such that no reading can actually replace it or speak for it. That is, I will argue that Frye’s criticism entails that resistance to ideology requires that readers not be made to repeatedly undergo or endure certain readings on the spurious ground that these readings are more authoritative or profound than others, even if this means that readers be allowed to refuse the reading of certain texts. That Frye fails to extend his recognition of the poetics of refusal to the right of women to refuse patriarchal readings is, I will argue, less a sign that his critical system does not entail such an extension than it is of Frye’s reluctance to confront his own implication in the readings of patriarchy. I conclude that this reluctance on Frye’s part to acknowledge his own role as guilty party in the conflation of patriarchal and literary reading constitutes a betrayal of readings entailed by his own theory. That is, it is Frye, not his critical system that acts as an obstacle to the realization of emancipatory readings. In the end, Frye may be simply the white liberal academic he said he was. His criticism remains more than an expression of liberal idealism.

Having provided an overview of the enterprise conceived for this dissertation, I will now return to more immediate concerns. That is, if I am to show how Adorno’s concern with the relationship of artworks to the commodification of society is mirrored in Frye’s concern with literature as an historic displacement of myth, then, in the coming chapter, we must examine their
respective understanding, of the artwork, of myth, convention (both organic and inorganic) and of cultural aging to see if Frye and Adorno are using these terms in the same way and if they mean the same things by them. This examination of terms entails the need to answer the following questions.

Is Frye’s understanding of the literary expression of myth like Adorno’s notion of art as the aesthetic redemption of myth as secularized prayer? Could Frye’s notion of literary convention as a displacement of myth be compatible with Adorno’s understanding of the deployment of convention by the artwork? Could Frye’s notion that literary works, as displacements of literary myth, only seem to be implicated in and are actually preserved from the cultural aging of society be consonant with Adorno’s notion that artworks resist the cultural aging that results from the rendering of their conventions into inorganic formulas by ideology? Do Frye’s symbolic levels of interpretation cited in the "Second Essay" of his Anatomy serve to undo what Adorno terms the alienation of readers from artworks by cultural aging which renders the conventions by which they would recognize the works into inorganic expressions of ideology?

Also, I will analyze what it means for Adorno to avow that, as a form of resistance to cultural aging, the artwork, indeed all artistic production, is “real,” and expresses the reality of society to answer the following question. Is what Adorno says about the relation of art to real production and society compatible with Frye’s description of literature as a “total form” of experience corresponding to “an order of words” -- one related not to any actual society but to an imaginative vision of society that calls into question the reality of actual social conditions? On the answer to this question hinges the resolution to an issue that will follow us throughout Chapter Two, and into Chapter Three, that of whether or not the notion of the language-like nature of artistic expression, a notion central to Adorno’s understanding of the artwork, is like that of the notion, central to Frye’s criticism, that literature expresses itself as a centripetal structure. If Adorno cannot be shown to endorse the notion that art is primarily an expression of imaginative experience, his criticism must be seen to be incompatible with that of Northrop Frye.
CHAPTER TWO:
FRYE ON LITERATURE, ADORNO ON ART:
DOES THE COMPARISON WITH ADORNO REVEAL ANY RESPECT FOR
CONVENTIONAL AND HISTORICAL DISCONTINUITY
IN FRYE'S NOTION OF THE LITERARY WORK?

A. Introduction.

Chapter One was a response to the charge by Frye's critics that his criticism is a flight from irony and the responsibilities of contemporary criticism. In it, I suggested that Frye's understanding of literary form is like Adorno's understanding of the form of the artwork. That is, both entail a recuperation of irony from its neutralization to a passive affirmation of social mythology and ideology under conditions of mass culture. I based my suggestion on the premise that in treating the literary work as part of an ironic recuperation of romance, Frye views the literary work as Adorno does the work of art: as a monad containing a totality of history and society ironically, in its language-like associations with the whole of artistic production. I also showed that, for feminist theory, such a view of the artwork amounts to criticism's subordination of engagement with the work in time to the spatialization of aesthetic experience as a form of understanding. But I countered that Frye is like Adorno, arguing that the apprehension of the artwork as monad requires an education in conventions and the difference between their operation in aesthetic and ordinary experience as a necessary prerequisite for the intense experience of its form in time.

All Frye's critics, however, might well be justified in objecting that any attempt to defend Frye against their charges by likening his criticism to that of Adorno is spurious. They could argue that Adorno's view of aesthetic experience and of the relation of the artwork to society is more like their own than Frye's. After all, is it not Adorno who says that criticism should view art not as it always was but as what it has become (Adorno, 1984, 482)? And is this not a view of art that apprehends the artwork as a moment that is inherently disintegrative of convention? Is not Adorno's concern with the autonomy of form in the artwork primarily a reflection of its ironic distance, and thus its resistance to the commodification of modern experience? In the same vein, is not his conception of the artwork as monad an acknowledgement of its identity with real production and its secularization of myth as the expression of progressive forces hidden in the workings of actual society and history?
If the answer to these questions is in the affirmative, then Adorno's theory is, indeed, less similar to Frye's than it is to those of Frye's critics. For then it would give priority to irony in search of a relationship between the work and reality unmediated by the conventions of modern society and ideology. Even Adorno's agreement with Frye — that the artwork speaks through its figuration — leads to his disagreement with Frye concerning the status of literature, which Frye wants to treat as an art, but about which Adorno is much more ambiguous. Writes Adorno, "Poetry is and is not art. It is not because it has a relatively autonomous discursive element" (1984, 184, 261).

It may be, however, that Frye's criticism is less concerned with denying the existence of poetry's discursive — its ideological — element than it is with apprehending the artistic expression that figures forth (Frye, 1966, 135-45) through the ideological and discursive content — what Frye calls the "overthought" (1971, 69) — of the literary work. To this end, Frye's appeal to the relation between literature and an imaginative totality may entail a relationship between literature and a real history of society at odds with and resistant to that expressed by contemporary ideology. That is, Frye's respect for literary convention as an expression of myth might entail a moment that is inherently disintegrative of convention in ideology's employ, a moment extending to the influence that ideology clearly has on the literary work and to the influence that the contemporary commodification of experience exercises over the operation of convention.

In this chapter, I argue that Frye's critical concern with conventional continuity has the paradoxical effect of entailing a disintegrative moment in literature, an effect made plain by comparing Frye's criticism with the aesthetic theory of Adorno. For, I contend that Adorno finds the reality to which art is related to be more like the imaginative reality associated with Frye's "order of words" than Frye's critics might suppose. But such an argument demands a comparison of Frye's and Adorno's notions of myth, convention, the artwork, and of their relation to history and society to show how, far from being contradictory, Adorno's views are entailed in Frye's. I want to show that Frye and Adorno have the same notion of the artwork as resistant to what Frye refers to as its "cultural aging" (1991, 57), a resistance which involves art in a dialectical relationship with ideology and commodification. And I will contend that Frye and Adorno see artworks and works of literature effecting the same two mechanisms to effect this resistance, which Adorno calls "estrangement" (1984, 322) and "the preservation of the transient" (323) and Frye calls "displacement" and "condensation" (1990, 149).

By comparing Frye's and Adorno's notions of myth and convention as they operate in artworks as monads, I hope to show, then, that Frye's reputed optimism and Adorno's famous
pessimism entail each other. That is, just as Adorno's criticism knows that the disintegrative moment in the artwork is unintelligible without reference to the work's participation in artistic form (Adorno, 1984, 363), Frye's criticism operates on the understanding that literary conventions can be apprehended only in terms of the difference between literary works.


As we have seen, it is Adorno who warns criticism that art is what it has become, not what it has always been, that criticism should apprehend the artwork as inherently "disintegrative" of convention (1984, 366). For Adorno is concerned primarily with the capacity of artworks to resist the false generalizations and categories of contemporary ideology and their implication of cultural artifacts in the commodification of modern experience. But Adorno also realizes that artworks cannot resist ideology and commodification by simply rejecting form and the conventionality that form entails. That antagonistic strategy operates on the assumption that artworks are somehow divorced from society and responsibility for its troubles, that they are capable of judging its expressions of false consciousness from a perspective of social innocence. For Adorno, no such position exists, as he indicates when he argues against the student activists of the sixties.

The days of art, these people charge, are over, and what is left to do is to actualize the truth content of art (which they rashly equate with social content) ... If there is one persuasive reason for condemning art, then it is the torpid notion that something pure can be culled from artistic material. It cannot. (Adorno, 1984, 356).

Thus, Adorno argues that "those present day tendencies [in art and criticism] that proclaim their 'informality' are aesthetically irrelevant unless they articulate themselves in some artistic form. Otherwise they are just documents" (363).

What Adorno seeks in the contemporary artwork is not an escape from the conventions of ideology. All conventions bear the marks of ideology's influence and artworks must employ conventions if they are to speak to human consciousness at all (Adorno, 1984, 291). Rather, he seeks in the artwork a preservation of convention that reflects "its culpability, its collusion with social privilege" (341) and, at the same time, its atonement. That is, Adorno sees the artwork as enacting an ironic preservation of convention, distancing convention from its ideological influences without denying the origin of convention in ideology. Adorno affirms that such a distance is possible when he writes that "if ideology is socially false consciousness, it does not follow that all phenomena of consciousness are therefore ideological" (357).
Arguing against criticism that simply rejects the role of form and convention in art, Adorno states that "a rabid critique of culture is not the same as a radical critique. ... Life — mere life as well as the prospect of the good life — has been perpetuated by culture. And authentic art is the echo of this" (Adorno, 1984, 357). The life to which Adorno refers is one capable of sustaining authentic human relations so that people are not reduced to mere things. Adorno finds the expression of hope for a good life, and resistance to life's reification into thinghood preserved in artworks from the earliest of times, a record, he argues, which constitutes their essence.

When Adorno says, then, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1979), that "the artwork lays claim to the dignity of the absolute" (19), he is arguing for the capacity of art to preserve a utopian vision of culture at odds with the reification of society by ideology. Adorno's criticism seeks not the demythologizing of artworks — which would deny their eternal essence — but the apprehension of their "redemption of myth" (Adorno, 1984, 173) as that restless expression of "spirit" which he defines as the unique configuration of the conventional and material moments in each artwork (218). For it is in its preservation of myth as spirit that art is capable of resisting the "social totality [of contemporary ideology] in all its omnipotence" (333): art seeks not the rejection of convention but its recreation of myth's dignity within the artwork in terms of "spirit in its most progressive shape" (333).

Section B.

**Adorno on the Role of Myth, Convention, Modernity and Aesthetic Education in the Appreciation of the Artwork: Encountering the Recuperative Moment in the Artwork's Dissolution of Convention.**

1. Introduction.

In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno seems to be in emphatic opposition to Frye's position the role of convention in art when he asserts that "the recourse [of art and aesthetics] to the universality of pregiven genres has long since become inoperative" (Adorno, 1984, 289). But, from what we just saw in the above section, we should be less than surprised when Adorno also intimates that criticism cannot give up entirely on the role of genre and other universals. Writes Adorno, "Conversely, the opposite present-day strategy of radical particularization comes dangerously close to being utterly contingent and indifferent" (289). Apparently there is still room in Adorno's aesthetics for universals such as genre, convention and myth. First and foremost, Adorno sees any artwork worthy of the name as a form of resistance to ideology — hence his wry observation that "the very notion of a
conservative work of art is somehow absurd" (253). If, as Adorno’s second statement suggests, the relationship of his criticism to that of Frye is not one of complete opposition; an examination of the views of Adorno and Frye on the role — be it even an ironic one — that myth, genre, and convention might play in the artwork’s resistance to ideology is necessary to illuminate the exact nature of the relationship between these two thinkers.


a) Myth as Ideology.

Myth, for Adorno, carries, among other things, the illusion of being the immutable and anthropomorph in image of creation. It is a pretence tied up with myth’s implication in ideologies both premodern and modern. In premodern conditions, the pretence of myth masks the self-interested calculation — the rationality — of the priestly caste and the nobility they serve (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 43-81). Under modern conditions, the pretence of myth to have died — done in by the Enlightenment’s rationalization of society — masks the survival of myth in the rigid "myth like" control — the irrationality — which the universals of the modern sciences exercise over human experience, rendering it increasingly homogenized and administered (Frye, 1984, 291). Myth, then, for Adorno, always seems to carry an element of modern reason dedicated to survival — be it of the priestly caste, the ancient nobility, or modern administration — and, thus, primarily to be implicated in ideology as an expression of class interest.

b) The Primary Function of Myth.

But Adorno conceives of an even more primary function of myth as the image of lost bliss that all artworks always seek to recover — as the utopic condition transcending social divisions that the artwork cannot dream into existence but of which it can always dream (Adorno, 1984, 339). In its primary function, myth is manifested as the persistence of ends-ordered reason (reason in the service of the realization of human happiness) and expresses the human desire to recreate humanity’s first terrifying encounter with nature (what Adorno calls "shudder" [1984, 118, 119, 366]) and hope — maybe prayer — which its terror evokes for the achievement of a humane environment. The original recreation of shudder by myth is that of the animus, which integrates human understanding and the alien forces of nature so that both are reconfigured as metaphorical associations or disparate aspects of the same human experience (118).
Adorno's critique of myth, then, is concerned with its employ as ideology, that is, its transformation into the social rituals or conventions that govern what it is permissible to believe, not with myth as the recreation of shudder as the hope for a better life. As ideology, the original authority of humanity's mythic encounter with nature is simply reproduced in ritual or conventional understandings of nature designed to rationalize the behaviour of ascendent social classes. In its more primary form, myth can never be a reproduction of ritual forms of human understanding. For, the mythic recreation of shudder is always that of an encounter with powers that have yet to be integrated into human understanding, an encounter which stretches -- even shatters -- the rituals within which that understanding was previously encased.

c) The Artwork and Convention.

Art preserves this mythic recreation of shudder with a recreation of its own so that the dynamic tension characterizing the mythic unity of intellect and nature is preserved in the artwork as the tension between the conventional employment of its media and the demands made by new content. Adorno argues that aesthetic conventions, like the rituals and conventions of myth's ideological employ, always have their origin in social designs, and are always trying to impose an external discipline on artworks that fall under their province (289-290). Essentially Adorno sees conventions as the formal innovations of particular artworks rigidified by social and political authorities into a predetermined set of formulas to which subsequent artworks are expected to conform, their chief use being in evaluating the extent to which art conforms to particular social standards. As social anxieties over the need for art to conform to certain historical standards wane, the conventions that enforcing that conformity lose their authority, becoming objects of parody -- what Adorno describes as "more a headache for artworks than anything else" (291).

But, if conventions (a term which Adorno seems to treat interchangeably with the terms genre, and universals [see 1984, 285-31]) is a headache for artworks, Adorno is emphatic that they are also necessary (292). For, he argues, if the purpose of innovation by artworks is their incorporation of new materials capable of stretching human understanding in recreations of shudder, human understanding is measured in terms of past convention, and innovation articulated in terms of its rebellion against previous conventional standards. As well, Adorno avers that if conventions are rigidified artistic practices, they also crystallize some of what is essential to those practices (287), namely, the role they play in the recreation of shudder. Thus, the rebellion against convention in the most recent of artworks serves only to decrystallize those conventions into the artistic practices by
which previous artworks recreated shudder, practices which the innovations of new artworks reinvolve in the recreation of shudder, though in a different way from past works.

The individual work that simply subordinates itself to genre does not do justice to it. It is more fruitful if there is conflict between them ... [That is,] the more specific a work is [the more it resists conformity to convention], the more faithfully it actualizes its type." (Adorno, 1984, 288)

In other words, the artwork's rebellion against conventions makes it "reminiscent" (295) of a time when those conventions were the innovative practices employed in the recreation of myth as shudder. It is because artistic innovation is dependent on the paradoxical realization of convention within the artwork as reminiscence that Adorno says that progress in art depends on a continuity of imitation, that there is "no Joyce without Proust, and no Proust without Flaubert, whom Proust looked down upon. In short, the autonomy of art [its resistance to ideology] was forged through imitation, not without it" (399). For Adorno, the artistic employ of convention tends to suggest an identity between conventional differences: all artworks are identical in their different recreations of myth as shudder.

d) Adorno's Ironic Recuperation of Romance.

Adorno's view of the artwork derives from Kantian, romantic and modernist influences. That is, his aesthetics seek to reaffirm Kant's insight that the universal intelligibility of the artwork is a function of its unique form, not of its being categorized under general concepts. At the same time, Adorno's is an endorsement of the romantic reaction against the tendency of Kant's aesthetics and of classicism in general to identify reason with beauty and beauty with harmony as the only aspects of reality worthy of artistic representation. Thus, he applauds the romantic treatment of the artwork as apparition - as the expression of nonbeing represented by ugliness (dissonance and the postponement of foreclosure) and the irrationality of archaic myth (Adorno, 1984, 122).

But if Adorno embraces romanticism's turn to apparition, he rejects the romantic reification of myth into atemporal aesthetic universals on the grounds that such a reification implicates nonreality in ideology just as much as classicism's universalization of beauty did reality. Thus, Adorno's employment of the romantic preservation of myth takes on an ironic cast: Adorno endorses the romantic embrace of ugliness in the artwork but sees ugliness as the dissonance and lack of closure injected into the form of the work by innovative techniques and new content from modern reality. It is these elements of modern existence which recapture the horror, the mythic essence, of traditional conventions in the artwork. By recapturing the horror and irrationality of myth, modern innovation transforms the work's rationality - its unity of form - from that of ideology, which hides the
cleavages in modern existence, into one that gives those cleavages an articulate shape (Adorno, 1984, 328). Bringing the cleavages of modern existence out into conscious view, the preservation of myth in the artwork acts as a synthesis of discrete particulars and so arbitrates between them (271–2). Thus, Adorno recuperates the romantic recourse to myth and its rejection of reality as the means by which art can depict the possibility of modern life and rationality free of ideological domination. In so doing he depicts the manner in which the artwork redeems the primary function of myth from ideology.

Adorno describes myth as ideology as involved in an eternal cycle of displacement from wrongdoing to punishment (1984, 78). Thus, he sees the rigid cruelty of premodern myth as the wrongdoing that provokes the demythologizing effect of modern enlightenment. In turn, however, premodernity exacts its revenge, and modernity becomes more and more a displacement of premodern myth, modernity’s rationality taking on the rigid administrative cast of premodern ritual.

For Adorno, what traps ideology in this cycle is its self-deception: its conviction that every punishment will end the cycle, when in fact it is part of its perpetuation. That is, by trying to escape the influence of myth, ideology only succeeds in reproducing it in another form. Art, on the other hand, does “not try to extirpate myth, it assuages it” (266). That is, by consciously reproducing the mythic cycle, especially the possibilities for happiness that the cycle discards as the dross of rationality, art points to the hope for a humane condition which inspired the expression of myth in the first place and so transcends the cycle of ideology (78). Adorno’s aesthetics, then, is not a complete rejection of tradition in art. Rather it regards the artwork as subjecting its traditions — its conventions — to the violence of modernity, and so preserves their original spirit as recreations of shudder.

3. Two Types of Violence: Convention as a Reproduction of Ideological Expressions of Reality, and Convention as Part of the Expression of Artistic Apparition.

a) Convention as Ideology.

Adorno, then, presents us with the paradoxical proposition that the artwork preserves the authentic spirit of conventions by doing violence to them — at least to their rigidity of form. But, in a sense, ideology does the same. It is true that under ideology, conventions act as a force for the rigid reproduction of particular forms, so that artworks are subjected to value judgements based on the extent to which they conform to the demands of specific conventions. At the same time, however, as expressions of ideology, conventions become malleable in the hands of social administrations, which
mold the conventions of art to reproduce analogues to truth. As Adorno has shown, the rigid judgement of artworks by convention and the reduction of convention to a malleable tool of ideology are precisely the mechanisms through which the culture industry has achieved the alienation of audiences from art (Adorno, 1991b, 26-53).

Under the pretence of reproducing the artistic genius, then, ideology molds conventions to reproduce culture as a mirror image of contemporary class structure, and to suppress the expression of those elements of possible experience that resist integration into that structure. Under the guise that it must represent original truth or exhibit unchanging standards of great design, current cultural production is forced by the ideological co-optation of convention to conform to the demands of whatever ideology happens to be dominant at the time. In effect, then, ideology uses conventions to offer "mediatensness in the guise of immediacy" (Adorno, 1984, 101). That is, ideology deliberately conflates certain aspects of the artistic recreation of nature with a nature independent of human creativity.

b) Convention as Artistic Apparition.

But, for Adorno, there is a difference between the violence that ideology and the artwork do to convention. As ideology, convention leads to a reproduction of culture as a vehicle to communicate certain ideological versions of reality. The operation of convention in the artwork expresses nothing "except through [the artwork's] own figuration, it is never a message carried by figuration" (Adorno, 1984, 216). "Art's speechless moment has priority over the significative one" (164).

As we have seen, Adorno holds that in a world where the deployment of all productive forces is conventionalized, if art is to speak at all, it cannot escape ideology by rejecting convention. Thus Adorno avers that the productive forces employed by the artwork are the same as those in real society. "The difference lies in the constitutive turn, by the [artwork], away from real society" (Adorno, 1984, 335). Art achieves this turn away from real society by expressing the non-existent, an expression "mediated by fragments of the existent gathered into an apparition" (123). That is, the artwork expresses itself as an apparition or something that is recognizably nonexistent. As apparition, the artwork turns the attention of respondents from its existent fragments to the formal configuration within which those fragments are organized -- a configuration made possible by the artwork's incorporation of new materials and techniques.
Adorno argues that, as a configuration of existent elements in the work’s form, apparition is not simply an expression of what is not, but of "tangible possibilities" (1984, 347) for human experience which the work’s existent elements are capable of expressing but which their association with mere existence has suppressed. With historic changes in ideology and society, the conventional representations of reality with which the work’s existent elements are associated alter so that, as a configuration of elements, the artwork is set in motion, an ever-changing constellation (399) of conventional associations. What remains is the work’s "configurative totalization of its elements" (1984, 335): its imaginative surplus which all conventional understandings of reality have the capacity to realize, but from which they are inhibited by their obligation to represent reality solely in terms of contemporary social conditions. Because it is a configurative unity, says Adorno, the work of art does not die: it persists as an expression of individuality in a world where objects and human beings alike have been reduced to an interchangeable uniformity (122). As such the artwork is an expression of society’s capacity to recognize individual worth, a capacity which ideology’s reduction of reality to mere existence has left unachieved (122-3).

Thus does Adorno illuminate the paradox of the artwork. As an apparition, it is the preserved image of ephemeral possibilities for happiness and the realization of individual worth reflected by but suppressed within mundane existence (1984, 107). It is this image, says Adorno, that prehistoric humanity sought in its condition of helplessness vis-a-vis nature: the mythic expression of possibility contained in the shudder of humanity’s encounter with a hostile world (118). And it is this image that early mythology describes in terms of a fleeting encounter with divinity, that of an immortal figure passing for an instant through the periphery of vision (119, 267).

For Adorno, art is a preservation of myth which artworks can articulate only as the "imagery" of fleeting possibility (1984, 78). Art’s expression of such an image requires the services of convention, but only as interchangeable elements giving voice to a figurative unity that can never be reproduced. Freed from the need to represent reality, conventions in the artwork take on what Adorno calls a linguistic quality. That is, they are employed not for their association with denotative meaning, which Adorno sees as a secondary function of language, but for their capacity to "link elements (263) of "old universals, even conventions" (295) together. So linked, the familiar elements of convention in the artwork form a "gradated vocabulary" (295) which allows the shifting constellation of historic conventions and techniques that contribute to the artwork’s configurative unity to speak (296). Likewise, the configurative unity of the work acts as a "reminiscence" (295) of the imagery of myth’s recurrence in all other works, as what Adorno calls a "monad" (295) containing
the whole history of society in its form. The society which the monad contains is that which is much bigger than actual history (279). For it is the history of possible society: a society capable of appreciating the individual's experience of it, one that does not treat individuals as uniform and interchangeable units (122).


The violence done to convention by ideology tends to reduce cultural objects to interchangeable and uniform representations of an ideological view of reality. Likewise, we have seen that the capacity of artworks to resist their reduction to expressions of ideology stems from another type of violence to convention — but one that recreates the original spirit in which they were conceived. As an apparition, concerned only with the linguistic quality of its figuration, the work of art incorporates both established social conventions and new content and technique into an expression that is irreproducible, and so envisions the creation of a society that truly respects the individual. If, as we have seen, the ideological co-optation of convention entails the reduction of convention to rigid standards for the reproduction of culture and its rendering into a malleable vehicle for the propagation of ideology's lies, the artwork has its creative counterpart to these repressive moments in its capacity for "estrangement" (Adorno, 1984, 322) and the "preservation of the transient" (323).

For Adorno, estrangement describes the manner in which the form of the artwork "orders elements of real life" (Adorno, 1984, 322), a manner that disassociates them from "their extraesthetic existence" (322). "Shorn of facticity" (335), the extraesthetic elements are freed from a world rigidly governed by the conventions of ideology to serve as elements in a form that has no end other than the realization of its own configuration, one unlike any that have gone before. On the other hand, Adorno maintains that if such a configuration is to speak — if it is to be familiar enough to say something to its viewers — its elements must be associated with conventional norms of artistic production (295). But here, too, the form of the artwork effects an estrangement of conventional norms. The artwork's incorporation of conventional — of universal — elements into its own form subjects them to "a countervailing dynamic" (292), that being the formal demands made by the work's incorporation of non-aesthetic elements. Thus, says Adorno, the form of the artwork is "ostensibly conflict ridden" (271), apparently the site of warring tensions between the formal demands made by past artistic practice and new elements. But, the conflict is mediated by the work as a "concrete universal" (272). As such, the conflicting tensions in the work's form render it so particular, so
irreplaceable that its form becomes an instantiation of the hope for a society in which individuality is more than "a torpid particular being, replaceable by other particular beings" (122), and reason is more than the operation of "an empty universal, subsuming and levelling specific beings in terms of some common characteristic" (122) Adorno expresses his belief that the modern artwork is an expression of enduring hope in conflict when he refers to it as

an image of catastrophe -- which is not a replica of real catastrophe but a cipher of catastrophic potential -- the magical motif of archaic art reappears, transplanted into the modern world of total thraldom. Modern art, too seems to want to avert a catastrophe by conjuring up its image. (Adorno, 1984, 48)

Adorno has it, then, that by incorporating the conflicting demands of previously nonaesthetic elements and established aesthetic convention into its form, the artwork "preserves the transient" (Adorno, 1984, 325). In other words, art works preserve the capacity of elements from contemporary experience to express the mythic hope for human happiness, a capacity rendered fleeting by the reifying effect of convention in its ideological employ. Adorno's view of the artwork as preserving the transient leads him to aver that "even the new [in art] is more like the immutable in ever changing form" (339).

By the same token, while every artistic convention is invariably co-opted into the ideological illusion that it alone is the final and exclusive arbiter of truth's expression, the artwork preserves the record of the brief time when convention operated as a type of flexible innovation like other innovations -- all of which operate in the artwork as monad. Thus Adorno maintains that, while "artistic consciousness is one that appropriates the most advanced materials [from contemporary reality], it respond[s] to the historical substance sedimented in them" (275). It is this substance that the artwork's preservation of convention's innovative essence articulates.


a) Art and Modernity.

Adorno might well object that my summary of his views on the artwork as a form of resistance to the co-optation of myth and convention by ideology does not deal with the fact that they apply only to modern art; and then he might object that his views on resistant art apply differently to the artworks of early and high modernity than they do to artworks of late or contemporary modernity. For Adorno, resistance to ideology becomes an inherent characteristic of artworks in response to the commodification of experience in modern market societies (1984, 320-1).
The relation between the artwork and commodity form is a dialectical one; that is, as experience in the modern West becomes increasingly commodified, commodity form and its proponents in the bourgeoisie changes from a subversive force aiding art in its resistance to feudal ideology (Adorno, 1990d, 65-6) to a reifying influence which threatens to reduce art to an expression of market ideology (60). And it is due to this dialectical relationship between art and commodity form that the role of convention in resistant art has also changed from one where art's resistance to ideology could be expressed through its affirmation of traditional conventions to one in which art's resistance to ideology could be expressed only through its disintegration of tradition (1984, 30-31).

For Adorno, modernity is not so much a chronological measurement as a social and economic condition, one characterized by societies for which concern with the newest technological innovations and the role played by technological progress in the production of more and better commodities is paramount (Adorno, 1984, 49). In other words, Adorno characterizes modernity as a social condition in which all experience tends to be defined as one would define the relationships between commodities. In turn, it is modern society in which formal innovation comes, in effect, to be treated as an inherent quality of artworks (49). Of course, Adorno allows that innovation does exist in premodern art. But he points out that it usually does so in emergent form. Those rare moments of premodernity when artistic innovation was only foregrounded were those in which premodern society developed an approximation of modern market society. And, because premodernity only ever achieved a market society in an approximation of modernity, its artistic innovation was always "desultory" in form (320). Premodern art, for Adorno, was subject to a "direct social control" (320) by premodern religious and aristocratic hierarchies that was unchallenged by the demands of commodity form for innovation.

b) Adorno's Case for the Changing Role of Innovation in Modern Art, of How Innovation Changes and then Resists the Operation of Convention.

With the inception of modernity, commodity form tended to operate in art as an emancipatory influence, allowing art to pursue formal innovations in conventions of production which premodern traditions of authority still regarded as immutable religious acts of adoration. In effect, commodity form allowed the artwork, with revolutionary results, to subordinate concerns with the following of convention and style to those of realizing its purely formal arrangements (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 130-1). Thus Adorno writes that the advent of the modern market allowed artists, while addressing themselves to noble and ecclesiastical patrons as "Your humble and obedient servant, [to]
undermine the foundations of throne and altar" (133). As modern societies developed, however, and the feudal and religious authorities of premodernity lost their struggle with an economy organized around the demands of commodity form, commodity form tended to become a reifying influence upon art in its own right. Thus, aesthetic innovations in convention — which originated as celebrations by art of society’s emancipation from premodern tyranny — became the instruments by which modern market societies co-opted aesthetic conventions in the rationalization of their own tyranny (132-3).

Adorno argues that under conditions of contemporary capitalism, the production and distribution of cultural artifacts have in effect become a mechanism for the suppression of authentic aesthetic expression. Subjecting artistic production to industrial discipline, the culture industry exploits the conventional innovations of authentic artworks. Isolating those innovations from their formal context in the artwork, the culture industry employs them as the formulas to be copied in the mass reproduction and distribution of cultural artifacts. Through the mass distribution of cultural artifacts which copy them, the formulas of the culture industry inundate the lives of modern individuals until they make up the familiar content of their so-called cultural experience. And because these cultural formulas have no formal integrity of their own, their apprehension as culture is dependent solely on their familiarity to the public and on their capacity to satisfy the public’s infantile longing for products that conform to familiar cultural standards. Thus do the formulas of mass culture become advertising for the artifacts with which they are associated (Adorno, 1991b, 26-54).

Under the culture industry, therefore, the experience of culture is transformed from that of acquainting oneself with the form of the artworks, to the purchase of formulas with which one is already acquainted. That is, the contemporary experience of culture has become that of a purchase motivated by the extent to which the formula purchased validates the consumer’s preconceptions about the nature of culture and reality. Adorno acknowledges that there is evidence that the public is not completely taken in by the culture industry’s attempt to portray products as art (Adorno, 1984, 259).

In Chapter Five of this thesis, I analyze residual irony in the culture industry to explore the manner in which irony gets incorporated as a mechanism of the culture industry. Meanwhile, we can say that under conditions of increasing reification by commodity form, artistic production could only respond by subsuming convention to innovative practices so new that they had not yet been absorbed into the conventions of modern ideology. Thus, contemporary artworks, which labour under conditions in which commodity form seems destined to become the only principle governing social organization, can only maintain their imaginative status as purely formal expressions — and, thus, their resistance to ideology — by riding the cutting edge of modern innovations in production. From
the vantage of the cutting edge, contemporary artworks can do nothing with convention unless they subject it first to dissolution (1984, 292-3). And contemporary criticism can only apprehend artworks as something more than expressions of ideology in the resistance to convention that their capacity for innovation allows.

c) Adorno's Case for the Changing Role of Consciousness in Art: The Challenge of Contemporary Art to Verstand — Instrumental Reason.

Adorno also argues that, at the inception of modernity, commodity form was a demythologizing influence. It liberated conventions of production from their premodern status as sacred and therefore unalterable ritual practices, freeing them up as productive elements to be organized in accordance with the demands made by the internal logic of an artwork. As a result, conventions took on an increasingly human form, becoming expressions of rational order and popular emancipation from ancient tyranny.

But with the triumph of commodity form over premodern authority, modern societies increasingly sought to deploy aesthetic conventions — and their expression of rational order and emancipatory conditions — as celebrations of the social status quo. As a result, convention became increasingly unable to operate as a part of the artwork's internal logic and instead became an instrument of survival for the existing institutions of market society. In response to this remythologizing of convention — in which aesthetic convention is frozen into the immutable image of rational order and emancipated experience, and then identified with actual conditions of actual market society — artworks can only stay true to the demands of their formal logic by giving expression to imaginative impulses that would be irrational by the standards of contemporary conventions. Likewise, the internal logic of the artwork becomes something that criticism can apprehend only by employing what Adorno calls "the whole of consciousness" (1984, 347), much of which is deemed irrational by the conventions of modern society. That is, the persistence of resistant art into contemporary society involves artworks in an ironic dissolution of modern conventions and their return to myth, which recreates both convention and myth as a total form of human reason and experience at odds with the rationality of contemporary social institutions (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1979, 120-164).
Adorno and the Responsibilities of Modern Criticism.

Adorno sees premodern art for the most part as characterized by a slavish adherence to convention and a veneration for and affirmation of the ideological employment of myth. Early and high modern art he certainly sees as resistant to ideology, but argues that the resistance of such art is directed against the co-optation of myth by premodern society. Its autonomy of form is a demythologizing influence, not a recuperation of myth: one which gains its emancipation from ideology by turning towards the realist conventions of an increasingly secular modern society (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 1-40). Only in conditions of contemporary modernity does the resistance of art to ideology entail its turning away from modern society in an ironic recuperation of myth and convention. Only then does the preservation of art's linguistic quality require that the artwork's content be estranged from real life, that its meaning should be expressed as an image of fleeting possibilities.

But Adorno also recognizes that contemporary ideology has effectively neutralized the capacity of whole populations to respond to the art of early and high modernity. For, even if past artworks were capable of a resistance to ideology, ideology can nonetheless condition the contemporary individual to respond to past artworks as if they were dead. The "mechanical reproduction and recording" (Adorno, 1979, 127) of early and high modern artworks by the culture industry effects their "neutralization" (Adorno, 1976, 113) to little more than banal illustrations of what the contemporary viewing public already expects of art. Even though the forms of those works embody a plasticity of expression at odds with the stultified nature of the conventions with which they are associated by modern ideology, the mass reproduction and redistribution of old artworks has guaranteed that respondents will come preprogrammed to see and hear the fulfilment of long dead conventions in them. It is precisely this alienation from past culture that has led contemporary art capable of any resistance to ideology to turn away from society. Only by doing so can art avoid the conflation of artworks with the affirmation of the truth about nonaesthetic experience.

To combat the alienation of society from the possibility of an authentic aesthetic experience, Adorno argues for an education which teaches the individual the difference between aesthetic and nonaesthetic experience (Adorno, 1984, 344). In effect, then, he is advocating an education which confronts the individual with the manner in which all artworks, regardless of when they were produced, achieve autonomy from their societies. But Adorno also argues that in conditions of contemporary modernity, any correspondence of the artwork (even one such as Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*), with actual experience is reified into a betrayal of their autonomy of form (347).
Therefore, I would submit that Adorno is also arguing for an aesthetic education that must treat all artistic references to reality — even those in early and high modern art — as what we saw referred to earlier as estrangements of life into the language of formal association. Further, such an education must treat the affirmation of convention by past artworks as betrayed by their own innovations, a betrayal which renders those artworks into unique forms and their meaning into a vision of society capable of accommodating all conventional understandings of reality.

6. Adorno and Aesthetic Education.

a) Education in Aesthetics as Entailing a Radical Rereading of Past Art.

Adorno has said that because of its rejection of the familiar employ of convention and understanding of modern experience, modern music and painting can be understood only by experts. Educated to understand their peculiar language, the expert listener and viewer can recognize the estrangement of content, technique, and convention within works of modern music and painting. It is this repetition of the recuperation of convention, technique and content within the form of modern art works that allows experts to penetrate to the very centre of their forms, apprehending in the discord between their elements an image of fleeting possibilities for a better world. But Adorno also points out that the same expertise is necessary if the linguistic quality of traditional art is to be appreciated by contemporary audiences. Says Adorno, under conditions of mass culture, the apparent accessibility of past art spells its doom. To validate this claim, one only has to look at the fact that there are many dark and doubtlessly misunderstood works among those enshrined forever in the pantheon of classics. Another way to prove this claim is to look at the current state of interpretation of traditional art. With few exceptions, such interpretations make no sense, are totally wrong and objectively unintelligible. In order to recognize this[,] what is needed is first and foremost a certain resistance to the illusion of intelligibility that surrounds those works and interpretations like a halo. (Adorno, 1984, 262)

In other words, Adorno requires that traditional artworks be apprehended like contemporary works as those at odds with the conventions and content of nonaesthetic reality. Thus, Adorno argues that "an adequate appreciation of past art ... presupposes [the] contemporary standpoint" (Adorno, 1984, 278) from which modern art must be appreciated. That is to say, the work of past [traditional] art must be taken as one of unique specificity, at odds with the conventions with which historical interpretation has come to associated it.
Of course, such an interpretation of past artworks must derive from an appreciation of their highly conventional nature, of their tendency to strive for likeness with other works that renders each work one among many. But, for Adorno, the true appreciation of the manner in which past works achieve this tendency requires that each work be apprehended as achieving its commonality with other works through the unique expression of its own form. For this reason Adorno (using the metaphor of the Matterhorn) writes to the effect that the only way to apprehend the conventions under which the past artwork operates as one of many works is to see that work as the only one within which those conventions operate (Adorno, 1984, 278). Any approach, on the other hand, that tries to apprehend traditional aesthetic conventions through comparisons of the similarities between past works will produce nothing but empty historic generalizations.

In arguing that past art must be seen from the perspective of contemporary criticism, Adorno is also calling for an act of interpretive misrecognition. That is, we have seen Adorno refer to any qualities of resistance as emergent or desultory in premodern art, and compatible with references to reality and the nonironic affirmation of convention in early and high modern art. His programme for education in aesthetic form, however, entails a different interpretation of resistance in past art that Adorno evidences when he argues that the resistance of their reduction to thinghood is an inherent and defining characteristic of artworks from the earliest of times. Thus, Adorno writes that "since time immemorial art has sought to redeem and promote the particular" (Adorno, 1984, 287). Presumably, he means that art has sought to preserve the particular from reification, as is shown in the next passage.

The oldest cave drawings are often said to be naturalistic, but such a characterization misses the fact that they aim at the portrayal of objects in motion, as if they were trying to imitate faithfully the undefinable aspect of things ... [T]heir driving force may not have been naturalistic imitation at all but protest against reification. (449)

The need for a different interpretation for resistance in past art is also evidenced in Adorno's argument that all references to reality and the affirmation of convention in early and high modern art be taken as acts of estrangement. As we saw in Chapter One, however, Adorno is aware that for aesthetic interpretation to apprehend convention and the representation of reality in early modern artworks as estrangements from actual existence, it must approach them differently than it would modern works.

Writses Adorno (1984), "Contemporary consciousness" can only apprehend estrangement with the early or premodern artwork by concentrating on the work's affirmations of convention as a "silent pointing towards the beautiful, accompanied by a levelling of the distinction between nature and the
That is, contemporary interpretation sees the work's apparent adherence to established conventional practices as resulting in the illusion that those practices are capable of realizing not the image, but the very substance of natural beauty. But the clearly illusory nature of the artistic illusion exposes the innovative superstructure on which the illusion is built. And the formal innovations inherent in that superstructure show it to be at odds with established conventional practices, even though that superstructure made possible the illusion that established conventional practices embodied natural beauty in the first place. Hence, Adorno says that the work's clearly illusory nature allows aesthetic interpretation to "recognize the resistance of the underlying material" (1984, 336). In turn, the established conventions in the work give the illusion its form, and so articulates the work's truth as the image of hoped for "peace" -- the dream of unattained reconciliation between humankind and nature.

b) Adorno's Aesthetic Education as Entailing a Familiarity with Convention.

We have seen that, in the face of ideology's alienation of its own society from artistic form, Adorno argues that aesthetic interpretation must be predicated on an education dedicated to recognizing the distance between the experience of all artworks and nonaesthetic experience. It is an education which takes all references in the artwork to reality and established convention as being acts of estrangement designed to incorporate both the content and conventions of social reality into the artwork's language of figuration. For Adorno, then, "aesthetics has to retrace the dynamic laws of art" (Adorno, 1984, 186) which have allowed works through modern history to operate as monads, incorporating the whole of history and society into their forms (424). And Adorno holds that such a retracing requires a knowledge of language of artworks.

Thus I contend that Adorno's understanding of aesthetics must entail that the educated appreciation of art involves conversance with convention. That is, the educated interpreter must become familiar with the different manners in which artworks, by doing violence to conventions, actually incorporate them as "structural properties of works of art" (Adorno, 1984, 477). But the interpreter will only be able to do so if they are able to identify the past conventions out of whose atomized element contemporary artworks construct their complex language-like structures (295). For this reason, says Adorno, contemporary art cannot be grasped by nonexperts (334).

Of course, Adorno would hasten to point out that since universals (and this includes conventions) are always mediated by particular artworks, the discernment of aesthetic convention and its recurrence between artworks must be a bottom-up affair. That is, for Adorno, the reminiscence of
convention in different artworks is recognized through a process of induction — the careful consideration of how convention has been co-opted by each artwork into the language-like relations of their unique form. But this type of induction requires some preacquaintance with convention, as Adorno's analysis of Beethoven's Missa Solemnis should indicate.

c) Adorno and Beethoven's Alienated Masterpiece.

In "Alienated Masterpiece: the Missa Solemnis" (1976), Adorno cites the great mass by Beethoven as a prime example of the neutralization of culture. By the "neutralization of culture" (113), Adorno means the process by which modern ideology reduces artworks to a sort of self-advertisement; that is, the reputation of the artwork — or perhaps of its author — for greatness moves audiences who are incapable of appreciating what it is about the form of the artwork that made it great to venerate the work as the ultimate expression of their own preconceptions about how a great work would be. The "neutralization of culture makes certain that ... [artworks] themselves are no longer perceived in their original contents. Rather, they are merely consumed as socially acceptable products" (Adorno, 1976, 115). To reverse the neutralization of the Missa, Adorno argues that it must, in Brecht’s terms, be "alienated" from "the aura of irrelevant worship which protectively surrounds it" (113). And, for Adorno, such an alienation requires "criticism" (113): not the criticism of evaluation designed to debunk the Missa’s reputation to greatness, but the criticism which seeks to "penetrate the work" (114) by apprehending its actual construction.

In his critical analysis of the Missa, Adorno observes with Kretzchmar, that something is odd about it. Unlike Beethoven’s symphonic productions, the Missa is composed of short musical images that force the listener to organize them into a unity. But Adorno parts company with Kretzchmar’s conclusion that the apparently paratactic nature of the Missa’s musical images is resolved in thematic developments which like those in "Beethoven’s great symphonic movements" create "unity from apparent diversity" (Adorno, 1976, 114-115). For Adorno, there is a permanent diremption between the musical images and thematic development, a diremption suggesting that the Missa gives only the appearance of development. Its richness of harmony and tonality (that is, "its sensuous highpoints, [its] inclination to the tonally overwhelming" [116]) is of a kind mistaken by uneducated audiences for thematic development in its resolution. Their mistake is in failing to perceive that while the overwhelming tonality — the triumphal sound — of "the great symphonic movement" (115) often accompanies and characterizes its thematic development as sonata form, such sound does not
necessarily entail that any development is taking place. As Adorno argues, inspite of its triumphant sound, there is no such development in Beethoven’s *Missa*.

Adorno’s analysis of *Missa*’s structure reveals that the diremption between the imagery of the work and its apparent development of theme amounts to an essential reconfiguration of the *Missa*’s most obvious convention – sonata form. And, according to Adorno, the work achieves this reconfiguration by allowing archaic conventions of polyphony a primary role in shaping its expression (1976, 117). Meanwhile he limits contemporary conventions of sonata form to the role of providing a modern context for the repetition of the older polyphonic form (121).

Adorno argues that the *Missa*’s reconfiguration of its main conventions – itself a modern innovation – expresses the impossibility that sonata form should be adequate to the celebration of faith demanded by the *Missa* (1976, 122-123). Thus the work deploys the archaic forms of polyphony as more adequate to the task. But even the efforts of the work’s archaic elements are "mocked" by the irreversible influence of the modern "human tone" upon its production (119). As a recurrence of archaic expressions of commitment – of myth – contained in the deployment of fifteenth-century conventions of polyphony, the *Missa* points to a declaration faith which its most prominent conventions are inadequate to express. This pointing renders the *Missa*’s triumphal sound into an ironic expression of its own society’s inadequacies.

If, however, the commitment to a humane ideal is one which modern sounds in the *Missa* cannot in good conscience express, neither can the elements of polyphony in the *Missa* do more than point to it. That is, polyphony acts only as the dissonance that transforms the *Missa* into an expression of mythic horror at the prospect that its apparent commitment to a humane ideal might be one that "can [be spoken] no longer or not yet" (1976, 122). Through its expression of mythic horror, the *Missa* seeks atonement for the falsity of its triumphal sound. That is, the *Missa* seeks to achieve the authenticity of commitment which that sound lacks. Thus does Adorno conclude that in its appeal to archaic polyphony, the *Missa*, like the late work of all great composers from Bach to Schoenberg "dredge[s] up the past in the anguish of the present as sacrifices to the future" (Adorno, 1976, 124).

I would contend that Adorno's analysis of the *Missa* entails an aesthetic education which familiarizes listeners with the language-like (1984, 115) operation of convention within the *Missa* as a work of art. For Adorno, such an education is necessary because, as he intimates in his analysis, the neutralization of the *Missa's* form derives from the listening public's "lack of understanding" (1976, 116). That is, to the extent that it is aware of the *Missa's* conventions at all, the contemporary listening public has come to identify the *Missa* with the thematic developments in sonata form. *But even that convention is only intelligible to the public in the familiar form presented by mass culture.* As such, the thematic development of sonata form is always associated in the mind of the viewing audience with a triumphal sound, a sound Adorno characterizes as that of "easy resolutions and rich textures" (1991d, 35).

To overcome their implication in the ignorance of the viewing public, listeners must first know something more about the nature of sonata form and the thematic development of musical ideas than is apparent in presentations made familiar by the culture industry. Secondly, they must approach the *Missa* not as a reflection of their preconceptions about sonata form, but as a collection of musical images, attending to precisely how these images are expressed in the *Missa's* form. Such an approach reveals that the *Missa* has enacted an estrangement of triumphant sound from sonata form by attaching that sound to polyphonic traditions. Of course, this revelation is also dependent upon some prior acquaintance with late fifteenth-century conventions of polyphony, which in turn would allow the listener to apprehend how the *Missa's* association of archaic polyphony with nineteenth-century harmonics has rendered that polyphony into a dissonance which those harmonies cannot resolve.

If listeners are to be freed from the ignorance of the contemporary public, therefore, they must have some prior acquaintance with convention. But more, they must be prepared to see through the work's ideological surface to where conventions, estranged from reality, operate as part of a structure of associations between musical images. "In other words," writes Adorno, "art works have an immanent objective rationality deep below their rational surface" (1984, 168). It is this rationality that the listener must seek in the artwork's inherently "linguistic quality" (164). Like contemporary aesthetics, the listener must seek that rationality "by fostering the dissolution of conventional aesthetic categories." For "in so doing, [they] release new energy into these categories" (468), thereby "giving tradition its due" (470).
Thus does Adorno argue that, by surrendering themselves to the work's language-like structure of imagery, listeners apprehend the unresolved dissonance — the recreation of mythic horror — between the work's conventions, and with that horror the "sublimely plebian hostility, inimical to all that is aristocratic" (Adorno, 1976, 123). In its expression of plebian hostility, the Missa recaptures the power of resistance in its convention, and so is capable of persisting as the work that "refused to reconcile in a single image what is not reconciled" (123).

For Adorno, criticism penetrates to the heart of a work's form by dissolving the conventions with which it has traditionally been associated. Only then can criticism apprehend the work's redemption of those categories and their recreation of myth as shudder in the work's language-like associations. Which is to say, Adorno's criticism discovers the operation of the convention in the artwork by charting the manner that the artwork resists and dissolves convention in its familiar forms. It is also to say that his criticism seems incompatible with that of Northrop Frye, who argues for a critical suspension of judgement and the following of convention as being the way into the form of the artwork.

e) Frye's Analysis of Shakespeare's Henry V.

Adorno's analysis of the Missa Solemnis has what I take to be a profound resonance with one by Frye of Shakespeare's portrayal of the career of Henry V, a resonance which shows the surface incompatibility between Adorno and Frye is just that — superficial. In describing Henry V, Frye relates:

when Shakespeare presents the career of Henry V, he supplies his audience with their own prefabricated prejudices. He traces his hero through his madcap disguise as prince, his emergence as responsible king, his invasion of France and his victory, leaving him as he is about to marry the French princess. He throws in Falstaff as comic relief to diversify the same ideology, and removes him when he has served his purpose. But if we listen carefully to the progression of images and to other things said that are subordinated but still audible, we can see and hear how many things are happening. We become aware of the misery of France, the fact that Falstaff is a powerful presence whatever his moral status, the shaky morale of many of the English soldiers. Above all, we become aware of the way in which Henry's victory is shot through with the illusions of fortune, and of the fact that he died almost at once and left a legacy of sixty years of disaster for England. (Frye, 1990, p.23 [emphasis mine]).

As in Adorno's analysis of the Missa, Frye urges the work's respondent to concentrate on the work as primarily a collection of images, to examine the part that conventions actually play in their
progression. And like Adorno, Frye argues that the reader will discover how the story's triumphant sound — its pandering to the prejudices of the contemporary audience — is not the only force (maybe not even the real one) driving the progression of images. Rather, the reader becomes aware that, as a structure of imagery, the work also incorporates a tragic structure that renders the optimistic tone of its historic surface ironic. The work's apparent resolution in victory is postponed, even undermined, by premonitions of disaster and echoes of regret that refuse to fade. At the same time, the tragic undertone in the career of Henry V is constrained from resolution by the historic nature of the play. That is, the tendency of the tragic dénouement to set right once and for all the disorder caused by the hero's catastrophe is curtailed by the vagary of the history play — its dissipation into yet another historic chapter.

As a "progression of images," therefore, Shakespeare's account of the career of Henry V is one in which the influence of Falstaff will simply not go away. That is, Falstaff's common touch, his expression of lower class disillusionment with aristocratic adventurism, persists until it is vindicated as a perspective on the legacy of Henry V clearer than any offered by the dramatic presentation of Henry's triumph, and as one that refuses to be reconciled to that expression of triumph. Thus does Frye show Shakespeare to have expressed what we have seen Adorno call "a plebian resentment of all things aristocratic."

Like the Missa's dissonant employ of medieval polyphony and sonata form in Adorno's analysis, Frye's analysis of the clash of tragic and historic conventions in Henry V exposes the inadequacy of both conventions to give expression to the triumphal expression of community with which the ideological surface meaning of Henry V was associated by contemporary audiences. At the same time, both conventions are reshaped by the work in what Frye, referring to the blinding of Gloucester in King Lear, calls "as powerful a rendition as we can get of the world we don't want" (Frye, 1963, 34). Thus, Frye's analysis shows how the literary work evokes what Adorno would call the mythic expression of shudder — of hoped for bliss expressed in images of terror. That is, as an expression of the language-like associations between imagery, Shakespeare's Henry V achieves what in The Double Vision Frye credits all literature with achieving: the transformation of ideological violence into images of the hoped for satisfaction of humanity's primary concerns. Writes Frye, Henry V

incorporates our ideological concerns, but it devotes itself mainly to the primary ones, in both physical and spiritual forms: its fictions show human beings in the primary throes of surviving, loving, prospering, and fighting with the frustrations that block those things. (Frye, 1991, 16)
It is this expression of suppressed possibility within ideological expression that Frye's analysis shows the operation of convention in the history of Henry V to have captured. But like Adorno, Frye charts this operation, not by following the work's conventions in their familiar forms. Rather he follows conventions through the work, bearing witness to the distortions which the work's unique form imposes upon them, and by which the work redeems its conventions as expressions of myth in its primary function.

Section C.

1. Introduction.

But even if Frye's analysis of Shakespeare's Henry V seems similar to Adorno's analysis of the Beethoven's Missa; even if it were true that the ability to experience the Missa -- and by extension Henry V -- in terms of an analysis like Adorno's entails a preacquaintance with convention (a position with which Frye would most assuredly concur), surely there must be a difference between what Frye and Adorno would mean by preacquaintance. Does not Frye's notion of an education of the imagination entail acquaintance with forms of mythic convention that operate as literary invariables? Adorno, by contrast, argues against the validity of invariables; that is, he does not simply deny that invariables exist but exposes the historic variability in those conventions that are treated as invariable.

But just how invariable are Frye's literary myths? That is, does he show how readers would experience a literary category in literature except as different displacements within literary works? And, as an historically specific displacement, does not myth allow its work to entail a unique condensation of elements of contemporary society into literary form? If so, Frye's notion of literary myth might well operate as a part of Adorno's conception of the new in art, which Adorno describes as "more like the immutable in ever-changing disguises" (Adorno, 1984, 339).

What I have proposed in the above paragraph is that the categories of myth and convention referred to in Frye's criticism are, in the forms he presents them, inherently ideological, and that Frye knows this, though he does not name them as such. But Frye's purpose in employing them is to show how literature estranges those categories from their ideological context, and how the reader can apprehend them in literature in a manner that, in Adorno's parlance, is estranged from society and
ideology. Thus, Frye's critical apprehension of mythic invariables in literature entails simultaneously the dissolution of any ideological form of convention and their recomposition in a form resistant to society and ideology.

I surmise that Frye begins his critical analysis of literature with the identification of literary universals in response to the critical tendencies of his time, that is, a tendency that we have already seen articulated by his critics to reject any role for universals and conventions in literary experience concentrating solely on the particularity of the literary work. Thus, does Robert Denham write that "it is not possible to read The Anatomy of Criticism without feeling the presence of the old New Criticism hovering in the background" (Denham, 1990, xv). Against such a tendency Frye must reverse the force of Adorno's argument; whereas Adorno stresses that "art works ... lead to the universal by virtue of their principle of particularization" (Adorno, 1984, 259), Frye must argue in effect that while what Adorno says is true, criticism must apprehend the particularity of the literary work in its expression of universality. Otherwise criticism is liable, for Frye, to attribute a false particularity to the artwork, and to derive from that false particularity a spurious universal.

To see if Frye is, in fact, making the same argument as does Adorno for the expression of universality in the historically specific nature of the literary work, we need to take a close look at Frye's account of the displacement of myth through the history of literary production with a view to answering the question: Is there really any such thing in Frye's criticism as undisplaced myth? If there is, then, in spite of all else, Frye's criticism is still a concession to the authority of historically invariable categories and thus implicated in the modern reification of literary experience under abstract categories. If not, then Frye's displacement of myth may actually play a role in what Adorno would call the artwork's estrangement of convention and content from contemporary reality. But to determine if that might be true, I will have to examine Frye's conceptions of literary myth and convention, and their operation within literature as a purely figurative language to see if they are compatible with those of Adorno.

2. A Necessary Diversion: Does Frye Treat Literature as an Art in the Same Manner as Adorno?

We have already seen why Adorno thinks that poetry is not an art. That is due to poetry's having an autonomous discursive element. But Adorno said that poetry both is and is not an art, and to the extent that Adorno regards poetry — and by extension all literature — as an art, he does so because the poem, like other art works, speaks through its "linguistic shape" (Adorno, 1984, 143). Adorno regards poetry as an art, then, because he sees it as expressing itself through its verbal
figuration, not through its association with the "sensual representation" (144) of actual reality. Further, he holds that poems, like other artworks, operate under the dictum that "concepts in art are not what they are outside art" (179). That is, artworks assimilate nonliterary elements — as does the poetry of Georg Trakl the word sonata (179) — in a manner which estranges them from their original contexts.

And it is through estrangement, argues Adorno, that the poem — an artwork which must speak only through its figuration — incorporates its always present discursive elements into its form, and so resists their association with the purposes of ideology. Adorno describes how the poem achieves the estrangement of its discursive content from ideology: "refraining from express indictment ... [the] form [of the poem] shapes [its contents] into an echo of a mythic dictum cancelling their sadistic tenor" (Adorno, 1984, 181). That is, the poem does not reject or judge its descriptive content. Instead, it incorporates that content into its form as part of an imaginative recreation of the mythic encounter with the obstacles to human happiness. As part of a formal association between imaginative images, these obstacles suggest the possibility of the very happiness they impede, and thus, their ironic participation in the literary dream of human happiness.

Like Adorno, Frye is aware that poetry as an art is burdened with nonliterary discursive elements. While he maintains that the essence of literature is characterized by the lyric tendency to turn away from "the kind of language we use to represent ordinary reality" (1993, 133), Frye acknowledges that the "turning away" of literature is of a different kind than in other arts. In music, for instance, "for the most part musical sounds are in a special area, different from the sounds we hear in ordinary life. The poet however, has to use much the same words that everyone else uses" (Frye, 1993, 134; Bogdan, 1989, 35 citing Frye, 1963, 93). While the other arts can turn away from the world to materials and conventions different from those employed by discursive expression, the materials and conventions available to literature will always carry a discursive content. Thus, Frye argues that for literature to speak as an art entails more than its simply turning from ordinary language; it also involves turning the contents of ordinary language into elements of formal arrangements that might have little or no meaning in their original setting. Thus Frye says, "In lyric, the turning away from ordinary experience means that the words do not resonate against the things they describe, but against other words and sounds" (Frye, 1993, 134).

It is already well known that Frye concurs with Adorno’s above dictum that the deployment of discursive content by literary form entails that literature refrain from judging that content. In the Anatomy, for instance, Frye calls on readers and critics to recognize that the literary work treats its
descriptive content as hypothetical propositions: an account of the kinds of events or things that would be part of a fictional narrative. As such, the discursive content of a literary work becomes part of its displacement of literary myth, which is in turn part of the total form of experience as a humane ideal. Thus, as we have already seen in Frye’s example of the blinding of Gloucester in *King Lear*, Frye sees the literary work incorporate the most vicious content into its form as part of the image of the world we don’t want. But, for both Frye and Adorno, such an image functions as part of the mythic vision of life capable of addressing the concerns for which all humans struggle, its contents operating as the obstacles that give that struggle tangible shape.

We see, then, that Frye’s treatment of all literary works as hypothetical displacements of myth is in response to the discursive content contained within each. That is, Frye’s is a recognition that in order for literature to resist the purposes of ideology and preserve its essence as a purely figurative form of expression, it must incorporate nonliterary elements into its form by — in Adorno’s parlance — estranging them from ordinary reality. Insofar as literature is an art, Frye’s criticism, like that of Adorno, takes it to be an estrangement from all conditions of society. And as I will try to show, this view entails in Frye’s criticism a sensitivity to the historical and social differences between the conditions of society and ideology from which art seeks to free itself.

3. Frye on Myth.

a) Frye on the Displacement of Myth within the Artwork: Is there such a thing as Undisplaced Myth?

In this section I want to try to answer the question of whether or not Frye’s literary cosmology ultimately includes any undisplaced — pure, *a priori* — forms of myth. And I want to answer this question in aid of arguing that, like Adorno, Frye views literature as estranged from society. I will proceed in this endeavour through an analysis of Frye’s historic modes of displacement and his symbolic levels of interpretation.

At first blush, the answer to the question of whether Frye recognizes undisplaced forms of myth in literature must seem too cut and dried to bother contemplating. That is, as we saw in Chapter I, Frye argues that literary myth modulates through what he describes as five historic modes, four of which are displacements of an “undisplaced” or mythic phase, in which a myth is a story of a god (Frye, 1957, 35-40). But if we look more closely at how Frye’s theory of modulation works in conjunction with symbolic levels, a different picture of mythic displacement emerges.
In the second essay of the Anatomy Frye flags his readers to "a parallelism gradually shaping up between the five [historic] modes in our first essay and the phases of symbolism in this one" (1957, 116). In this parallelism between historic modes and symbolic levels, Frye's first interpretative or literal level, which apprehends the literary work as primarily an ordering of words, is synonymous with the treatment of works as an "ironic structure" (116) by authors in the final or contemporary phase of literary history. His second or descriptive level corresponds to the tendency of nineteenth-century low mimetic authors to realism. His third level, which treats literary works as formal symbolic structures, is most "easily studied in the works of renaissance and neo-classicist writers" (116) of the high mimetic phase. The fourth or archetypal level, which apprehends all works as contexts for the repetition of easily recognizable archetypes, "finds its centre of gravity in the mode of romance, when the interchange of ballad, folk tales and popular stories was at its easiest" (116). Finally, Frye's anagogic level, the level at which all literary symbols and images are taken as metaphors for other literary symbols and images, is most easily identified with undisplaced "myth in its narrower and more technical sense of fictions and themes relating to divine or quasi-divine beings and powers" (116).

Frye also defines myth as "a narrative in which some characters are superhuman beings who do things that 'happen only in stories'" (366), and, at the level of anagogy he defines the literature of all the historic modes as metaphors for myth. For Frye, then, myths are the clear forms of action that are not real, only conceivable — and thus hypothetical in principle. What separates the literature of the other historic modes from language that depicts real experience is the resemblance of that literature to myth which depicts only conceivable experience.

Thus, the literal level of interpretation sees literary works order the words of ordinary language into forms of imaginative experience to which no discursive summary can do justice; and the descriptive level sees how literature gives voice to imaginative forms of experience implicit in the depiction of real things and events. Likewise, just as the formal level of interpretation apprehends the literary incorporation of universal ideals into forms of imaginative experience, the archetypal level incorporates the images of plausible experience — those forms of life familiar to every community and century into imaginative language. Each of Frye's levels of interpretation examines how the literature from one of his historic modes differentiate their language from conventions of nonliterary language by incorporating those conventions into the depiction of mythic actions — action which could only take place in stories.
But, what nonliterary conventions from ordinary language could the literature from Frye's mythic mode incorporate into its expression of myth? After all, we have seen that, according to Frye, the language of literature from the mythic mode (mythopoeic literature) is that of undisplaced myth, and undisplaced myths are already the stuff of stories. It would seem, then, that the language of mythopoeic literature must be that of undisplaced literary myth because its conventions need not be distinguished, for they could not be confused with the conventions of ordinary language. And yet, Frye argues that, at the level of anagogy, the opposite is true; that is, he maintains that anagogy must see mythopoeic literature incorporate the language and conventions of theology (1957, 64). Otherwise, the myths of mythopoeic literature will not be taken to describe the kinds of action that happen only in stories. And conventions — such as those of theology — cannot be appropriated by literary experience unless they are incorporated into its metaphorical structure.

Frye avers that as metaphor, the literary expression of myth is both one of affirmation and denial: myth is simultaneously the affirmation that its narrative depicts the actions of a divine or semi-divine character (whose person and will is identical with some aspect of nature), and a statement of denial, entailing that only a fool would believe that such actions could have actually occurred. And, he argues that the works of other historic modes incorporate contemporary conventions into their expression of myth as metaphor by displacing myth — altering its format in the direction of greater plausibility — to accommodate those conventions. In so doing, such works act as metaphors in that they affirm the expression of myth while insisting that the mythic tale cannot have happened in the manner portrayed by stories about the gods. Thus do these works transform contemporary conventions into an affirmation of divine action, though in a secular form that rejects as implausible the account of that action in mythopoeic literature.

On the other hand, I would contend that mythopoeic literature only becomes possible, for Frye, when "preliterary" (Frye, 1990n, 238) myths of concern — the stories of what members of a community "have to know" (239) — start to become displaced in directions that premodern societies would find implausible, directions towards secular concerns and ways of thinking that are strange to the premodern societies in which the archaic myths first appeared. Thus, Frye's writing on "the role of preliterary myth in human culture" (252) refers to "a second stage" (252) of cultural development "where the mythical tends to be identified with the literary, and excluded from the conveyance of genuine information" (252). Presumably Frye sees this second stage followed by a third one in which literary myth is reincluded in the expression of genuine information, this time about the plausible form of human experience.
Both above notions of literary displacement — one in the direction of plausibility, and the other in the direction of estrangement — have a tendency to greater realism. But the aim of the first type of displacement is to familiarize the modern audience with myth. The aim of the second, on the other hand, is a presentation of myth alien to premodern audiences, more importantly perhaps, a presentation of myth perhaps that theology — the language of belief in undisplaced gods — would proscribe as that which should be alien to all audiences. An illuminating example — though not from Frye — of how mythopoeic literature uses associations with secular concerns to displace myth in the direction of its estrangement from ancient sensibilities comes to us out of observations in Homer's *Odyssey* (1946). Odysseus, it is remarked, is strange among men. For he is "not prepared ... to give in even to the immortal gods" (192). Rather, he "shall do what [he him]self think[s] best" (97). Here we see how the secularization of thought in Odysseus acts to estrange his story from the archaic assumptions which are also present, even predominant, in it.

Mythopoeic literature's displacement of myth in the direction of estrangement depends, for Frye, then, not so much on the fantastical character of divine action as on the "semi-magical" (Frye, 1990g, 109) language in which the fantastic must be couched. That is, the "accidental resemblances among words [that] create sound patterns of rhyme, alliteration, assonance, and meter" (109) give the preliterary myths a tendency to thematic association which makes them "encyclopedic" (Frye, 1957, 55-6) in their treatment of human experience. And as a "society becomes more pluralistic and specialized" (Frye, 1990n, 239), this tendency serves to bring parochial depictions of divinity in preliterary myth into contact with mythopoeic literature, in which the broader, ultimately more secular concerns foregrounded in the literature of later historic modes are beginning to emerge.¹

Primary among such concerns is the question: Can this story be true? (239) At the same time, the markedly verbal character of such associations distinguishes their "power" (109) as something words "rarely" (109) possess outside of literature. The reality described by such associations is an imaginative one. Not the actual world, it is clearly constructed out of the resonance between the verbal imagery of different stories.

When Frye, then, says that undisplaced literary myth describes divine actions — the type that could only take place in stories — he seems to me to be describing the language of divine action, that

¹As an example of this type of mythopoeic literary practice, Frye cites the Homeric poems as being the writings educated Greeks of the classical period had to know (Frye, 1990n, 239). Also, Frye refers to the development of a mythopoeic literary practice when he argues in *The Double Vision* (1991), that "[In the Athens of the fifth century BC, a momentous step in human consciousness occurred when the rituals associated with Dionysus developed into drama, and the great evolution of what we now call literature out of mythology took a decisive turn* (43).
is, the metaphorical character of literary expressions of myth which makes them displacements of each other and not of a pure form of myth beyond displacement. For, as we have seen, Frye may describe anagogy as the level of interpretation at which all literature is a metaphor for myth. But he also says that it is the level at which all literary imagery — even that of mythopoeic literature — is a metaphor for other verbal imagery. While criticism at the level of anagogy apprehends the literature of other historic modes as metaphors for the expression of literary myth in mythopoeic literature, Frye would allow that the myth in mythopoeia is also a metaphor for the expression of myth in each of its historic displacements, so called. In other words, there is, for Frye, no purely "undisplaced" form of literary myth of which all others are metaphors but which itself is not a metaphor for them. Writes Frye, "we cannot assume that a primitive and popular myth has been swathed like a mummy in [the] elaborate verbiage [by the literature of later historic modes]" (1957, 117). The myth in literature is not some pure form hidden behind its displacement by the literary work. Quite the opposite: the form of myth is revealed by its displacement within each literary work operating as a structure of metaphor, one that is simultaneously the same as and yet unlike all other displacements of myth.

But, if literature is not a displacement of a particular "undisplaced" form of myth in literature, what exactly does it displace? In Words with Power (1990), Frye suggests that, like the Old Testament, all particular forms of utopian myth contain an ironic element that makes them simultaneously an expression of dystopia. Frye argues that the opposite or utopian counterpart suggested by dystopia is not a particular form so much as "a social norm" (309) articulated by what he refers to in The Double Vision (1991) as

a pure speech. Such a purity cannot be the abstract purity of logic or descriptive accuracy, much less the isolation of one existing language from others. It is rather the purity of simple speech, the parable or aphorism that begins to speak only after we have heard it and feel that we have exhausted its meaning. From that explicit meaning it begins to ripple out into the remotest mysteries of what it expresses and clarifies but does not say. (83)

Also in Words with Power Frye seems to refer to this pure speech in his observation that, "because of its basis in metaphor, the language of poetry is concrete language, where objects of sense experience are in the foreground" (1990v, 73). Foregrounding the objects of sense and "the particularity and discreteness of the world" (73) to which they are related, the literary work attends to the struggles of this world relating "the ideological concerns of its time" (43) to more broadly human
concerns with "making a living, making love, struggling to stay free and alive" (43) that are reflected in every literary work, though by each with their own particularity and discreteness.

For Frye, all works of literature are displacements of a total literary myth which all contain in different ways, but ways that are reminiscent of each other. That is, each work expresses its displacement of myth by articulating a reality familiar to its readers in a manner that estranges that reality from them, and gives a familiar resonance to that which before was alien. What literary works resemble is not a pure form of mythic imagery so much as human desire to recreate the world in a form capable of quieting its deepest concerns, a desire Frye, quoting Vico, says was born of the terror early humanity experienced in its encounter with the "first thunder clap" (Frye, 1990q, 131). Says Frye, "Vico tells us that history is made by men, which means that the gods born of the first thunderclap were human creations too" (132-3). Clearly, then, Frye sees the mythopoeic forms of literature from his first historic mode as being displacements of myth experience like other literary displacements of myth. What the mythopoeic forms displace — imaginatively recreate — is a mythic encounter very much like that which we have seen Adorno call shudder. It is a recreation effected by the metaphorical language of literature, a language more concerned with the reality articulated by what Frye calls the "centripetal" (Frye, 1957, 73) associations between verbal images than with the reality of actual social conditions.

Like Adorno, Frye attributes the motivation for artistic production to that nameless and formless encounter with indifferent brute existence that drives humankind to the imaginative recreation of nature and society in a humane form. Also, like Adorno, Frye sees literary works effect this imaginative recreation by estranging conventions from their role as depictors of reality and incorporating them into a language made up entirely of metaphorical associations between verbal images.

b) Frye and the Ideological Co-optation of Myth.

If Frye views literary myth as metaphor, he regards the ideological co-optation of literary myth as metonym. Says Frye, "The language of ideology is metonymy: it urges that this particular structure of authority [the one in contemporary society] is the closest we can get to the ideal one, and so is being 'put for' the ideal" (Frye, 1990i, 90). That is, ideology is the tendency to align elements of literary myth "to the ideals of some ascendent group or class" (Frye, 1990j, 23), "in an attempt to rationalize its ascendancy" (Frye, 1971, 49). And Frye argues that, as there has never been a time in
history when literary myth has not been so used by ideology, if one were to cut the whole of literary myth at any point in the history of its development, one would reveal a class structure.

From literary mythology, then, we get what Frye calls "social mythology" (Frye, 1971, 136): the myths that the ideologies of social classes or groups craft out of those elements of literary myth that suit their purposes and which they then identify with the literary ideal of an humane society. In turn, ideologies ensure that myths will be created in alignment with certain ideas about the nature of reality which we assume will fit together "logically" if we believe in them and "pseudologically" if we do not (Frye, 1990s, 205). In so doing, the ideological deployment of myth creates the illusion that the social mythology of a certain class corresponds to the form of the truth while others are "merely myths", that is, false or imaginary images of reality. Ideology's tendency, therefore, is to isolate particular expressions of mythology from each other, and so from society's memory, with the effect that ideology can resurrect versions of social mythology when they become useful and discard them when they no longer are.

Frye argues that ideology achieves its alignment of myth with certain class interests through ideological "displacement" (1990v, 149) and "existential projection" (1957, 63). As we shall see, displacement and existential projection, in effect, are the same type of mechanisms that Adorno describes in his account of how the culture industry achieves the reification of aesthetic form. Frye's notion of existential projection involves the tendency of societies to attribute those elements of literary mythology that conform to the purposes of contemporary social mythology to the form of reality, and then to demand that all literary productions be judged in terms of the extent to which they conform to that reality. And we see Frye's account of existential projection reflected in what Adorno recognizes as the tendency of ideology to "abstract universal characteristics from important works so as to be able to obtain a general standard for judging others" (1984, 287).

The displacement of literary myth as social mythology is the tendency of ideologies to the edition, redaction, conflation, glossing, expurgation, and insertion of literary myths, usually in their must authoritative sources -- such as the Bible (Frye, 1971, 47). The ostensible purpose of this tendency is to ensure that literary myths seem to conform to the sensibilities reflected in contemporary social mythology. But there is also a deeper purpose: the promotion of a type of amnesia in contemporary society that causes its members to mistake particular forms of literature for the whole of literary experience. Thus, Frye argues that displacement is an attempt by ideology to suppress all literary experience except that of the centrifugal associations between certain elements of literature and its own view of reality, its effect being the isolation of those literary elements from the total form
of literary experience (49), and, with those elements, the members of that ideology’s society as well. The isolation of a society’s members from literary myth renders that myth malleable to ideology, allowing it to discard or import other elements of literary myth into its own social mythology, and in ways that serve only its own purpose. Frye’s description of displacement resonates with Adorno’s account of how the culture industry extracts formal practices and ideas from their contexts in artworks, reproducing them as the formulas of mass culture. For Adorno avers that it is the culture industry’s rendering of artistic form into formula that retards the ability of mass audiences to appreciate the artworks from which those formulas were taken in the first place. In turn, their isolation from artistic form allows the culture industry to recycle more practices from old artworks to mass audiences as the form of the new (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1979).

Frye argues that under the influence of ideology, myth is transformed into a force that dominates us (1966, 145), and history, into a mythic cycle. That is, ideology demands that myth be repeated in "inorganic" (Frye, 1991, 52) forms -- forms divorced from their life in literary creation -- in order to validate and reinforce the truth claims of contemporary social mythology. But, as Frye points out, because ideological forms of myth are always projections onto reality (and often hostile ones at that), like all projections they inadvertently give expression to reservations about that which they explicitly affirm. Too often a social mythology’s description of hostile and aggressive enemies betrays its own society’s hostility and aggression. And increasingly, a social mythology’s endorsement of its own society’s progressive nature betrays the extent to which its elites have become obstacles to that progress. But since ideology is essentially a dogmatic form of expression, and, as such, is “impervious to argument” (Frye, 1990e, 98), it demands the suppression of such negativity on the part of social mythology with the result that the maintenance of any particular form of social mythology requires the appeal to force.

As Frye has it, all ideologies eventually go into decline only to be replaced by new ones. With decline comes the loss of an ideology’s social authority and its ability to deny the hidden expressions of dissent in its social mythology. As social mythologies are judged in terms of their correspondence to truth, this expression of dissent by the mythology of a declining ideology is taken by newly ascendent ideologies as a sign of its falsehood. It also acts as the pretext for allowing the new ideologies to attach the authority of literary myth to their own ascendent class in the construction of a new social mythology.

But, as the construction of social mythology by newly ascendent mythology is essentially a reaction to the supposed falsehood of the mythology of the previous ideology, newly ascendent
ideologies tend to construct their social mythologies out of the elements of literary myth that were discarded by their predecessors. Thus, Frye has it that the ideological domination of myth traps human society in a cycle of repetition. Isolated from the total form of literary myth, society’s members are unable to recognize, and so must suffer, the recurring reproduction of its forms as social mythology. They must treat their experience of social mythology as the form of a reality to which they must adjust, not as the "fossilized former human creation" (Frye, 1990v, 85) that it actually is.

For Frye it is these fossilized forms of myth from which literary works attempt to estrange ordinary language, incorporating that language into their centripetal structure. Within that structure particular images of myth are expressed not in terms of their actual correspondence with the form of the truth, but in terms of their potential identity with each other as diverse forms of a conceivable human experience. "Literature is not itself a myth of concern [a social mythology], but it displays all the imaginative possibilities of concern, the total range of verbal fictions and models and images and metaphors out of which all myths of concern are constructed" (Frye, 1971, 98).

Armed with this reservoir of conceivable experience — much of it discarded by the social mythology of the contemporary period, and recent times recently past — the reader of literature has the means to perceive that while there are recurring facets to human history, this does not entail that human history must be "a matter of merely doing the same thing over and over again" (Frye, 1991, 52). That is, the literary imitation of myth entails that, while the past does have some claim on the future humans build for themselves, this does not mean that humans must construct the future as a monument to the past as social mythology represented it. We see the above notion that history is more than mere repetition played out in Frye’s historic modulations in the literary form of myth. For, while each of these modulations conforms to an historically particular form of social mythology, all of the modulations are present in each and every literary work, a testimony to the images and ideas that the social mythology of the work’s era has discarded. It is this vision of literature that leads Frye to insist that the only enduring form of society is that contained in literature and the arts (Frye, 1990e, 97) Thus, Frye sees literature as acting to remedy the amnesia which we saw earlier that social mythology imposes upon the members of its society. In so doing, literature resists the violence that ideology visits upon its mythology. Its resistance is in aid of the "hope for a society that can remember on Tuesday what it thought it wanted on Monday" (Frye, 1991, 57). In Frye's views on history as the recurrence of myth, we hear Adorno’s argument that the arts, by imitating the mythic cycle, but in self-conscious form, transcend it (Adorno, 1984, 78). That is, like Frye, Adorno sees
art "sublimating into imagination and form" its "displaced and forever recurrent mythical content" (70)

4. Frye on Two Types of Violence to Convention.

a) Convention Defined.

Like Adorno’s notion of art, Frye’s critical understanding is of literature as an imaginative mode of expression, one capable of a vision transcending the repetition of myth in history. But as we saw in our exposition of Adorno, such an understanding entails the literary work in acts of violence against convention that, by countering the violence done to convention by ideology, completes it. Can the same be said for Frye’s understanding?

In the above section, we saw Frye’s account of how elements of literary myth are incorporated by ideology into a social mythology which ideology then associates with particular ideas and ideals of reality. But we also saw, in turn, that ideology demands of literary practice a conformity with that of its social mythology. For Frye, the topic of literary practice takes us into the discussion of convention. That is because Frye regards all literature and its reception as an expression of imaginative practice and all practice as conventionalized.

Frye defines convention in terms of common practice. That is, Frye talks of convention in terms of the "use of pattern" (1957, 111), by which he means patterns of imagery, narrative, rhythm, etc., and calls these patterns conventional when they appear in the work of a number of contemporary artists (111). When they appear in the work of different social conditions and eras, Frye is more inclined to call them genre (111). However, Frye also seems to use convention to refer to the tendency of all works to imitate the practices in other art works -- and this includes generic practices (95-97).

But when Frye says that literary works are conventional in the sense that they imitate the practices of other works, he is not saying that all literary works employing a particular convention will appear to be exactly the same, or that they must all employ it in the same manner. Nor is he saying that literary works should be defined in terms of their association with a particular convention, to be taken as conforming to the demands of that convention to the exclusion of all others. For Frye sees literary works conforming first and foremost to the demands made by literature as an art of words, within which words are employed for their capacity to hang together in associations of imagery, not for their association with external reality.
b) Convention and Ideology.

For Frye, one of the associations with external reality that literary works must resist is the tendency of their contemporary reality to classify and evaluate them on the basis of whether or not they correspond to particular conventional categories. For resistance to this tendency implicated literary works in the dialectical relationship between the literary expression of myth and reality. Frye argues that the literary work preserves myth as a plausible account of human experience through changing "social contexts" (1957, 51). As such, literary myth resists the tendency by different conditions of social mythology to discard it as false, or to assimilate it totally into their view of reality. To achieve this preservation of myth literary works must alter their conventions in response to changing social circumstance, not to represent those circumstances but to preserve the presentation of literary myth in a form plausible to the sensibilities of those changed circumstances. As such, in its employment of convention, the literary work must maintain its distance from the conventions of the work's society without becoming unintelligible to its members, so that the work must seem to its society as a work like others, but at the same time possessing "something indefinable" that makes it true (Frye, 1967a, 85).

That "indefinable something" is expressed by the talent of literature for mutation and metamorphosis (Frye, 1957, 132). That is, literary works cannot be said to have employed conventional patterns of imagery artfully unless they have done so in a way unlike any other work. Thus, when Frye says that works imitate other works, not "such vague abstractions as [a] tradition or style" (98) of convention, he means that their imitation is not of convention per se, but of the novelty with which other works have employed convention. And the imitation of novelty can only be achieved if the imitation is somehow different from what it imitates.

It is Frye's notion of literary convention as novel imitation that ideology violates. Ideology demands that literary conventions be abstracted from their operation within the ever-changing demands of literature as an art, a demand which renders them "inorganic" to literature, "a matter of merely doing the same thing over and over" (Frye, 1991, 52). "Inorganic imitation is the same as what superstition means: binding oneself to a continuing process that is mere compulsiveness, often accompanied by the vague fear that something terrible will happen if we stop" (52). Works that succumb to the demand that they enact an inorganic repetition of convention do violence to the sensitivity with which literary convention responds to social change, ignoring the dynamic relationship between that change and plausible forms of experience. Eventually this dynamic catches up with
inorganic convention and the works with which it is associated, with the result that they evidence the effects of what Frye calls "cultural aging" (56). On cultural aging in the arts, Frye writes,

even the arts may sometimes give the impression of wearing out their historical possibilities.... And while we are not likely to tire of Beethoven, the cultural tradition he belongs to may reach a point of exhaustion where it becomes oppressive to carry it on without major change. (Frye, 1991, 56)

The exhaustion of Beethoven's tradition occurs because of social demands for works that simply reproduce his style without any sense that a true imitation of Beethoven's work would have to be sensitive to the dynamic of social change. In the event of that social change, those works tend to date. Frye recognizes the same operation of inorganic convention in the literary field in his comments on the "great deal of superficial and inorganic convention, producing ... works of followers and disciples and schools and trends generally" (1957, 104).

For Frye, the response of ideology to the cultural aging, an aging that ideology's demand for inorganic repetition precipitated in the first place, is one designed to ensure its recurrence. That is, when faced with cultural aging, ideology tends towards radicalism, which takes either the hysterical form of a reactionary call for the suppression of change or a revolutionary form that champions change at the expense of tradition. Frye argues, however, that, in the end, revolutionary radicalism (with its tendency to sweep away individual concern) is as much inclined to the use of force as reactionary radicalism (1991, 57).

As revolutionary radicalism, ideology regards the aging of inorganic conventions as a sign of false consciousness in all works with which those conventions are associated, to be remedied by their wholesale rejection. In their place, ideology demands a literature that conforms to a new set of conventions, which it extracts from contemporary literature to suit the needs of whatever social class is ascendent in the present day. Frye concludes that, as a result of their recourse to yet another set of inorganic conventions, "revolutions ... are culturally sterile: they weaken the traditions of the past and put nothing in their place except second rate versions of the same thing" (1991, 57).

As Frye points out, while revolutionary ideologies may have some insight into the illusions of past traditions, they tend to be even less insightful about the illusions entailed in their own view of reality than were the past traditions against which they rebelled. And, for Frye, ideology's lack of insight into the illusions of its own conventions is greatest when it assumes that its view of reality is completely unconventional, that literature can and should operate apart from convention. For such is the view of a mob — that of a mass market (Frye, 1990i, 83) so comfortable with its own
conventional assumptions about reality that it is completely "unaware that they are assumptions" (Frye, 1990s, 205).

Frye’s analysis of the violence done by ideology to convention seems, then, to face him with the following unhappy prospect. Literature cannot be "beyond convention" (Frye, 1990i, 80), and so cannot reject the conventions of ideology out of hand. For, as we saw above, the rejection of one ideology’s conventions leads only to the unconscious — and thus ideological — embrace of another’s. And yet literature cannot conform to the conventions of ideology without falling victim to cultural aging. I will argue that the predicament created for literature by ideology leads Frye, as it does Adorno, to conceive of the artwork as, in effect, performing a form of recuperative violence upon its conventions.

c) Convention and the Literary Work.

For Frye, every literary work "is a product of its time" (Frye, 1971, 97), and therefore, "an ideological … expression of the culture in its own age" (Frye, 1990c, 268). Yet, as we saw in Frye’s analysis of Shakespeare’s Henry V, he also holds that literary works are not limited to the expression of ideology, that they, in fact, co-opt its ideology into the expression of broader — more primary — human concerns (Frye, 1991, 16). I contend that Frye sees the literary work’s incorporation of ideology into the expression of primary concern as resulting from its literary displacement of myth and condensation of contemporary content. Displacement and condensation serve to violate literary conventions as they are understood to operate by ideology, and as they actually do operate in other literary works. But by this violation the literary work succeeds in imitating those works by differentiating itself from them, and so preserves myth as an expression of social concern that is at once at odds with and broader than those of contemporary society.

Frye’s notion of the literary displacement of myth entails that the literary work present its myth in a form that is neither dismissed by audiences of its time as false, or assimilated into their understanding of what is simply the case. Thus, the work presents its myth as the implicit form — the narrative shape or "mythos" (Frye, 1957, 366) — of more contemporary imagery. This presentation has a dual effect. As the implicit form of a story in contemporary settings, myth becomes more plausible to contemporary experience. But literature also "condenses" (Frye, 1990, 149) contemporary content into myth. That is, in literature, contemporary content takes on a mythic form which turns the attention of the contemporary reader from "centrifugal" (Frye, 1957, 73) associations between content and contemporary reality and towards the association of content as a verbal image with other
verbal images. In turn, the literary condensation of contemporary content into verbal imagery foregrounds not only the associations between images in the work but also their resonance with the imagery of every work that has employed the same myth. Frye points out that the resonance between verbal images causes them to cluster into complexes of imagery (1957, 103), the effect being that, if readers attend closely enough to the work as a structure of associations between verbal images, they can apprehend its resonance not only with all the other works that contain its myth, but with the whole of literary mythology. Thus Frye says that, at the level of anagogy, the reader can apprehend "the sense of infinitely varied unity of poetry [that] may come ... implicitly in each poem" (121).

We now have a sense of how the literary work uses the displacement of myth to differentiate itself from the conventional expectations of contemporary reality. That is, the literary work deploys conventional images of that reality, but in ways that are at odds with the depiction of that reality, which show it to be but a fleeting aspect of the total form of experience contained in literature (Frye, 1990d, 97). But this still does not solve the problem of how the literary work imitates other works in terms of its difference from them. Thus far, Frye's notion of the literary work as a displacement of myth seems only to suggest that works imitate each other because of their formal similarities. This takes us back, however, to the idea that works can be adjudged alike by virtue of their shared properties, an idea that allows the similarities between works to be measured by standards of rationality that may have been co-opted by modern ideology.

But Frye argues that in order for the literary work to be apprehended as a monad, it must operate as a concrete universal (124) — as exemplifying the essence of all literature because it expresses that essence as does no other. An explanation of how the work operates as a concrete universal takes us back to Frye's observation that literature can never really escape the associations that its words have with contemporary reality. In order to appropriate words, even those in modern imagery, as elements of its centripetal structure, the work must appropriate contemporary reality as well, not just the official version approved by ideology, but even the elements of that reality which ideology has suppressed. Of course, the literary work's need to incorporate the whole of contemporary reality into its form has the paradoxical effect of incorporating contemporary ideology as what Frye calls the work's "overthought" (Frye, 1990v, 59), in that it attaches their assumptions about reality to the whole of literary mythology. By incorporating ideology as its overthought, the work allows "the mythical [to] confront the logical, assimilating it to the concerns of human existence" (Frye, 1971, 96).
As we saw in Frye's analysis of *Henry V*, the attachment of literary myth to contemporary ideology tends to undermine that ideology's assumptions about the makeup of a good story, allowing other stories suppressed by ideology in contemporary reality to be heard. Another result of the work's connecting ideology and literary myth is that ideology's own appropriations of myth are rendered ironic, thus becoming the subject of parody, even farce. Frye is, in effect, commenting on this result when he refers to the mythological allusions in the cave scene from *Tom Sawyer* as being an example of how recognition of myth in literature is as often ironic as it is straight (Frye, 1966, 139). For, Mark Twain's novel uses the cave scene to parody the melodramatic appropriations of myth by his American contemporaries as a form totally inappropriate to the reality they purpose it to describe. For Frye, such a co-optation of myth by ideology can only be recuperated for literature as it was in *Tom Sawyer* by the "powerful literary acids of satire, realism, ribaldry, and fantasy" (Frye, 1957, 127). But such a recuperation also transforms the contemporary content of the literary work into a unique "literary context" (Frye, 1966, 140) for the articulation of myth — an expression of hitherto suppressed creativity that emerges when contemporary "impressions react to their environment" (Frye, 1957a, 5). Thus, Frye describes contemporary content as "being the structure of the individual work," that is, an expression of literary myth "distinct from the structure of the convention or genre to which [the work] belongs" (Frye, 1982a, 87).

Frye, then, understands the occasion of parody in literature to be a sign that "certain vogues in handling conventions are getting worn out" (1957, 103); that is, having already been rendered by ideology into inorganic expressions of myth, these conventions are on the verge of being discarded by ideology as well. As Adorno remarks: "Art cannot take them seriously ... [they have become] surrogates for true hilarity" (1984, 291). For Frye, literature can only recuperate such conventions by rending asunder their ideological form, a rending the literary work achieves by identifying those conventions with conventions of mythic irony. In so doing, the literary work becomes an expression of myth unique to its time and place. Thus does the work follow Adorno's dictum: that "art's constructions and montages are at the same time de-montages, i.e. dismantlements that appropriate elements of reality by destroying them, thus freely shaping them to something new" (1984, 362); that "wherever art, on its way to concreteness, tries to eliminate the universal — a genre, a type, an idiom, a formula or whatever — this negation preserves what it ostensibly eliminates" (481).

By way of conclusion, Frye's criticism purports to understand literature by following its conventions. But I have argued that it does so by following them through each literary work; each one being different from the rest, convention cannot operate in precisely the same way in any two literary
works. That is, the employment of convention by the literary work is always determined by its unique condensation of contemporary content into the expression of literary myths, myths that appear in literature only as a variety of historical displacements. What the displacements of myth share is neither appearance, nor meaning, nor even the association with same literary conventions. Thus the same myth may be associated with conventions of romance, comedy, tragedy and irony. Rather, myths are identical only to the extent that they possess a common narrative structure which describes human experience in terms of individual concerns, and which, because of its centripetal nature, is capable of resonating with all other such structures in the expression of primary concerns of humanity.

Frye, therefore, sees the invariability of myth — what Adorno calls that enduring spirit expressed in the formal configuration of every artwork (1984, 218) — as expressed in terms of its historic variability. And, because the invariability of myth is expressed in terms of its historic changes, Frye insists, in the third essay of his *Anatomy*, that the conventions in which myth is expressed must be understood in the same manner. That is why Frye describes what he takes to be even pre-generic literary conventions, or *mythoi*, in terms of their variation through the history of literary production (See Frye, 1957, 132-243).

If there is an invariable form of myth, for Frye, it exists within the literary work as monad or concrete universal; as form unique among literary works, each work resonates with the influence of every historic displacement of myth (Frye, 1990, 4) and the conventional associations that each displacement entails. Within the work's content, these conventional and mythic influences play themselves out in ways that are special to that work's form, that defy any established expectations about how particular conventions ought to operate in literature. Frye comments on this defiance of established expectations when he says, in the *Anatomy* (1957), that

sometimes … the normal categories of approach are not the right ones. In *Hamlet*, as Mr. Eliot has shown, the amount of emotion generated by the hero is too great for its objects; but surely the correct conclusion to draw from this fine insight is that *Hamlet* is best approached as a tragedy of *Angst* or of melancholy as a state in itself, rather than as a purely Aristotelian imitation of action. (67)

I have argued that, from Frye's perspective, the literary work does not impose uniformity on its diverse influences, but enacts an ironic recuperation of convention that refashions those influences into a potential unity within which their differences are highlighted. Such practice is at odds with contemporary ideology, which seeks to define identity in terms of uniformity and individuality in terms of exclusivity. Thus, says Adorno, ideology tends to cover over the cleavages in society. Like
Frye, Adorno apprehends in the artwork, a unity which give those cleavages articulate shape (Adorno, 1984, 328).

5. Does Frye Recognize a Dialectical Relationship between Literature and Commodity Form?

a) How Much of an Historian is Frye?

In my analysis of Adorno, I asked whether he would object that my description of his take on the violence done to convention by the artwork was ahistorical, whether he would counter that such violence is inherent to art only in conditions of modernity, that if such violence exists in conditions of premodernity, then it does so only in emergent or desultory form. But would such objections be expected from Frye as well?

We have seen that Frye views literary displacements of myth as responses to changing social contexts and the potential for new expression those contexts contain. In his third essay from the Anatomy, Frye suggests that his historic categories are part of a literary grammar corresponding most closely to that of Western literature (1957, 133). In his first essay, the displacements of myth by literature of his high mimetic, low mimetic and ironic modes are shown to be in response to the social changes characterized by the development of modern society, moving from the Renaissance to the present (58-62). But just how closely related to modern history are these modes; that is, do they really take the unique character of modern historical change seriously? If they do not, then, Frye cannot really be taken seriously when he argues, like Adorno, that history is about more than repetition. For it is only by distinguishing the manner in which the historic modes manifest themselves in different cultures and civilizations that criticism can bring to the fore those historic differences which history as mere repetition obscures.

Frye's thesis that the historic modes repeat themselves through the history of every civilization seems indicative of the view that the commonalities between the development of modern society and that of its predecessors are more important than the differences between them. Also, if Frye sees the first two of his historic modes as corresponding to premodern stages in the development of Western civilization (55-58), he still defines their literary output as participating in the same centripetal movement as that of modern literature, one designed primarily to resist the centrifugal associations between literary works and reality. This seeming failure to differentiate between premodern and modern literature, to recognize that the capacity of resistance is special to the literature of modern condition, casts doubt on the historicity of Frye's criticism.
Yet there is evidence in Frye’s description of the historic modes to indicate that they most closely describe the response of literature to cultural aging in the modern West, that, if the same process of cultural aging occurs in other societies, it does so in emergent form. Firstly, for Frye, not all cultures age. Cultural aging occurs only where societies become complex enough to engage in the development of the sciences, technology, and increasingly sophisticated forms of social organization. Frye (1990p) illustrates this point with the somewhat embarrassing example of the contemporary Laplander, who embraces cultural forms indistinguishable from those of their predecessors of five centuries ago. By contrast, says Frye, the culture of the present day western European would be unimaginable to their fifteenth century predecessor (316-17). Secondly, while societies other than the modern West have undergone the process of cultural aging, that aging has typically been somewhat different from cultural aging in the modern West. Frye cites the example of ancient Greek literature which, while it passed through mythic, romantic, and high mimetic modes never ceased the foregrounding of mythopoeic elements throughout (1957, 35). I would argue that the persistence of mythopoeia through the cultural aging of ancient Greece, even into literature that was more concerned with giving myth a more human face, suggests a society in which the literary capacity to resist ideology is emergent; that is, it is one in which the opportunities for resistance suggested by social change are more limited than in the modern West. That Frye’s criticism should note the persistence of mythopoeia in ancient Greek literature is evidence that his criticism entails a sensitivity to this difference.

b) Frye on Literature and the Commodification of Society.

Finally we see that Frye attributes the resistance of Western art and literature to cultural aging to its development as a consumer or capitalist society. In "The Survival of Eros in Poetry," Frye writes:

In the earlier stages of a culture, there is usually a dominating myth of concern [social mythology] which controls the arts. In the Middle Ages, for example, the ecclesiastical authorities who were the main patrons of painting prescribed the subjects to be painted and the way they were to be treated, stated which saints were bearded and which clean-shaven, which ones barefooted and which shod, and insisted on certain conventions, such as clothing the Madonna in blue. As painting grew more complex and its patronage widened, the artist became increasingly aware of technical discoveries to be made in the art of painting itself, which might command his loyalties no matter what his patrons wanted. By the time we reach Salon des refusés of the French impressionists, we have gone a long way in this direction. (Frye, 1990t, 53)
The widening of patronage to which Frye refers arose with a market society rich enough to purchase painting, music and literature as commodities, commodities in which prospective buyers, be they secular princes or bourgeois burgers, were interested in seeing their own reality reflected. And Frye shows his awareness of the influence this new commodity interest had on the development of literature, when, in _The Modern Century_ (1967a), he equates the displacement of high and low mimetic literature in the direction of realism with that of a revolutionary development in modern Western society against the institutions of medieval feudalism (Frye, 59-62). In the _Anatomy_ (1957), Frye cites the displacement of myth by high mimetic drama — especially high mimetic comedy and tragedy — into forms sensitive to decorum in speech (58) as expressive of an emergent bourgeois consciousness (283). That the prince and courtiers (58) of high mimetic drama are either at the centre of the dramatic action — as in tragedy — or arbitrate over the dramatic action of characters from the merchant classes — as in comedy — evidences the modern concern of that drama with bourgeois interests in a class structure that includes and protects them. That dramatic action results from the deliberations of the hero and their protagonists reflects the bourgeois interest in a society governed by the same principles of rationality that operate in the market place. Frye argues that as the bourgeois class gains social and economic ascendancy in modern society, literature passes into a low mimetic mode, one reflecting the concerns for the accurate measurement of reality valued by the "highly individualistic society" (59) of the self-reliant and independent bourgeois entrepreneur.

In his above quotation from "The Survival of Eros in Poetry," then, Frye is referring to the transformation of literature into a commodity form by competing patrons who give literature the incentive to follow a tendency towards greater realism, and so afford literature some distance from the conventional demands of feudal and religious authorities. This is not to say that literature abandons those conventions. Quite the opposite: literature continues to respect ancient conventions. But over time the deployment of new techniques motivated by the tendency of literature to realism alters the manner in which ancient conventions are realized by literature until their formal realization takes on a life of its own, one autonomous from the ideological values those conventions are supposed to represent.

Thus Frye sees in the influence of commodity form, an influence represented in the tendency to realism in the literature of high and low mimesis, a "liberal" force, one capable of freeing literature from traditions of authority, which literature was then able to translate into a more rational form (Frye, 1990bb, 214-15). But Frye also notes that, after benefiting literature and the arts as well as reformist religion by "dissolving the concretions of feudal authority," commodity form and the
capitalist society that made it possible "turned demonic with the industrial revolution" (215). That is, with the defeat of feudal authority, the bourgeois were no longer interested simply in seeing their perspective included in literary representations, requiring instead that literature should simply represent their interests. In effect, Frye's account of the literary modulation from low mimesis to irony is that of literature's response to capitalism's triumph over feudal privilege, and its replacement of feudal tyranny with one of commodity form. Frye argues that contemporary tyranny is more of an obstacle to literature than feudal tyranny, because unlike feudal society, contemporary society actively conflates literature with the description of reality in order to reduce both to a form of commodity.

This conflation is achieved in two ways. First, Frye argues that in the last two centuries the development of modern science and technology has given descriptive language a precision of which it was never before capable (Frye, 1990v, 6). But this social development in the precision of descriptive prose has led to the demand for a literature so pure, so transparent, that its words would contain nothing more than what is contained in thought, "the wordless data of sense perception" (Frye, 1990v, 7). Such demands are for what Frye calls "an ironic perspective" (87) in which literary language is taken to be capable of describing reality with a "neutrality that is possible in science" (87). Frye points out that, of course, such a neutrality is impossible for language (87), that, even in its description of nonlinguistic reality, language is driven by other imperatives involved in the "ordering of words" (7). But the "prestige given [by the demands for descriptive accuracy in language] to the words 'truth' and 'facts'" (6) have lent credence to the idea that absolute descriptive precision is the primary function of language. As a result it has become commonplace for all other language to be taken as a metaphor for descriptive language, and for the role played by the ordering of words in descriptive language to be an initiative excluded from conscious reflection (7).

The effect of this social demand for descriptive accuracy on literature is to subordinate what we have seen to be its capacity for autonomous ordering of words to whatever verbal conventions with which contemporary audiences have become familiar. For these, says Frye, contemporary audiences invariably mistake for the accurate depiction of reality (Frye, 1957, 132). As we shall explore in greater depth later, Frye observes that contemporary advertising and the mass media have picked up on the conflation of familiarity and reality in the general populace, engaging in the mass reproduction and distribution of literary images until they have the familiar reassuring ring of truth (Frye, 1971, 147). Surrounding the products of advertising and the sub-literary presentations of mass culture with their emotional and imaginative intensity, these images become the reason to buy (Frye, 1967a, 66) — in effect they become the form of the commodities that mass audiences consume both on
and off the TV screen. Thus do modern advertising and mass culture translate the demand for descriptive accuracy in literature into the conflation of descriptive accuracy and literature with commodity form.

Of course, Frye recognizes that even the images of advertising and mass culture have some residual irony, which gives rise to the suspicion in mass audiences that they are being taken in by fancy rhetoric — the ordering of words (1971, 136) We will discuss how Frye sees mass culture turn this sense of irony to its own advantage in Chapter Five. But one result Frye sees as deriving from the residual irony in mass culture is that of contemporary criticism to confuse the ironic effect that the ordering of words has on the representation of reality with reality itself. For Frye it is this category error that leads to what he describes as the "ironic provincialism" (1957, 62) of New Criticism.

A second way in which contemporary society seeks to conflate literature and commodity form is evidenced, for Frye, in its attempt to relegate literature to a "stupid realism" (1967a, 61) in pursuit of beauty, a pursuit that Frye warns against as being "dangerous nonsense" (1957, 114). For Frye, contemporary society demands of literature that either it be useful (that is, true to life) or that it be beautiful, a demand evidenced in the tendency in capitalist society to treat language primarily as description or as an embellishment on descriptive language (1990i, 5-7). But, for Frye, the problem with beauty is that, like what the contemporary mass audience takes for reality, beauty is really only a product of those "narrow" (1957, 114), "established" (1990i, 81) conventions with which audiences most readily associate it. Thus, for Frye, beauty's pursuit entails a restriction of the author's "choice" of "subject and technique" (1957, 114) to "certain fashionable conventions" (1990i, 81), a restriction that confines the author, for instance, to describing the human body in terms of "someone in good physical condition between the ages of eighteen and about thirty" (Frye, 1957, 114).

The danger to authors presented by the pursuit of beauty, then, is that it drives them to conform, both to conventions that are already familiar to audiences, and to those of their own past efforts which their contemporary audience has found the most pleasing (115). The pursuit of beauty, then, becomes indistinguishable from efforts to be pleasing to one's audience, which is nothing more than the affirmation of the author's ego. As an expression of the authorial ego the literary work is reduced to something that is wholly the author's production — their private property. Thus, for Frye, the modern notion that literature should pursue beauty is bound up with the notion that the literary work must be an expression of what contemporary society takes to be individual genius — but what Frye has exposed as authorial ego. And Frye argues that the latter notion incorporates the literary work into the law of "copyright" (1957, 98) where it can function only as a confirmation of authorial
greatness. By this, I take Frye to mean that, in the end, it is for the author's reputation and not what is in the beautiful work that their public queues up to buy. That is, the author's work becomes what Adorno calls a commodity through and through.

For Frye, then, the result of modern society's demand that literature and the arts engage in the pursuit of beauty results in the production of sub-literature that is indistinguishable from advertising, propaganda and a great deal of mass culture ... [in] which ... the prevailing idiom is one of stupid realism ... a kind of sentimental realism, an attempt to present a conventionally attractive or impressive appearance as an actual or attainable reality. ... We see it in the pretty-girl faces of advertising, in the clean-limbed athletes of propaganda magazines, in the haughty narcissism of shop-window mannequins, in the heroically transcended woes of soap-opera heroines, in eulogistic accounts of the lives of celebrities, usually those in entertainment, in the creation by Madison Avenue of a wise and kindly father figure out of some political stooge, and so on. (Frye, 1967a, 61)

In response to the attempt by modern society to subordinate literature to the rationality of the "market place," Frye maintains, authors of authentic literature must turn their backs on its language (1957, 60). Thus, the literature of the contemporary historic — ironic — mode views contemporary illusions that language can represent reality with an irony that exposes the imprecisions embedded in that language. And this ironic exposure extends the contemporary society's most imprecise deployment of convention. Only thus can the literature of this ironic age recuperate those conventions as an expression of myth. What Frye describes as the rejection of realism by contemporary literature for an ironic return to myth requires that it eschew the easy communicability of familiar conventions (Frye, 1957, 103).

c)Frye on the Changing Role of Consciousness in Art: the Persistence of Vernunft in Contemporary Literature.

To resist commodification by modern society, literature, as we have seen Frye argue, turns its back on the language of the marketplace and the easy communicability of familiar conventions. By the standards of contemporary rationality, literature's eschewal of communication must seem irrational. What such literature is trying to do, however, is counter the tendency of its society to a rationality that has become irrational, a rationality so obsessed with the means of production that it has lost sight of the human ends it is supposed to serve (Frye, 1990m, 168-83). Contemporary literature's return to myth is an attempt to recuperate the capacity of contemporary conventions for the expression of
Vernunft (Frye, 1971, 95 & Frye, 1990m, 178); that is, an active rationality in which human consciousness is grounded, one dedicated to the realization of humane ends.

The other reason why contemporary literature eschews easy communication is so that contemporary audiences will not confuse them with the conventions that advertising and mass culture have appropriated from literature and with which they mistake for literary meaning. This conflation of literary meaning with the conventions of mass culture entails for Frye that contemporary audiences will be totally inhibited in their approach to literature, indeed to all of the arts. As a result, all art becomes unpalatable to contemporary audiences. Like the presentation of Bach’s *Toccata and Fugue* in *Fantasia*, it has to be accompanied by cartoons to save the audience from the “tedium” of actually having to listen to it (Frye, 1966, 142).

I have tried to show how, in Frye’s account of the displacement of literary myth through the cultural aging of the West, there is a sensitivity to the unique conditions that make the response of literature to modern society unlike its response to any other, of how the influence of commodity form has acted first as a rationalizing and democratizing influence in literature, and then as an irrational and tyrannical obstacle to literary production, one that has the effect of inhibiting the experience of all literature by modern audiences. In so doing I have argued that, in effect, the response of literature to the contemporary commodification of experience is as central to Frye’s understanding of the literary work as is it to Adorno. In the next section, I will argue that Frye’s education of the imagination is intended to be like that of Adorno – to remedy the inhibition of contemporary readers from literature of all types. As we saw in our analysis of Adorno’s aesthetic education, such an education requires a preacquaintance with the operations of convention in the artwork. I maintain that Frye’s education provides just such an acquaintance.


a) Frye on Criticism as an Education in the Distinction between Literature and Reality.

We saw Adorno prescribe an education that would liberate individuals from that pre-aesthetic twilight which confused art and reality. But, in Frye’s writings on education (especially in *The Educated Imagination* [1963] and “The Developing Imagination” [1990d]) we see a different strategy at work. In these essays, Frye seems to be proposing a literary education designed to prevent rather than to remedy the confusion of literature and reality by readers. To this end, his programme of
education aims at gradually inculcating interpretive habits in students as they progress from early childhood through to graduation from university.

Frye's programme of education begins by familiarizing students with the myths and folk tales of literature, and by cultivating in students the habit of accepting them as typical story shapes to be followed rather than evaluated (1990d, 88-89). Frye recommends that only after this primary stage should students be exposed to the more displaced forms of the mythic stories: first in romance and comedy, then in tragedy and satire (90). The study of prose, especially modern prose, is something that Frye leaves for the second phase of the student's education: until the acquaintance of students with literary myth is advanced enough that they can recognize how contemporary prose is engaged not in the representation of reality so much as in the articulation of present day myths (92-96).

Finally Frye's "tertiary" phase of literary education encourages the university student to examine contemporary myths in the light of that much broader expression of myth by literature and the arts (97), an examination that will bring the student face to face with what Frye calls the real form of their society — not merely that of the "transient appearance" given to it by contemporary conditions (97). For Frye, then, the education of the imagination seems to be something that is to be cultivated in the individual from childhood: a kind of protective armour to be developed "against the assaults of advertising and propaganda" (1970, 87). Thus does Frye write, in The Stubborn Structure, that this armour should be developed "long before university, because university comes too late in a student's life to alter his [sic] mental habits more than superficially" (87).

In The Critical Path (1971) and Words with Power (1990v), however, Frye seems to recognize the need to undo the damage done to individuals by contemporary social mythology when he complains that the tendency of modern society to treat descriptive or "utilitarian prose" (1971, 144) as being at the centre of literature and all other language as a decorative metaphor for descriptive prose (144) has the effect of isolating individuals from literary experience. In his complaint, Frye argues that between them, what he calls the "mass" (1971, 149) or "communication media" (147) and the tendency of much of contemporary educational practice to treat language as "an art of communication" (144) have groomed a generation of students for whom the informing influence that words have on their experience of reality is invisible — an influence operating only at the level of their unconscious.

To remedy this tendency on the part of individual readers to unconsciously conflate literature and the depiction of familiar conventions, Frye maintains that criticism must reacquaint readers with the different manner in which the literature of each of the historic modes distances itself from reality.
This means that in an age which treats language as if it were the servomechanism for communicating nonlinguistic realities, Frye must reacquaint individuals with what has become the "excluded initiative" (Frye, 1990v, 6) in language: that is, the diverse ways in which words are ordered by the literature of each historic mode. Form the purview of The Critical Path and Words with Power, then, Frye effects this reacquaintance in his "Second Essay" of the Anatomy by introducing readers to his five levels of symbolic interpretation, each of which, as we have seen, corresponds to the literary practices of a particular historic mode. To bring the ordering of words in literature back to reading consciousness, then, Frye begins his educational programme by disassociating the attention of readers from the familiar centrifugal relations that they have come to associate with literal and descriptive meaning in literature, towards their centripetal attributes which description and literal meaning display as conventions of the ironic and low mimetic modes. This disassociation and shifting of the reading attention is achieved by approaching literal and descriptive meaning as part of an hypothetical structure. As a structure of possible experience — not a correspondence to actual experience — the work must be taken primarily as a "pattern" (Frye, 1957, 77) of words, for no account of actual experience can be extracted from it. The literal meaning of the work, then, is in the order that its words hang together such that no word can be extracted from that order without diminishing its meaning. As an hypothetical experience, a work's descriptive meaning makes it but one verbal image among other verbal images of possible experience. That is, the work's meaning is not in the experience represented, but in the potential for representation contained within the ordering of its words (1957, 78-82).

The first two phases of Frye's education not only free the ironic and low mimetic conventions of irony and realism from their thrill to centrifugal associations, they show also that the continuous conventions of descriptive writing and the radical objectivity of ironic conventions are results of the tension between recent technological developments — new content — and literary form that would condense such content as centripetal elements in the expression of myth. Of conventions of continuous descriptive prose — concerned as they are with empirical realism — Frye says they are possible only with the development of modern historiography, archaeology and the empirical sciences. Likewise, the radical objectivity of irony is a fictional mimesis transforming the alienating effect that the empirical and social sciences have had on the social and technological development of society into techniques of literary expression. Thus Frye's educational regimen starts with literal and descriptive meaning because they contain the current social content to which myth must adapt and which myth must transform if it is to remain part of the literary expression within which all modes are at play.
together. As Frye says, "The mode it is easiest to begin with is the mode that was the last historically to become fully mature" (Frye, 1990, 4).

Frye also begins his exposition of his hermeneutic levels with the lowest or literal and descriptive levels of meaning because, like contemporary literature, they allow readers to see the extent to which literature must distance itself from the conventions of contemporary life — and their centripetal associations with reality. But, surely the literature of the earlier historic modes does not distance itself from reality to the same extent as does contemporary literature. And if such works were ever to recognize in their form the priority of the ordering of words over the affirmation of convention, is this recognition not something that takes only an emergent shape in the literature of the past? Why then, is it necessary, in his upper three levels of symbolic interpretation, for Frye to portray the literature of early modern and premodern conditions as distancing itself from the ideological conventions of its day?

b) Frye’s Criticism as a Radical Rereading of the Past.

Frye’s aim in the upper levels of symbolic interpretation is not to free past literary works from the ideology of their day, but from the rigid historical categories in which the present has cast them. By showing the different, often inadvertent, ways in which literary works of the past gave priority to literary form over the association with their contemporary reality, Frye reveals how those works triumphed over history, how they incorporated elements of human expression from their own time so that those elements could only be explored more fully in times to come. As we saw in Frye’s analysis of Henry V, Frye sees the ancient literary work not as conforming to either our contemporary notion of history or that of its own day, but of reordering elements of history in a manner that causes them to turn and confront us as a human drama, one full of questions, and struggles, and longings that society tends more than ever to leave unaddressed.

Thus Frye’s analysis of Henry V, like Adorno’s of the Missa, also allows the work to effect what Brecht (Frye, 1990g, 117) calls an "alienation" (117) of its readers from their fixed ideas about history and the life from which those ideas are attached. Adorno refers to that vision of life as a "world spirit" which promises to "usher in a new world, preserving therein all that is authentic. World spirit, of course, does nothing of the sort. All it does is confirm and perpetuate the untruth of the old order of things" (Adorno, 1984, 278). To remedy the implication of modern audiences in a vision of life that merely perpetuates ideology, criticism requires their acquaintance with the form of a work such as the Missa, a work alienated from the comfortable assumptions of history. Such a
remedy is precisely what Adorno, citing Walter Benjamin, demands when he writes that "[h]istory ... has to be read against the grain" (279). Writes Adorno, "This also holds true in relation to important artworks" (279).

Frye makes reference to the same vision of life in his comments about "all the pan-historic fantasies of the nineteenth century, of Hegel, Marx and Newman and Comte, who keep insisting that by history alone can we be saved, or rather by putting some kind of construct on history that will give it a specious direction and meaning" (1991, 56). For Frye, such constructs serve only to give us history as "the continuous record of what dominant ideologies do" (1990v, 61). In Frye's way of thinking, the only remedy for historic fantasies is in a fictional history such as *Henry V*. There, it becomes clear that the play's 'history' — its narrative structure — "is not 'following' history at all," and so articulates the play's indictment of the fantasies with which history is associated (Frye, 1990g , 117).

Section D.

Do Adorno and Frye see Literature as Being Related to the Same Society?

I have tried to show that for both Adorno and Frye, criticism can only apprehend art and literature as maintaining their autonomy from ideology if it sees them as distancing themselves from their society and its conceptions of history. For both thinkers, this distancing does not demand the complete rejection of society's conventions; in fact, such a rejection would be impossible. Instead, the work of literature or of art distances itself from society by estranging (in Adorno's parlance) the conventions and content with which it has been commonly associated from contemporary reality: condensing (in Frye's parlance) the conventions and content into the work's own language-like or centripetal associations.

As such, Adorno argues that the work's conventions and content become part of an associative structure which resonates with the whole of history and society in its recreation of mythic terror and the hope for a better life that terror implies. Likewise, Frye argues that the conventions and content of literature are incorporated into the centripetal structure of the work. That is, acting as a structure of verbal and thus hypothetic associations, the work reveals that its conventions resonate with the whole of literature as a structure of myth — and with it the whole of the work's society in imaginative form.

But is Frye's formulation of the manner in which literature distances itself from society really like that of Adorno? Should we not want to say, on the one hand, that Adorno sees art as distancing
itself only from the illusions of society, and thus of relating itself to a social reality which those illusions obscure; and, on the other hand, would we not be correct in saying that the vision of society to which Frye attaches literature, being hypothetical in principle, can never be one in actual fact — never a social reality?

I think Frye would respond, however, that the vision of conceivable society in literature is a total form of possible society, one which contains actual form of society as well as those forms which actual society suppresses. Thus, Frye would hold that the conceivable society of literature is, in effect, more real than actual society (1990, 85). In its exploration of possible forms of experience, argues Frye, literature apprehends a part of reality "our senses have filtered out" (Frye, 1993, 134). That is, literature apprehends that part of reality that actual society has failed to achieve. As such, literature, for Frye, is an indictment of the ideological illusion that reality is confined to a society's achievements, an indictment demanding, for instance, that "[t]he Canada we really owe loyalty is the Canada that we have failed to create" (Frye, 1967a, 122-3).

For Frye, the loyalty called for in literature is not to a particular course of revolutionary action but to a "supplementing of consciousness" (1990, 52) which allows readers to see the creative potential in elements of society that ideology has dismissed as irrational, evil, or unsightly. "As meditation in the widest and most flexible sense" (Frye, 1990, 96), literature is just such a supplement and thus the experience of literature is a necessary precondition of any truly revolutionary praxis.

But, if the society to which Frye sees literature being related is a real one, is it real in the same sense as the society Adorno apprehends as related to art? Adorno writes that "in the history of the real world outside, what increases is not only repression but also the potential for freedom which is at one with the truth content of art" (1984, 279). That is, like Frye, Adorno sees the form of society to which art relates as containing that part of reality which society in its repressive condition has suppressed, the reality that lies beyond a simple description of actual conditions in the imagination of those social forms that society could still but has as yet failed to achieve. Thus Adorno says that the artwork "assist[s] the non-identical ... against the repressive identification compulsion that rules the outside world" (1984, 6).

That Adorno sees the reality of the society described by the arts as more real than that described solely in terms of actual social conditions is evidenced in his comments on empirical reality. Says Adorno, "Aesthetic behaviour [the perspective of the artwork] is the ability to see more in things than they are. It is the gaze that transforms empirical reality into imagery. ... Those who do not
project at all do not grasp empirical reality; they reiterate and distort it, expunging the communication between diffuse particulars" (1984, 453-4). For Adorno, then, ideology -- which reduces experience to its simple reiteration, as Adorno's analysis of the culture industry shows (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 120-68) -- distorts the experience of reality. And this distortion can only be corrected through acquaintance with the possibilities for communication and solidarity between elements of society that ideology treats only as diverse particulars.

Adorno maintains that an acquaintance with suppressed possibilities for social solidarity can be made in the experience of the artwork as "a historical spokesman for repressed nature" (1984, 348). But as such -- and in spite of what Fredric Jameson (1981, 287-288) argues -- the artwork, for Adorno, is no more an expression of actual struggle for Utopia in society than is mass culture. That is, the artwork records only "the memory of what has been vanquished and suppressed" (1984, 366). Adorno would argue that the difference between art and mass culture is that, on the one hand, mass culture ignores what has been vanquished and oppressed as simply non-existent. "The truth of art," on the other hand, "comes into view when a non-existent is seen to rise as if it were real" (122) -- when art affirms the possibilities contained in what actual society takes to be non-existent. The history of society which each art work contains as a monad is an expression of society's potential to be more than ideology says it is, and thus, is an imaginative construct. Thus, Adorno holds that the "principle medium [of artistic experience] is imagination" (178); its "truth is the antithesis of existing society" (279).

As a force for change, the artwork is for Adorno, not a prescription for action by actual social forces, not an expression of their solidarity. Rather, for Adorno, as for Frye, the artwork is an agent capable of broadening consciousness about the untapped possibilities for solidarity in society. As such it has the capacity to "help determine changes in society, albeit in a subterranean, invisible fashion" (343). Thus, Adorno and Frye both see in art and literature a world that is more real than that of actual social conditions because it is an imaginative one, giving expression to "tangible possibilities" (347) for social change.

E. Conclusion.

Both Frye and Adorno see literature and the arts as depicting potential worlds that are more real than the actual one. For, under conditions of ideology, actual reality denies that potential for freedom which is very much a part of its reality. Further, both thinkers seem to concur that in contemporary conditions of society, where the activities of the imagination are so effectively masked,
an acquaintance with literature and the arts is a necessary precondition to truly revolutionary changes in society. But, as I have tried to show in this chapter, such an acquaintance is predicated upon education and a preacquaintance with the aesthetic operation of convention.

Thus while Adorno says that respondents must "give [themselves] over to the work" (1984, 346), surrendering to its form and not confusing it with the categories of nonaesthetic reality, he also says that the artwork is an object requiring the utmost "concentration" and study (348), an object often accessible only to experts (334). So too, Frye says that the goal of literary experience is that the reader inhabit the literary work, neither confusing it with reality nor being deaf to what it actually has to say (Krieger, 1966, 139). Likewise, in *The Modern Century*, he says of art that it "demands an active response with an intensity that hardly existed before" (Frye, 1967a, 69). We have also seen him, however, when he warns against "trying to operate the gambling machine of ideal experience" (Frye, 1971, 29) preferring the cool medium of scholarship to the heat of engagement with the text in time (25-32).

In the next chapter, I want to confront the possible objection that Frye fails to honour the perspective of the social margins: the location of those suppressed possibilities for creative experience which, we have seen Frye argue, it is the purpose of art and literature to express. According to this objection, by advocating an education in aesthetic convention and the resulting expertise as prerequisite to the experience of works of contemporary art and literature, Frye is implicated in the assumption that the perspective of the social margins will be one of ignorance. I will try to counter this objection by arguing that Frye, in effect, follows Adorno in showing that because contemporary literary expression has been forced to the social margins, the persistence of literary freedom depends on a criticism attuned to the esoteric concern of modern lyricism. That is, without an education of the imagination, criticism cannot even begin to honour the perspective of the social margins.
CHAPTER THREE:
FRYE AND ADORNO ON THE PROBLEM OF CONTEMPORARY LYRICISM:
DO THEIR CRITICAL THEORIES IGNORE, OR DO THEY SPEAK FROM
THE MARGINS OF MODERNITY?

A. Introduction.

At the end of Chapter Two, we encountered the objection that the critical education envisioned by Adorno and Frye entails a response to works of literature and art which ignores the perspective of the social margins. That is, the critical or expert response to art and literature required by Frye and Adorno, one based on a preacquaintance with the workings of convention, excludes those individuals whose perspective is also excluded from expression in the social mainstream. This objection derives from critics theorizing from the perspective of the subaltern and has been directed at Frye by feminist critics Deanne Bogdan (1992, 146; 1994) and Margaret Burgess (1994), who give priority to insights obtained when individuals of oppressed gender, colour and ethnicity confront the text with their bodily experience of life in contemporary society: it assumes that their participation in the text results in insights that articulate what we have seen Adorno call the non-identity of society — the reality which contemporary society both denies and filters out of mainstream consciousness.

But, Adorno, in effect, argues that without the remedy of education, such as that advocated by himself and Frye, the co-optation of texts and textual experience by contemporary society has precluded the possibility that participation in texts by individuals of any group, no matter how oppressed, would amount to a sustained resistance to mainstream ideology. Thus, mass culture has ensured that individuals will come to the artwork preprogrammed to respond to them as conforming to the most infantile of expectations, and that works which confound such expectations will be incomprehensible to everyone but an expert. For this reason, Adorno states that "[t]he elitist segregation of the avant-garde is not art's fault but society's" (1984, 360). As we see in this chapter, nowhere does Adorno make the case for the above statement more strongly than in his analysis of contemporary lyricism.

Chapter Three of this thesis is an analysis of how Adorno and Frye both see engagement — that is, the integration of the reader's subjectivity with the form of the literary text — as having been co-opted and reified into absurdity by mass culture, so that, by itself, participation in the literary work is no guarantee of resistance to indoctrination by contemporary ideology. According to this analysis, Frye and Adorno do not simply dismiss engagement as a precritical response to the text.
They do, in effect, argue, however, that what is needed to recuperate participation for critical insight is a theory. Such a theory would retrace the retreat by literature itself to the margins of contemporary society, and educate readers to respond to literature as a lyric structure, capable of recreating the marginal perspective from which the truths of mainstream society are exposed as artificial constructs. In this educated response, one which treats literature as an expression of contemporary lyricism, both Frye and Adorno see the integration of the individual subject and the form of the work. And it is this fusion that challenges as illusion the terrible dictum that the fate of all contemporary individuals is one of alienation.

I contend that, in their critique of Oswald Spengler’s historic determinism, and their account of analyses of the lyric genre, Adorno and Frye articulate a theory of how modern literature maintains its resistance to ideology by in fact retreating to the social margins. Frye and Adorno see the contention by Spengler that marginalization and impotence are the fate of modern literature as a misinterpretation of history. Rather, they maintain that marginalization is the very strategy by which literature maintains its independence from the social mainstream, and with that independence the capacity to change the current trajectory of history.

To understand how literature operates at the social margins as a form of resistance, Adorno analyses the influence of the lyric genre on contemporary literature. I argue that Frye’s analysis describes the lyric as having the same properties and the same relationship to history as does Adorno’s, so that, in effect, Frye’s analysis of the lyric also gives us an explanation of how literature operates at the social margins.

According to my argument, both Adorno and Frye see contemporary lyricism as a literary genre in which words express radically subjective, individual impressions unconnected with their meanings in contemporary society. That is, they see lyricism as a form of literary expression that turns away from the association between words and their contemporary meanings to their association with other words and sounds. Adorno and Frye, however, do not contend that the lyric merely rejects society. They both argue that, in its verbal associations, lyricism recaptures the linguistic influences from a time when the distinction between subject and object was not so polarized as in contemporary social conditions. Thus, lyricism’s expression of individuality expresses the memory of a society from which individuals were not so alienated as they are at present, and preserves the hope that such a form of society could be realized once again.

In its extreme individuality, Frye and Adorno regard contemporary lyricism as different from past lyricism, as constituting a unique response to a late capitalist condition of society that co-opts all
other conventions in its reification of individual experience. As such, modern lyricism becomes the defining generic influence in literary production, the influence that allows literary works to maintain their resistance to modern ideology. They allow, however, that by its very difference from its archaic predecessors, modern lyricism preserves the linguistic essence of earlier forms of lyricism, albeit an essence that lingered in the background of archaic literature practice, showing itself only in momentary flashes and background influences.

Frye and Adorno would argue that if literature in contemporary modernity is to be apprehended as literature at all, it must be taken primarily as an expression of its lyric influence. Only thus can literature be seen to counteract the reifying influence of mass culture. For, under mass culture, all traditional modes by which individuality is expressed have been co-opted into the actual reproduction of "well adjusted" workers and consumers. The only means by which criticism can counter the reification of identity by contemporary ideology is that of a critical education in how lyricism disrupts the conventional expectations of modern society. That is, criticism must educate readers to apprehend all forms that lyricism gives to the expression of individual identity as potential or hypothetical ones — many of which are ignored or dismissed in contemporary life. In turn, criticism must also teach readers to reject any interpretation regarding literature as expressing a definitive form of actual individuality on the grounds that all such interpretation is symptomatic of the kind of ideological evaluation that precludes any definition of individuality from the social margins as irrational, dysfunctional, or simply unintelligible. I contend, then, that the analyses of the lyric by Adorno and Frye entail the following conclusion: if engagement of the text by members of subaltern groups is to result in something more than simply a reproduction of the prejudices that marginalized them in the first place, their engagement must entail a recognition of the text's lyric influences. For it is these influences that can give expression to and resonate with the experience of individuals excluded from the social and cultural mainstream of contemporary society.

I conduct my argument in chapter Three, first with a section comparing the critiques of Spengler by Adorno and Frye, and then with two more comparing their analyses of contemporary lyricism. Thus, the second section of this chapter deals with the perspective taken by Frye and Adorno on modern lyricism as a literary genre. The third compares their separate views on how modern lyricism differs from its archaic predecessors in order that it might preserve their literary essence into an age where no other source of resistance to ideology remains. In order that it might effect this preservation, lyricism takes art, criticism and critical education to the margins of contemporary social expression. Also, for purposes of this thesis, the term lyricism should be read as
referring only to its technical use as articulated by Frye and Adorno in this chapter, and not to any wider usage.

Section B.

Adorno and Frye on Oswald Spengler:

His Vision of History’s Fate in Recurring Cycles of Decline.

Both Frye and Adorno begin their analysis by endorsing Adorno’s observation that, just as ordinary individuals in contemporary conditions have been forced into complete alienation from their society, so also do literature, the arts and with them criticism find themselves at the periphery of social expression. But neither Adorno nor Frye sees this observation as indicating the proper fate of humankind, nor do they see it as a sign that contemporary cultural expression has been reduced to complete impotence. Indeed, it is the persistence of literature and the arts as the clash between the imagination and the landscape of an alienated society that preserves what Frye calls "the still small voice" (Frye, 1990q, 140) of sanity in a world that where, as Adorno attests, even rationality has been taken to insane extremes (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979). That is, in their seemingly divergent accounts of Spengler, both Frye and Adorno argue that, while the forces of cultural aging in modern society push literature from a position of social authority to that of an expression of the social margins, it is from this vantage that literature is capable of articulating the truth about modern society’s denial of freedom. The tendency of modern society to develop as if tyranny and decay are the only conceivable fate of civilization is shown to be one based on illusion, an illusion exposed by the ability of contemporary literature to recreate out of society’s suppressed innovations the dream of an emancipatory alternative to tyranny.

Frye’s defence of the Spenglerian model of history might well leave him open to accusations that, my previous arguments notwithstanding, he has a cyclical and determinist model of history, which he imposes upon our interpretation of the past with no sensitivity to the special characteristic of modern experience that such an imposition might violate. Is not Frye’s defence of Spengler just another example of his creating categories of explanation that leave the real problems of modernity unexplained? Is it not just another instance of Frye’s imposing an eternal shape upon history within which we interpret literature, one that precludes the possibility of any insight arising from the special circumstances of contemporary modern life and of lived participation in texts under modern conditions?
I bring Frye’s views on Spengler up at this juncture because I want to show how they must be seen in the light of his understanding of cultural aging and literature and the insights that this understanding brings to the nature of history, ideology and modernity. So far, I have argued that Frye’s criticism is counterhistorical, that his education in convention is designed to show how convention might operate in a manner not co-opted by modern ideology, that his postulation of a total form of literary experience is designed to illustrate a use of cultural forms which allows readers, even though they are entirely products of modern ideological conditioning, to reflect critically upon that conditioning. Likewise, if Frye accepts Spengler’s organic model of history, it is only to incorporate that model into his counterhistorical approach to criticism, to help sort out the distinction between cultural aging and the persistence of the arts under conditions of modernity. The form in which Frye finally accepts Spengler’s organic model mirrors the truth value which Adorno grants to Spengler’s theory of cultural aging. For both Frye and Adorno also agree to its untruth.

Frye’s analysis of Spengler shows how cyclical and determinist perspectives on history can be conflated with linear and progressive ones. If criticism seeks to discover what is new and special about modern experience, especially when in contemporary conditions representing the old thing as new and exciting has become a matter of ubiquity, then it should see how the interpretations of Spengler by Adorno and Frye coalesce.

According to Frye’s 1955 article on Spengler, Spengler affirms that all civilizations go through the same process of aging and death and that all cultural aging has three identifiable stages in common: the first being an age of prophets and the founding of religions; the second of artists, poets and the development of cultural forms; and the third of statesmen, generals and the struggle for power between warring states (Frye, 1990p, 317-8). While Spengler concedes that all three periods are capable of artistic production, and while he does not think that art necessarily gets better with the aging of civilization, just older, he stresses that the last period in the aging of a civilization is one in which poets and artists are and should be pushed from the centre of social action (322) For Spengler, the proper activity of a civilization in its old age is the test of force between communities. As the late stage of a civilization’s aging is one of alienation, in which different cultures cannot learn from each other (324), the arts — concerned as they are with creating the associations that make civilization into a form in which all cultures can participate — have no place. They become peripheral because they are irrelevant to a civilization’s old age. Frye also notes that Spengler sees the modern West as a paradigm case of cultural aging. For Spengler characterizes the West as an “infinite expansion” — it spreads its intolerance and the domination by which intolerance manifests itself over the entire globe
(324). Thus, for Spengler, modernity — social progress fuelled by the development of science and technology — is reduced to nothing more than a manifestation of cultural aging, to the condition of western civilization just before it disintegrates, leaving the field open for the birth of a new civilization (324).

Frye endorses Spengler’s organic model of civilization, at least to the extent that all civilizations descend through three stages of aging (Frye, 1990p, 317-8). He sees great strength of Spengler’s model as a warning about the nature of modernity, namely that a modern society that deploys its science and technology in pursuit of universal domination is, like all the civilizations that came before it, destined for extinction. For Frye this warning is in refreshing contrast with historian Arnold Toynbee’s notion that the West might muddle through what he calls its "period of troubles" (Frye, 1990p, 322) to continue indefinitely along the road of progress.

But Frye disagrees with Spengler’s affirmation of aging and death as the proper fate of civilization in the modern West, and in his relegation of the arts to a position of irrelevance in the advanced age of Western civilization. Under conditions of ideology, death and the birth of yet more civilizations may be the outcome of aging in the modern West. Frye, however, thinks that because Western civilization is organized around advancements in the sciences and technology it has the potential to initiate something new in the history of civilizations. Instead of inaugurating a new civilization, destined to descend into a competition between warring cultures, the decline of the West could mark the transformation of modern societies into a human community with bridges that transcend cultural divisions and the hoarding of resources that those divisions entail. For Frye, Spengler may be right about the decline of the West, but not about its death. Thus Frye does not believe that the old age of the West need be nor that it should be a time of troubles. As Frye writes about Spengler’s description of Western decline as an appeal to hard-headed reality and fate, "We can see that Spengler was one of a group of sentimental conservatives among the German intellectuals of the Twenties ... who talked so much about being hard and realistic that they didn’t notice they were dreaming" (Frye, 1990a, 315).

In his rejection of Spengler’s notion that cultural aging and death constitute the fate of the West, Frye is in concurrence with Adorno. While agreeing that Spengler accurately describes the alienation characteristic of late modern society, Adorno criticizes Spengler for identifying this condition with that of the decline of earlier civilizations such as that of Classical Rome, whose demise may have been caused by "the unproductive condition of their Latifundia and slave economy" (Adorno, 1990, 71). Modernity, Adorno points out may have the "productive resources" (72)
necessary to escape this fate. Thus, Adorno says that "there is no reason to suppose that modern society must inevitably repeat this cataclysmic rhythm" (71).

In a vein similar to Frye's, then, Adorno argues that while the poverty of premodern life may indeed have made repeated patterns of decline and death a necessary characteristic of civilization in premodern conditions, the capacity of the modern West to overcome poverty gives it the potential to break out of conditions of civilization and the domination and tyranny that accompany them. That the West has so far failed to realize its potential is, for Adorno, a result of ideological choice and market strategy, not of economic or historical necessity.

Far from resisting these strategies of decline, Adorno argues that culture -- comprising those creative practices that pursue "form and order" (Adorno, 1990, 71) for their own sake -- has tended to be "in complicity with ideological domination" (71). That is, under conditions of decline -- what Frye calls the late phase of cultural aging -- Adorno has it that modern culture identifies the order and form of ideological domination with modern society's defining ethos -- the belief in "continuous progress" (71). Culture's identification of progress and domination serves to rationalize the dehumanization of individuals and their living conditions by late modern ideology, and so hastens the "decay" (71) of society into barbarism.

But, if the decline of modern society is not fated, neither is culture's complicity in that decline. Adorno argues that cultural practice can resist the decline of civilization, but not by rejecting the domination and barbarism of that decline. That strategy would lead only to idealism and the further rationalization of ideology. Rather, cultural forms that would protest against the ideological strategies of decline should embrace the barbarism and domination -- the "decadence" (Adorno, 1990, 72) -- of modern society, at the same time "renouncing allegiance" (72) to that ideology's conflation of societal decay and the image of a progressive society. In so doing, cultural works can articulate in positive form the protest of which the powerless of society are a "negative embodiment" (Adorno, 1991, 72) against "the horror of prehistory" (72) that contemporary ideology has imposed on society. That is, contemporary culture can protest domination and tyranny in modern society through a silent pointing at the oppressed and miserable of the earth, which says that their sickness speaks for itself as an indictment of the course charted by modern ideology. Also, by pointing to what ideology has dehumanized and sickened, cultural forms identify the productive forces cast aside by ideology, forces capable of building a "better life" (72).

Thus, Adorno concludes that cultural forms will articulate their resistance to ideology "not in [a] resurrected culture but in the utopia that is silently contained in the image of decline" (Adorno,
As an example of art that captures utopia in the silent image of decline, Adorno cites the works of the avant-garde: these works sever culture's ties of allegiance with the ideological image of progress by effecting an ironic disintegration of ideological appropriations of aesthetic convention — even its appropriation of irony's ubiquity. In so doing, art recreates the modern appropriation of convention as a reminiscence of the poetic vision that modern ideology both suppresses and rejects. As Adorno writes in *Aesthetic Theory*,

> [A]rt is able to utter the unutterable, which is Utopia, through the medium of the absolute negativity of the world, whose image is all that is stigmatised as ugly and repulsive in modern art. While rejecting the appearance of reconciliation, [the image created by the ideological appropriation of aesthetic conventions], art nonetheless holds fast to the reconciliation of reconciliation in an antagonistic world. (Adorno, 1984, 48)

In other words, modern art disintegrates the traditions that ideology has appropriated to reclaim the vision that has traditionally been the one of which art has dreamed. The effect of this reclamation is that art exposes the untruth of society in late modern conditions — that alienation is fate — and gives expression to a truth unique to modernity. For art sees in modernity the truth that "this earth here, now and immediately could, in virtue of the present potential of the forces of production, become a paradise, [and] that this is as real a possibility as total catastrophic destruction" (Adorno, 1984, 48). Thus Adorno sees in art of the avant-garde the repudiation of Spengler's version of cultural decline — what Frye calls aging — as fate. For Adorno, contemporary literature and the arts represent to a society its own untapped potential to stem that decline and work towards the realization of a utopia.

We have seen that Frye concurs with Adorno's rejection of cultural decline as the fate of modernity. But does Frye have a view similar to that of Adorno about how modern society co-opts culture to create the illusion of inevitable decline as the deserved, even the desired fate of humankind? In *The Critical Path*, Frye talks about the rise in modern society of what he calls "anti-poetic myth of progress" (1971, 85), and which he identifies with modern society's rationalization of its tendency to domination. Says Frye,

> the "myth of progress" ... became ... an imperialist ideology, designed to rationalize the aggressiveness with which the white man assumed his burden.

> According to the myth of progress, history shows a progress from primitive to civilized states, which turns out on investigation to be a progress of technology, though it is often called science. If two cultures collide, the one that gets enslaved or exterminated is the primitive one. The victorious one was more progressive because ... it was better organized socially for destruction. (1971, 85)
Frye notes that, like the "conception of evolution" (1971, 85) with which it is closely connected, the myth of progress is one for which literature has little use. According to Frye's thinking, that is because literary -- and for that matter all cultural production -- persists through history, albeit in ever changing forms. It does not develop or advance. However, I would contend that, in his examination of the mass media, Frye shows that the myth of progress certainly has a use for literature and culture. Again, in The Critical Path, Frye shows how the mass media represent a revival of verbal culture, and with it a return to "tribal conditions of pre-literacy" (1971, 151). This co-optation by the mass media of literary form into pre-literary presentation is designed suggest "a cyclical view of history" (151), so that the viewing public will recognize its own return to what Adorno would call pre-history in the mass media's presentations of literary forms.

To resign audiences to this return, the mass media presents its forms as "a purely linear experience which can only be repeated and forgotten" (Frye, 1971, 151). This linear experience of culture creates the illusion that the imagery of cultural return is also that of a new order to which society is progressing and with which audiences must engage in a "panic about keeping up, getting with it, meeting the demands of a changed situation, etc." (152). Thus does Frye show how the myth -- the ideology -- of progress aligns itself with cultural forms in order to persuade modern individuals to acquiesce to its domination of modern history.

In the Modern Century (1967a), Frye also avers that popular forms of contemporary culture also have the continuous or teleological structure that leads and exhorts viewers, thereby connecting them with the moral assumptions -- that is, the ideology -- of contemporary society (71). I would conjecture that the continuous narrative quality of mass culture -- its sententiousness -- is exacerbated by the linearity of the mass media. That is because, for Frye, as we have already seen, the linearity of the mass media allows images only to be repeated and forgotten (Frye, 1971, 152). The tendency of the mass media to effect amnesia in its viewers shatters any conscious sense that they might have of the formal continuity between its images. Only by following the progression of those images to their inevitable conclusion in an exhortation (Frye, 1967a, 71) to accept ideological assumptions about the world can viewers get any sense of what the images of mass culture mean.

Like Adorno, then, Frye's account of the myth of progress and its co-optation of literary forms into the contemporary mass media show how culture becomes complicit in the decline of society by identifying images of domination with the idea of progress. But, also like Adorno, Frye maintains that artworks also have the capacity to resist this decline. To effect this resistance, contemporary literature subjects the myth of progress and its dissemination by the mass media to an
ironic reconfiguration. That is, "the poet hands the continuity of his poem over to the reader [so that, as in the case of Finnegan's Wake, 1939] the reader ... is the hero of that book, the person who laboriously spells out the message of the dream. This technique is continuous but not rhetorically continuous; that is, the links are associative and not merely ready made as they are in a propagandist's speech" (Frye, 1967a, 69), or, I take it, in the sententious presentations of the mass media.

According to my reading of Frye, then, contemporary literature emphasises the same verbal quality of continuous speech represented in the mass media. At the same time, however, contemporary literature dissolves the exhortative characteristics inherent in the products of mass culture, that is, their demand that readers follow their images towards the discovery of some hidden purpose to which those images ultimately refer (Frye, 1967a, 71). Thus, Frye writes "how in The Waste Land (and much other modern poetry) the poet hands the continuity of his poem over to the reader" (71). The effect of modern poetry's dissolution of the association between image and external meaning is that the reader must confront the meaninglessness of the cultural forms as they are presented by mass culture, a meaninglessness which the modern literary work exposes by severing their sententious connection to ideological assumptions about reality. Yet, for Frye, it is in the work's imagery of experience, now devoid of the meaning which the myth of progress tries to impose on it, that the reader must discover new meaning, and so construct a vision of society out of the formal associations between images that ideology acting through the mass media suppresses.

Later in this chapter, we will return to Frye's account of how contemporary literature rejects the sententiousness that characterizes modern popular culture. As well, we shall revisit Frye's handling of issues around linearity in mass media and culture in Chapter Five. For now, however, I will conclude with the observation that Frye's account of the literary rejection of sententiousness shows how contemporary literature resists the modern cultural decline from the margins of society. That is, the rejection of sententiousness forces literature to speak through associations between images, and their resonance with an ironic form of verbal ideal — a literary mythology — of experience that has been silenced and suppressed by the cultural mainstream. The ideal of experience described in contemporary literature is ironic because, like the aspirations of the oppressed, it describes the world as it is not. As in Finnegan's Wake (1939), such a totality of experience is fully enclosed within its own verbal associations. On the other hand, Frye insists that the reader has not read until they have constructed a vision of reality out of work's imaginative recreation of experience; for such a vision describes that reality that society is capable of realizing but has failed to build.
In summary, for Frye, as for Adorno, Spengler is right when he says that the West has entered a time of troubles and that literature and the arts have been pushed to the periphery of society. But Frye is in concurrence with Adorno when he rejects Spengler's affirmation of aging as the fate of civilization and of the peripheral nature of the arts as a sign of their irrelevance. Indeed, for Frye and Adorno, it is from the periphery that the arts have the power in modern society to expose the potential in modern society for the humanity that ideology suppresses and to show that when Spengler talks about hard reality, he is, in fact, dreaming.

For Frye and Adorno, Spengler is not simply a describer but an exponent of modern alienation. The job of criticism is to interrogate how society under conditions of aging achieves the illusion of fate that Spengler affirms. In so doing, criticism apprehends in the peripheral nature of art something unique to conditions of modernity — the vision of society's potential to cheat fate. It is this interrogation that both the criticisms of Frye and Adorno engage. For Frye recognizes that the characteristic unique to late modern literature — the overt nature of its need to struggle against the modern mainstream — is necessary, given the nature of contemporary conditions, to its participation in the literary universe. Again, the problem of apprehending literature in its immediacy is exacerbated by ideological structures that obscure the unique relation of literature to modern society — a relation special to conditions of modernity. On the other hand, the militancy with which contemporary art overcomes this problem not only reveals what is essential to the production of literature under modern conditions but also the generic influence that is essential to the literature of every historic epoch. It is at the periphery of society, then, that literature discovers its essence. And Frye and Adorno both discuss this discovery in their analyses of the lyric.

Section C.

Adorno and Frye on Contemporary Lyricism:
Lyricism as the Generic Literary Influence.

1. Introduction.

We saw, in the last section, that Frye and Adorno both endorse Spengler's notion that, under conditions of cultural aging, literature and the arts are pushed to the periphery of social expression. They part company with Spengler, however, in his assertion that this relegation to the social periphery constitutes culture's necessary decline from an autonomous and creative form of human activity into impotence. In response, they cite the capacity of contemporary artistic and literary
works, in Adorno's parlance, to articulate the image of utopia in modern decline; in Frye's parlance, to express a vision of primary concern in associations expunged from the sententious presentations of contemporary popular culture. As we will see in the coming section, Adorno and Frye both attribute the capacity for resistance to ideology in contemporary literature — its capacity to speak from the social margins — to the generic influence of modern lyricism.

In their separate analyses of lyricism, Frye and Adorno both admit that the extreme individualism of contemporary lyricism is characterized by rejection of familiar convention and easy communicability, which risks being taken as unintelligible both by the standards of the modern mainstream. Thus, lyric expression relegates itself to the periphery of social expression, but in so doing it evidences that overriding concern with purely formal associations between verbal conventions that has become the literary generic influence in contemporary literature. Frye and Adorno argue that it is this lyric foregrounding of the role played in contemporary literature by verbal figuration that allows literature to give expression to the hope for a society more humane than that of actual social conditions.

2. Adorno's Account of Contemporary Lyricism as the Literary Genre.

In "On Lyric Poetry and Society," Adorno argues that the radical individualism of modern lyricism does not constitute a retreat from experience and the social conventions governing it, so much as it does "an expression of objective forces that impel a constricted and constricting social condition to transcend itself and become worthy of human beings" (1991, 43). Thus, lyricism is not simply the rejection of an objective experience — an experience comprehensible to a public or a community — for a "rigid individuality blindly opposing society" (43). Rather, the artistic forces at work within the subjective impressions of lyricism are themselves objective, so that the lyric expression of individuality is seen to be a type of social expression. But, if the individuality of modern lyricism is a type of social expression, it is not the expression of a society that can be reduced to a description of contemporary social norms (Adorno, 1991, 43). For the linguistic practices of modern society contain residues of practices from premodern conditions of society "less individuated than the present" (43), practices that treat the relationship between subject and object — between individual and society — as polar opposites.

In contrast to modern society's polarization between subject and object (between individual and society), contemporary lyricism expresses its subjectivity or individuality in terms of objective or
social forces, though, as we have seen from sources other than those of "existing conditions of the [present] time" (Adorno, 1991, 43):

the lyric's idiosyncratic opposition to the superior power of material things is a form of reaction to the reification of the world, to the domination of human beings by commodities that has developed since the beginning of the modern era, since the industrial revolution became the dominant force in life. (Adorno, 1991, 40)

Against this objectification of nature and experience by contemporary society, the lyric seeks an imaginative recreation of nature in human form. For, says Adorno, "it is only through humanization that nature is to be restored to the rights that human domination took from it" (1991, 41). Adorno argues that lyricism does not express its vision of a humanized nature, "its dream of a world in which things would be different" (40) through reference to reality. Rather it does so through its rejection of what Adorno derides as the "living language" (44) of modern society, and through its memory of a language that is no more — one evoking "a vanished condition of soul" (51).

A response to contemporary linguistic conventions and their reduction of experience to a description of existing social conditions, the lyric preserves of less polarized linguistic practices amounts to its turning away from the association between language and its contemporary meaning. In so doing, modern lyric expression gives priority to the concern with "linguistic form" (Adorno, 1991, 43). But, says Adorno, this is the very priority from which the "primacy of language" (43) — what we have also seen Adorno call the linguistic quality — in all literature is derived. Thus, lyricism reveals the essence of all literary expression to be that of a concern with verbal "configurations" (43) and the objective or social forces that occasion the development of these configurations. These forces are not associated with the language of contemporary reality, but with verbal influences of premodern and early modern conditions of society. For Adorno, lyric expression — indeed all literary expression — is social, but not a product of any existing society.

To understand, then, how lyricism differentiates itself from the modern treatment of subject and object and gives an expression to a vision of society different from that of modern society, Adorno holds that we must explore the lyric concern with language as a verbal form of expression (as what Frye call a centripetal structure), a concern which extends the effect of lyricism beyond lyric poetry to make it the literary generic influence on the whole of literary production (43).

Adorno argues that until criticism recognizes the social totality at work in verbal structures of lyric works, its operation will appear merely to be a disruption of their articulation of contemporary experience. Writes Adorno, "until we have broadened historically or turned it critically against the sphere of individualism, however, our conception of lyric poetry has a moment of discontinuity in it -
- all the more so, the more pure it claims to be" (1991, 40-41). Once criticism grasps the linguistic relations at work in lyric — indeed all literary works — and the historic forces against which they resonate, it will also apprehend that the work is engaged in the articulation of experience, but one at odds with contemporary society. Indeed the experience of society articulated by the work is one at odds with any that ever existed, for it is one recreated out of the verbal residue of past societies in a the context of the present one. Thus, Adorno says that lyricism "recreates the illusion of nature emerging from alienation ... and [thus] becomes more than illusion, it becomes the full truth" (41). That is, lyricism recreates a vision of the nature that contemporary society could achieve and so expresses a truth about contemporary society which that society oppresses and denies.

For Adorno, then, the radical individuality of contemporary lyricism, its turning away from the actual conditions of modern experience, constitutes its turning towards an alternative and imaginative totality of experience (1991, 38). Indeed, it is the very individualism of modern lyric poetry that allows participation in this totality. For the specificity of modern lyric poetry is derived from the priority which it gives to the concern with verbal form (43). And it is this very concern with form that is generic to all lyric poetry, indeed, to all literature, and which allows literature to act as an imaginative recreation of experience as a "whole" (45). The generic influence of lyricism (43), then, explains how poems can treat the formal properties of words as more important than their connection with their contemporary meaning while still maintaining a relationship to experience and to a "collective undercurrent" that makes it intelligible (46).

In summary, Adorno describes contemporary lyric poetry as an expression of extreme individuality — a turning away from communication with the world to the resonance between words and sounds — unlike that of ancient lyricism. But, as such, lyricism articulates its subjectivity in terms of objective forces. That is, the form of lyric subjectivity is influenced by historic uses and social contexts for words that persist only in such linguistic elements as dialect — the memory of lost lyric practices. It is this social influence — one that does not derive from contemporary social conditions — that allows lyric subjectivity to speak of a possible society from which individuals are not alienated as they are from contemporary society. For Adorno, the capacity of lyricism to speak accounts for its generic influence on contemporary literature. That is, Adorno maintains that the linguistic quality which lyricism evidences in its capacity for verbal association and the possibility of a humane society articulated in these associations is the generic literary essence of all literature of the present day. With lyricism, all literature shares the hope of "a language that is no longer present" (1991, 44).
3. Frye's Account of Contemporary Lyricism as the Literary Genre.

Like Adorno, Frye also struggles against the notion that modern lyricism is a retreat into the merely individual, that it is merely a rejection of established linguistic conventions of metre and prose for the incomprehensibility of a purely private expression. And, not surprisingly, Frye's argument for the relationship between lyric individualism and a wider vision of experience has recourse to the proposition that a generic lyric influence — a concern with the centripetality of language — links modern lyricism to its ancient predecessors and ultimately to the rest of poetry. But less expected, Frye's argument is like Adorno's in its acknowledgement that it is the specificity of modern lyric poetry — its extreme individualism — that foregrounds for criticism the generic influence of lyricism upon all literature, and that it is the polarization of subject and object in modern experience that makes the lyric totality of experience — the potential unity of things that are in actuality quite varied — a literary paradigm.

Frye's analysis of the lyric casts his comment at the end of the Anatomy — "that we discover the total cultural form of our present life" (1957, 346) in our cultural heritage — into a new light. We have always taken Frye to mean that the literary past contains a total and persistent form of experience of which the present day highlights but a "transient appearance" (1990d, 97). But, with Adorno, Frye also means that it is the "militant situation" (Frye, 1967a, 69) in which contemporary literature and the arts find themselves that allows criticism to find the seeds of contemporary resistance in the literary past — to find a capacity for "life under the gun" that is inherent to art, but which the modern lyric has developed, and which allows it to persist under modern conditions.

In his essay, "Approaching the Lyric" (1993), Frye describes the lyric, like Adorno, as the product of a "blockage" (131) born of the author's dissatisfaction with the expressive capacity of the familiar conventions governing the language of "normal activity" (131). Thus the lyric appears, at first, to be at best the discontinuous interlude between and, at worst, the disruption of, more continuous metrical and prosaic conventions in a poem and their expression of experience. But what seemed a "discontinuous element in poetry" (130), signalling a retreat into individual angst and "frustration" (132), turns out to be the lyric reorientation of the poem away from the concern with external meaning and towards a concern with expressive power inherent in words (133). In the Anatomy, Frye says that the lyric, rejecting the censorship of ordinary language and its demands that words give at least a plausible account of reality, is an exploration of the "paronomasia, sound-links, and memory links" (1957, 272) evoked by the centripetal associations of words to each other. As such, lyricism is the articulation of experience which results from such associations — an experience
limited only by the capacity of words to give it articulate shape and of the imagination to give it conceivable form.

The lyric concentration upon the poem's inherent power of verbal association foregrounds the "dream world" (Frye, 1957, 272) quality of the experience which these associations evoke so that the lyric poem gives the reader a sense that its verbal images are potentially identical with all other verbal images as dream-like displacement of the same literary experience. And Frye maintains that the central characteristics of this literary experience, the verbal identifications in myths between the intellect and nature (Frye, 1990g, 111-112), identifications opening the mind "to a strange environment that still has something familiar in it" (Frye, 1993, 134) makes it a possible human setting. That is, even if it is currently occupied by "sinister figures, giants, ogres, witches, and magicians" (Frye, 1957, 193), we are left with a sense of that the world of literary experience retains the capacity for human habitation.

For Frye, then, the lyric rhythm is concerned with the capacity of language, operating as a structure of centripetal associations, to recreate experience in the form of a human environment. But the lyric recreation of experience is imaginative because it is concerned only with the verbal — the formal and thus the hypothetical — exploration of the potential in nature for the creation of a human environment. It makes no claim to reproduce nature as it actually is. Quite the opposite. It brings to awareness "a world that our senses have filtered out" (Frye, 1993, 134). Such a definition of the lyric's antipathetic relationship to actual reality identifies it with the metaphorical nature of literature which Frye describes as evoking "controlled hallucinations," that is, an experience of life "where things are seen with the kind of intensity with which they are not seen in ordinary experience" (Frye, 1993d, 33). Thus, Frye, like Adorno, sees the influence of lyric rhythms as extending beyond lyric poetry to the entirety of literary production (1957, 272). For he sees the lyric as that concern with the metaphorical properties of language which allows literary works to participate in the recreation of nature as an order of words, and that liberates myths from their implication in structures of belief so that they may occupy the centre of this order — a centre in which nature is identified with an human environment.

Lyricism, for Frye, may not be the simple "discontinuous element" (1993, 130) — the "frustrating or blocking point" (135) — in conventional expressions of experience in language, but neither can its nature as "block" (132) be downplayed. For it is through the lyric unleashing of the power of allusion contained in poetry's most discrete moments that the truly imaginative and thus infinite nature of the verbal order — its intangibility — is given tangible form. In the first essay of his
Anatomy, Frye describes such discrete moments, in the manner of "Longinus" (1957, 67) as those of "ecstasy" (67) — as "tiny flashes of significant moments which reveal the whole of civilization's meaning" (61).

Lyric poetry does openly allude to the central role that mythic identifications with nature play in the verbal universe. But lyric allusions are more often those of language that seems to defy identification with any recognizable form. Lyric allusion tends to be the allusion of language made discrete by "retreating from [a] sense [of reality] to sound" (Frye, 1993, 132) and the formal possibilities contained in that which is unfamiliar. Thus Frye cites Hart Crane's description of the lyric poem as giving "the reader ... a single, new word, never before spoken ... but self evident as an active principle in the reader's consciousness henceforward" (132). If myth is not to be confined to authoritative statements about the actual condition of nature, then it is with this lyric allusion to hidden possibilities that myth as a verbal form must identify.

For Frye, then, it is as an apparent blockage — as something that the modern conventions governing ordinary language can only regard as arising from an act of spontaneous and radical individuality — that the lyric influence reveals in myth an infinity of concern that it cannot express but to which literature can only point through the entirety of its production. Thus, the lyric influence is one from which contemporary poems derive the quality of radically individual, subjective, expression — as if their "poet, so to speak [were] turn[ing] his back on his listeners" (Frye, 1957, 250) — and from which the expression of myth derives a spontaneity that liberates it from its implication in the standards governing ordinary experience. In turn, myth gives tangible — objective — form to the intangibility of poetic expression: myth becomes the central and recognizable element "around which the lyric [associations] cluster" (324) in the verbal form of nature as a human community, one within which all poems become comprehensible as conceivable expressions of human community.

We see, then, that, for Frye, the lyric influence allows the literary expression of myth to take readers back to a time when the distinction between subject and object was not as polarized (1990, 111) — a polarization which Frye shows to be evidenced by the extent to which the influence of the censor is able to push literary language to the periphery of modern experience. For, it is the subjective — the lyric — nature of the poem that transforms myth from the outdated statement about the nature of ordinary experience that it has become under modern conditions into the spontaneous expression of formal possibilities which ordinary experience precludes. On the other hand, myth allows the poem's expression to be more than merely individual. The poem's expression of myth renders all of its verbal associations into social forces — echoes the language used in different historic
displacements of literary myth. In turn, these forces give the poem tangible shape as the container of an imaginative imitation of nature of which myth is the central and most recognizable element.

In summary, we saw in the last section that by Adorno’s account, modern lyricism’s extreme subjectivism is neither necessarily that of a retreat into the "the contingency of a mere separate existence from society" (Adorno, 1991, 38), nor is it that of a simple rejection of the objective experience — objective experience being that of nature through social categories of interpretation. Rather, he sees lyric individualism as a concern with the primacy of language at work in all literature, a concern that depolarizes the relationship between subjective and objective expression in the poem so that its subjective expression results from the operation of artistic forces also at work in the objective expression of nature as an imaginative totality of experience not determined by existing social conditions. For Adorno, then, the critical apprehension of modern lyric poetry as more than merely a moment of "discontinuity" depends upon criticism’s understanding of lyric individualism as the expression of, what would be for Frye, a generic lyric influence working in modern lyric poetry and connecting it to the whole history of literary production.

In a manner like Adorno’s, then, Frye’s account of lyricism, as the concern with "resonance between words and sounds" (1993, 134) generic to all literature, shows the lyric influence to manifest itself in the poem’s discrete moments — moments that upset the continuous narrative flow characteristic of metrical and prosaic literary convention. If the lyric influence allows the poem to resonate against an experience of nature as an imaginative verbal form, it does so through the gaps in the poem’s conventional resemblance to contemporary speech. So, just as the lyric concern with the centripetal qualities of words gives resonance to a purely verbal and thus imaginative totality of experience beyond the purview of ordinary sense, this alternative — this objective — experience of nature, to which lyric rhythms turn the poem, manifests itself in the extreme individualism of literary works, in the incommensurability between their words and the familiar meanings with which contemporary social conventions associate them, one that finds full and autonomous form only under conditions like those of the present.
Section D.

1. Introduction.

Frye and Adorno maintain that contemporary lyricism is unlike the lyrics of antiquity, or even those of the more recent past. I will argue that for these thinkers the historically different forms of lyricism represent its dialectical relationship with the development of modern society.

For Adorno lyricism undergoes historic changes in form, moving ever farther from the cultural mainstream, in order to preserve that linguistic "impulse ... to recover the bliss of a world that is gone" (1984, 465), an impulse, says Adorno, which "has always animated art" (465) and not just literature. That is, if contemporary lyricism foregrounds a purely linguistic quality which Adorno says appeared in archaic lyricism only in "flashes" and "backgrounds" (Adorno, 1991, 40), it is because that is the only manner by which contemporary lyricism can preserve the linguistic quality of literature and the arts in an age dominated by the culture industry. Frye, I contend, evidences Adorno's understanding of lyricism's dialectical relationship with the development of modern history in his account of premodern, early, high and late modern lyricism.

2. Adorno's Account.

Does Adorno really argue that the radical difference between contemporary lyricism and its early and premodern forbears is determined by its need to preserve a literary essence that has been submerged within lyricism all along? Adorno first evidences this argument when he stresses that the specificity of contemporary lyricism -- and its overriding influence on all contemporary literature -- is the only means by which the linguistic quality of literature can survive under contemporary conditions that he calls anti-lyric. What Adorno is arguing for is a critical awareness that, under conditions of late modernity, the linguistic quality of literature -- be it the form of new productions or already existing works -- can only be preserved as a structure which rejects the evaluations that conventions of the contemporary culture industry make about its connection with life or other art.

As we recall, Chapter Two has already dealt at some length with Adorno's account of the culture industry, and, in Chapter Five, my examination of how the culture industry affects the neutralization of irony will return to that account. For now, however, I want to concentrate on how the influence of the culture industry motivates lyricism's retreat to the margins of social expression.
According to Adorno's account, then, the culture industry mounts its attack on the cultural expression of subjectivity — with which lyricism is intimately associated — first, by conflating communicability with a simple overfamiliarity of acquaintance. That is, the culture industry makes its formulas like a "second nature" to its audiences by inundating them with their reproduction. Thus does the culture industry render into a sick joke the idea that culture could have something special to communicate to the recipient individual. For instance, Adorno cites the example of the popular song "Especially for You" (1992, 44), whose mass production and distribution to millions of listeners makes a mockery of the title's promise.

The individuality of the contemporary respondent to culture suffers the same fate, at the hands of the culture industry, as culture's ability to say something special to them. Writes Adorno, "On the faces of private individuals and movie heroes put together according to the patterns on magazine covers vanishes a pretence [to individuality] in which no one now believes" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1979, 155). That is, the culture industry inundates its public with helpful tips on how to look, think, and even of what to expect of culture. And since the culture industry has employed the mass production and dissemination of its "role models" to draw out any expressions of dissent, it is able to preprogram its audience to participate in, hear, and see cultural events and artifacts just as it wants them to.

The effect of the culture industry's prefabrication of experience in rigid form is to reduce the representation of subjective experience by mainstream culture to absurdity. Thus, Adorno argues, in the Dialectic of Enlightenment, that subjectivity is reified into the "ossified" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 134) stereotypes of sentimentalism and hysteria. Says Adorno, subjectivity has come to be represented as "the mere twaddle which is acceptable in religious bestsellers, psychological films, and women's serials as an embarrassingly agreeable garnish, so that genuine personal emotion in real life can be all the more reliably controlled" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 144). The culture industry's meaning is clear. Subjectivity is a private matter. That is, silly people, maybe even serious people in the occasional silly mood, might enjoy the spectacle and expression of subjectivity. As a rule, though, serious people would suppress it. Any genuine expression by culture of subjectivity can only be unwelcome: the kind of disturbance that can only unsettle serious people already exhausted after a long day of productive work.

Given the culture industry's reification of communication, individuality and subjectivity, contemporary lyricism is really barred from employing any recognizable conventions in its own expression of individualism and subjectivity. In any event, audiences would simply mistake their
employ by lyric poetry for affirmations of the culture industry's authority. Thus, contemporary lyricism eschews easy communicability for associations and resonance of a verbal form that takes the trouble to speak for itself. Thus Adorno writes that

the lyric shows itself to be most deeply rooted in [the reality and not some ideological illusion of] society when it does not chime in with society, when it communicates nothing, when, instead, the subject whose expression is successful reaches an accord with language itself. (1991, 43)

Such an accord is reached in the lyric interplay of verbal practices and the social forces they represent when they include those images of possible society which the culture industry has discarded as dross. Adorno, therefore, sees the lyric poem as most effectively expressing itself through its linguistic qualities and thus as most deeply rooted in the reality of society when it is "primarily a protest against society as it is" (Adorno, 1991, 43). Then does lyricism register its solidarity with the oppressed, "those" says Adorno "who have also literally been degraded to objects of history" (1991, 45). Then does lyricism, in Frye's parlance, recreate the past as the realization of "our own buried life" (1957, 346).

For Adorno, then, contemporary lyricism expresses itself as an individualism that is alienated from contemporary society. That is, to identify with that society, the lyric would have to give up its individualism and the linguistic quality which allows it to express its individualism. For, as we saw above, in a society dominated by the culture industry, all associations between images are carefully controlled and always reflect the social status quo. We have also seen that, in part, the lyric preserves its individuality from the culture industry by registering the influence of language from a time when society was less individuated than now, and the expression of authentic subjectivity was able to be articulated in objective terms. Adorno also describes "the traditional lyric" (Adorno, 1991, 46) of the archaic and early modern past as the embodiment of such language, though of course, that was the language of their time. Thus, Adorno allows that the linguistic quality whose foregrounding in modern lyricism makes that lyricism a special form nonetheless existed in more traditional lyrics, if only in flashes or background influences.

Given Adorno's argument thus far, it seems that contemporary lyricism foregrounds its linguistic quality while resisting communication because this is the only way in which contemporary lyricism can preserve its linguistic quality at all. That same quality could survive in the background of traditional lyrics because theirs was a condition of society in which public forms of life might tyrannize over but did not systematically degrade and destroy the individual subject, allowing it some small leeway to express itself through public conventions.
Evidence that Adorno holds this view comes in the form of his warning that traditional lyricism has long been tied to, and not independent from, bourgeois society (1991, 46). This suggests that forms of lyricism that might have been capable of some small independence from premodern society are no match for modern capitalist society. If the linguistic quality emergent in traditional lyricism is to persist into contemporary conditions, then the form of lyricism must change and its linguistic quality must emerge as the dominant influence as a literary form.

3. Frye’s Account.

That Frye sees the same difference between contemporary and past forms of lyricism as does Adorno is evidenced by his comment that in the past the lyric influence has also been in the background of poetry — even lyric poetry, which in its ancient form had, as we shall see, very public aspects. Like Adorno, he points out that whereas the lyric has been foregrounded in modern literature (with the effect that it seems to do violence to prosaic and metrical conventions), in past literature the lyric influence spoke for the most part from behind and through more prominent metrical and prosaic conventions. And, as I will argue in this section, like Adorno’s theory of lyricism, Frye’s makes a case for how the foregrounding of the lyric influence in contemporary literature allows lyricism to preserve its centripetal structure, a structure common to lyrics of every age, into conditions of modernity. With that structure contemporary lyricism also preserves the capacity in literature for resistance to ideology, a capacity that has become essential to its survival in contemporary circumstances.

I take Frye as evidencing this case for the persistence of a literary essence through historically different forms of lyricism in his account of premodern, early and high modern and late modern lyricism. That is, Frye’s historic account of lyricism charts how lyricism preserves its integrity as a distinct genre by entering into a dialectical relationship with the history of Western society. This relationship Frye’s history measures in terms of lyricism’s changing association with metrical and prosaic conventions, especially the rise of prose to prominence in modern literary expression, its connection to the bourgeois preoccupation with realism, and its eventual co-optation by contemporary mass media and culture. Thus, Frye’s account of the lyric is like that of Adorno in showing how lyricism preserves the memory of its most ancient expressions, ones uttered in the language under social conditions in which subject and object were not so alienated from each other as they are in contemporary society. Thus does it show how contemporary lyricism maintains the hope that the reconciliation of subject and object may be recreated in modern form.
a) Premodern Lyricism.

Like Adorno, Frye holds that the lyric concern with form — its appeal to an imaginative totality of experience alternative to that assumed by contemporary society — involves a depolarization of the relationship between subject and object. In Frye’s case, this depolarization shows us that the unity of experience contained within the literary order of words cannot be reproduced in accordance with standards of meaning uniformly applicable to all ages of literary creation. The literary unity of experience can only be recreated in the specificity of every new literary work. Only in the present day does this become fully manifest. While Frye holds that it has always been the influence of lyric rhythms that turns literature towards a concern for the centripetal aspects of language, through most of literary history this influence has been submerged within other literary conventions in two important ways.

First, lyricism tends to emphasize the separateness of the personality to which its poems give expression and the distinctiveness of its social vision from that of ordinary discourse. But, traditionally, this private character is tempered by the conformity of lyric poetry to regular strophic forms of epic poetry and public worship (Frye, 1957, 294-5). So, while the traditional poet may have turned his back on his audience, addressing instead the private vision that gave authority to his work, his address was made public by the conformity of traditional lyricism to easily accessible conventions of metre. Thus, Frye says that the lyric poet’s private meditation becomes a source of public authority, one in which the audience can participate by repeating or chanting along with the poet (Frye, 1957, 250) as is still done with the psalms — what I would call a case of the poet playing cantori to their decani.

Second, the language of lyric poetry tends not only to turn away from public discourse, it also turns the rhetoric of public discourse away from its appeal to actual audiences, concentrating instead upon the expressive possibilities contained in that rhetoric (Frye, 1957, 54). In its traditional forms, however, this lyric direction of rhetoric away from its appeal to actual audiences was not so much an oppositional as an educational stance. Poets deployed the language of rhetoric as spokesmen for their society, which meant "(as [they were] not addressing [themselves] to a second society) that a poetic knowledge and expressive power which [was] latent or needed in [their] society [came] to articulation in [them]" (Frye, 1957, 54).

The articulation of poetry as knowledge reveals thematic connections between the traditional tales or myths of a community that is encyclopedic in nature. While all premodern communities are governed by ideologies that distinguish between those traditional tales that are canonical and those that
are merely frivolous or purely entertaining (Frye, 1990n, 238), and while premodern ideology treats the canonical tales as thematically more serious, more educational, more factual and closer to the truth than the frivolous tales of entertainment, the encyclopedic nature of its rhetoric forces even premodern poetry beyond the recitation of canonical tales to recognize the same serious themes in what were avowedly more frivolous forms of fictional storytelling. While it did not actually oppose or reject the authority of the canon, the effect of premodern lyric poetry was to extend the formal possibilities for the expression of serious themes beyond the limits prescribed by contemporary ideologies. By operating as what Frye, citing Sidney, calls "the companion of camps" (Frye, 1971, 66), then, lyricism influenced the premodern metrical conventions governing story telling so as to bring out their inherently literary tendencies.

Frye, then, is like Adorno in seeing the premodern lyric as operating in the background of poetic expression at a time when it may not have been overtly oppositional, when in fact literature tended to act in what Adorno calls "a pragmatic way" (1984, 289-291), one judged by the effectiveness with which it transmitted certain genres and the values connected with them. For Frye speaks of premodern societies as ones in which poets were readily acknowledged as spokesmen and educators at the centre of what was important in their society (Frye, 1971, 38-9) But we have also seen Frye acknowledge like Adorno that, even in its emergent form, the lyric is a concern with the formal properties of language — albeit one that shows itself only in momentary flashes — that allows even the earliest works of art to resist the reduction to mere objects of ideological expression. Thus, Frye argues that traditional lyricism, operating as it does within the metrical conventions of premodern storytelling, transforms the individual distinctiveness — the subjectivity — of the poetic vision into an objective vision of society or one in which the whole public — acting as decani — can participate. On the other hand, the premodern lyric also works within the canonical expression of objective experience. But lyricism transforms that expression into a concern with rhetorical qualities, a concern that extends beyond the social vision contained in a society's ideological nostrums and into the realms of more imaginative, and thus, subjective forms of storytelling. In short, Frye may not see the premodern lyric as oppositional, but he still sees it as resisting the tendency of what Adorno calls "living language" (Adorno, 1991, 44) to polarize the distinction between subject and object and to reduce all art to an object of experience — to something that does not transform that objectivity but only reflects what objective experience has to say about it.
b) Early and High Modern Lyricism.

If the lyric had long been satisfied with a traditional background role, as we see Frye write in *The Critical Path*, this satisfaction lasts only as long as the canonical tales of premodern society retain their educational authority, and poets their status as a society's acknowledged teachers (1971, 38) with the power to unlock the communal word-hoard (1971 80). With the rise of modernity, however, the poet has had to accommodate social changes — and consequent changes in linguistic practice — that lead to the rejection of this authority and the relegation of poets to the periphery of society. These changes encompass what Frye calls the "world of the marketplace" (1957, 60) — a term which resonates tellingly with Adorno's account of the connection between the rise of market society and oppositional art, with profound consequences for the development of lyric poetry, that is, as I will describe below, until the twentieth century lyricism would be deeply affected by the development of modern market society and with it the rise of prose and literary realism.

The rise of the world of the marketplace marks what is described in Frye's account of the development of drama (1957, 282-293) as a decline of literature dominated by highly stylized stories *told* in continuous metre and its displacement by fiction *written* in continuous prose, a decline in which ritual structure is subordinated to concerns for realism (269). Frye argues that it is a common misconception that continuous prose is the natural form of speech (1971, 144), that continuous prose - the sententious language adequate to the demands of realistic description — only becomes possible with the advent of bourgeois capitalist society, its development of the empirical sciences and with them techniques of accurate measure, verification, perspective, and the reproduction of print (1971, 144, 1990v, 5-6). The new sciences emphasize the role played by prose in the articulation of informed and rational deliberation (1957, 272), and in the formulation of valid choices. And, as the language of rational deliberation informed by its capacity for realistic description, prose develops to meet the needs of an "intensely individualistic society" where the informed decisions of bourgeois entrepreneurs and consumers provide the initiative for social action (1957, 59). At the same time the sciences also challenge the authority of the traditional canon, and the language of continuous metre within which it is couched, driving both from the centre of social action. Thus do the serious themes of premodern education become replaced by concern for the verified fact and accurate portrayal of reality that is articulated in the abstract and technical language of modern technology (1971, 82-3).

The rise of bourgeois society and with it the need for a language of deliberation and description has an effect upon literature that extends beyond the rise of prose fiction to encompass the whole of literature. First to feel the bourgeois influence is drama, where, even before the advent of
prose, the new decorum demands that the divine revelations which constituted the centre of heroic action in premodern spectacles be replaced by the deliberations of an heroic community with a national focus (1957, 58). But, with the rise of prose fiction to the status of fully developed form, even metrical poetry is given over to prosaic initiatives, so that Wordsworth was able to claim that apart from metre, the lexus — the word ordering — of prose and poetry had become the same (1957, 270-1). This final triumph of the prosaic over the metrical in literature corresponds with the romantic rejection of the classical forms and Wordsworth’s manifesto that poetry’s true subject matter is “the state of [contemporary] experience” (1957, 299).

Under such changing circumstances, lyricism can no longer survive at the centre of society. Its position at society’s centre depended on that society’s respect for a mythic canon and what we have seen Adorno call the pragmatic value of literature as a transmitter of that canon (1984, 289-91). Thus, if, as we saw in Frye’s description of the social role played by the premodern lyric, the poetic vision rested on its lyric exploration of the traditional canon’s expressive authority — an exploration that placed the poet at the centre of society, how does poetry survive the traditional canon’s loss of authority? We see the rejection of the traditional canon’s authority beginning in the high mimetic drama of early modernity and then more markedly in the prosaic fiction of high modernity. That is, as literature passes through its high and low mimetic stages it tends to seek authority in the nonlinguistic experience to which words refer, concerning itself chiefly with the exact relationship — and thus the clear distinction — between words and their nonlinguistic referents. How, then, does the lyric concern with the traditional forms of verbal authority persist in language that rejects the authority of those very forms?

Frye might well answer that, while poets are pushed along with the traditional forms from the centre of social life, they are not totally alienated from that social life, at least not all at once. Nor do the traditional forms lose their authority without a fight. As a result, the world of the marketplace and the shape which the language of that world gives to experience can replace the traditional authority of the metrically presented classics only by way of subversion — by taking on the guise of the poet’s art. In so doing, however, prose gets incorporated into a poetic experience in which lyricism continues to be a "minor aspect" (1993, 135), providing the centripetal background and preserving the concern in literature for the continuity of a purely verbal and thus imaginative authority. We see Frye argue, in other words, that lyricism changes in order to preserve the poetic concern with form — indeed the traditional forms in which that authority has been embodied — into a modern era when language comes to be dominated by prose and the concern with realism. Thus,
Frye cites the lyric rhythms as being those which render what would otherwise be prosaic rhythms poetic (1957, 272); by employing the plausibility principle to lever the old cultural tales from their associations with premodern expressions of ideology (272), lyricism reincorporates them into literature as the implicit verbal patterns that give prose fiction its imaginative form and its enduring social vision, and romance an influence that extends beyond its historic mode to the totality of literary production.

Frye has it that the rise of a bourgeois consciousness, and, with it, a high mimetic mode of literary expression, causes poetry to distance itself from traditional forms of storytelling embodied in the mythic and romantic modes — forms that bourgeois audiences were coming to associate with discredited ideology. With modernity, the premodern sense that lyricism was a form of participation mystique — that the lyric poem was a vision of the community in which the poet invited the audience to participate — fell into the background (Frye, 1957, 295-6). And where medieval audiences saw the romantic balladeer as guardian of the word hoard, the humanist sentiments of early modern audiences could discern only "fablers and loud lyars" (62). Such a change in audience attitude hindered the freedom of metrical and epic forms of poetry to engage in the lyric exploration of traditional tales as the verbal forms of purely imaginative expression. For these same tales, told in epic style, were coming to be seen as old fashioned, as depictions of an imaginary — a false — world that were being discredited by new knowledge and modes of social organization.

But such a distancing on the part of poetry took it away from the centre of social expression. Where poetry in the mythic and romantic modes had been the tribal encyclopedia, telling its audiences what it was important to do and know, the literature of the high and low mimetic modes had to give up epistemological authority to the empiricism of the new sciences and the rationalism of enlightenment philosophy (Frye, 1971, 82). At the same time, poetry could not simply divorce itself from traditional authority. For, in early modern conditions like those that produced Elizabethan drama (Frye, 1957, 269), the power of ancient ecclesiastical and aristocratic hierarchies — and their deployment of the mythic cosmos in a rationalization of that power — persisted into modern society, as is evidenced in the continued "cultural domination of epos: [a dramatic form in which] prose is thought to be a subsidiary form of spoken expression of which the highest form is verse" (269). The result of premodern authority's persistence into modernity was a literature "whose centre of gravity was halfway between epos and prose" (269) — halfway between the expression of the traditional canon and the depiction of contemporary experience.
If the poets were to distance themselves from ancient conventions and forms of storytelling, then, and still to preserve the independence of poetry’s social vision, they would have to do so by recreating the older conventions and forms to suit the new sensibilities, sensibilities exhibiting an increasing taste for realism. Increasingly, poets, playwrights and authors would have to smuggle the realism of deliberative language and prose into depictions of their society’s myths, transforming them from panegyrics to aristocratic privilege into depictions of a world yet to be born, depictions incorporating "the hopes and fears of all humanity" into the work demanded by "well to-do patrons" (Frye, 1967a, 62).

The distancing of modern poetry from the social conventions and mythology of traditional society recreates those myths in forms plausible to audiences demanding stories that conform to the standards of deliberative language and realism. In so doing, modern drama and fiction subject the traditional myths to what Frye calls the "centripetal gaze" (1957, 58), recasting them as the imagery of a purely literary world of fictional and thematic design within which the structural principles of literature are isolated. By recreating -- naturalizing -- myths to conform to standards of plausibility set by the developing canons of deliberative language and realism, modern literature allows the same structural principles inherent in the traditional myths to emerge in a context acceptable to modern audiences.

In Adorno’s parlance, then, Frye seems to be saying that the influence of the marketplace -- evidenced in the demand that literature should be a commodity conforming to the changing sensibilities of the bourgeois (thus, the paying audience) -- has the paradoxical effect of freeing literature from the demands both of traditional and market ideology, allowing it to recreate myth as a concern with verbal form to "obey the law of art itself" (1957, 132) -- what Adorno calls their own "law of form" (Adorno, 1984, 128).

So it is that the displacement of myth in the direction of prose and realism preserves into conditions of modernity that concern with verbal form which we have seen Frye refer to as the lyric influence. In modern conditions, the preservation of the lyric depends upon its maintaining a distance from the celebration of social myths and conventions -- from the essentially panegyric character of premodern lyricism. And it is the influence of prose which allows for this distancing. For, if the premodern panegyric linked canonical and fictional tales, revealing their common deployment of the structural principles of literature (Frye, 1971, 93), the modern panegyric, having been kidnapped as a vehicle for the expression of revolutionary triumph, merely masks these principles (75). It is in the
conventions of deliberative and descriptive language of prose that modern literature gives expression to the same structural principles fitting into a context of plausibility (Frye, 1957, 51).

But if the influence of prose preserves literature from reduction to an expression of ideology, prose does not reduce literature to a mere reflection of that marketplace of which prose professes to be the voice. Quite the opposite. The lyric concern with form — though preserved in literature by the rise of prose — also preserved literature from the essentially ideological influence that the dominance of continuous prose had on the ordinary language of early and high modern society.

As we have seen, Frye argues that in ordinary speech prose tends to turn the attention of language away from considerations of form and towards the nonliterary aspects of experience. In so doing, prose becomes a response to a uniquely modern demand that language exhibit "the power of adaptation to changed conditions" (1957, 269). Of course, Frye recognizes that even the metrical language of premodern poets allows them to make changes to accommodate demands peculiar to local or contemporary decorum (271). But the metrical and epic conventions of tradition could make such accommodations because they allowed the poet an "unconscious habitual skill of thinking in metre" (271) — of thinking in unchanging forms which allowed the poet who mastered those forms to vary the content of their poems without altering the shape into which that content fit. Thus, the premodern accommodation of decorum was one of content only.

In premodern poetry, matters of form were determined by unvarying conventions of metre and myth. With the rise of prose in the seventeenth-century as a fully distinctive form of literary expression, the rhythms and forms of language were liberated, Frye argues, from "the domination of metre" to "become a transparent medium" capable of presenting "its subject matter like plate glass" (1957, 265). For Frye, then, the prosaic attitude of high and low mimetic discourse was that form should reflect the current content. This attitude tended to render form invisible with the effect that "it [was] only in the most subtle and indirect way that [the high and low mimetic authors were] thought of as possessing and retelling the essential myths of the society [they] live[d] in" (1971, 80). Thus, Frye sees that it is the tendency of prose to turn literature away from mythos as the participation of heroic characters in ritualized, recurring and thus inevitable events (1957, 284-5) — and towards irony and ethos — in which the influence of the social environment upon the heroic character come to the fore.

So Frye sees a literary tendency to ethos — that is, the call for the accurate representation of individual characters and their environment (1957, 286) entailed in the prosaic attitude characterized in a verisimilitude between language and the moral standards of contemporary society. But he also
sees the operation of ethos in ordinary language as a manifestation of, what we saw in Chapter Two, to be a peculiarly modern misconception of objective experience, one in which the standards governing ordinary experience and those governing morality are conflated with standards of scientific objectivity, in which prose, on the basis of its professed status as the voice of experiment, verification and logic, claims also to be the natural language of ordinary and moral experience (1971, 144). As such, prose plays an essential role in the modern reduction of experience to a description of actual conditions, properly apprehended and acted upon only by the rational subject. In turn, if the literary expression of myth is to avoid being demonized as immoral, out of date, or simply irrational — the imaginary associations of unsound minds — it must attach itself to prosaic language, becoming an imaginative act of creation by the rational individual (1957, 59).

Thus, while Frye argues that the development of prose moves literature in the direction of ethos, he also points out that literature — unlike ordinary language — never succumbs to the ideological demand that it become a moral structure (1957, 155-6). As centripetal and thus hypothetical structures, literary works tend to operate within the bounds set by what can be conceived as the product of desire rather than the bounds of truth or morality (156). Prose literature does seek to reconcile desire and morality, hence its concessions to ethos, but only in order that it might be allowed the flexibility to explore all the imagery of desire — even those aspects of myth which the influence of ethos regards as demonic — without fear of expurgation by the censors (156).

The influence of ethos in literature is less a positive assertion of the moral authority of prose than it is "a vision of irony," dissolving the claims by classical and traditional mythic forms to moral authority (Frye, 1957, 286). As irony, ethos targets the implausibility of the moral elements in classic and traditional mythic forms as indicative of how absurd it would be if literature were really structured to give such moral elements primary importance. But the purpose of this irony is not to set up the moral authority of prose in place of that previously held by traditional mythic forms. Irony's purpose is rather to act as an analogy of experience capable of turning the reading attention to the elements of myth that do persist into modern literature (154): images of nature and society in a struggle for abundant life, for instance, of "farms and the painful labour of the man with the hoe, the peasant or furze who stands in Hardy as the image of man himself [sic]" (155). Thus, the influence of lyricism on the depiction of experience by literary prose results in the low mimetic "poem or novel coming to represent a unique or sealed-in experience" (1971, 80) at odds both with tradition and the contemporary depiction of reality.
Frye is arguing, then, that ethos in literature is not so much a rejection of myth as the distancing of literature from the implausibility of the moral claims made by the traditional and classical forms of myth. It represents the tendency to recreate the same purely verbal and thus imaginative patterns of social imagery explicit in premodern stylization, but implicitly and in a setting plausible to modern sensibilities. In other words, he is arguing that it is only by preserving the lyric concern with form in literature — through the influence ethos and prose — that literature can on the one hand escape its association with premodern ideology and on the other escape reduction to an analogue of early modern morality. As we have seen, therefore, Frye says that without the lyric it would be difficult to see what was literary about prose at all (1957, 272).

Frye argues that if under the influence of mythos — the ritualized event — the premodern lyric is a celebration of a community’s social life, under the influence of ethos — and its expression in prose — the modern lyric stresses the invisible presence of its death (1957, 296). So modern lyricism preserves the mythic vision of community in the form of an idyllic and unfallen world, one lost to the present social conditions and conventions which literature expresses in its analogy of experience, but recreated as the social vision of what humanity is capable. For Frye, the lyric stress upon the presence of death in literature causes modern lyricism to take the form of a double stoppage. On the one hand, lyricism deploys prosaic influences like those that Frye argues are evidenced in "Wordworth’s Lucy poems" in a stoppage of the metrical conventions governing the ancient expression of myth — a sign that the life which ancient society celebrated is now to be mourned as would "a dying god" (1957, 296). On the other hand, lyricism gives myth a telling that is plausible by the standards of prosaic and deliberative language, so that the "mythological expansion [of that which is mourned into a divine personage] is less marked and more often replaced by doctrinal or conceptual expansion (296). For modern lyricism represents not only the tendency of literature towards ethos and the displacement of the highly idealized images of myth in a more plausible direction, but the romantic tendency to conventionalize the content of experience in the direction of myth: myth becomes the dissonant element in the development of prosaic forms.

The upshot of Frye’s insight into modern lyricism’s nature as a double stoppage — double stoppage understood as lyricism tempering both the expression of myth and prose in literature — is that while modern lyricism is a more overt form of resistance to social convention than was its ancient counterpart, both premodern and modern lyricism struggle against being reduced to a mere object by ideology. For, like the premodern lyric, the early modern lyric’s concern with form struggles against the reduction of objective experience to the associations between words and the shape that current
ideology gives to it. And, if early modern lyricism involves the distancing of literature from the authority of a premodern canon presented in metrical convention, it must also involve a distancing from the authority of modern concerns with descriptive accuracy presented in prose. The lyric concern of modern literature with the conventionalization of content in an idealized direction reconfigures the prose — the language of experience — into an *analogy of experience* so that the objective experience to which prose gives expression becomes more than that for which the moral standards of contemporary society can account (1957, 154). Thus, the influence of prose in literature is seen also to detect the possibilities for human happiness latent in but suppressed by current social life — and to expose the contingency in the hard realities of modern ideology.

Like Adorno, then, Frye argues that with the rise with bourgeois consciousness and its desire for realism into literature, realism and continuous prose come to the forefront of literary expression. And, as the language of the capitalist marketplace, realism and prose liberate literature from its bondage under premodern ideology. But prose and realism only effect this liberation because they allow literary works to be more than either expressions of commodity or traditional form, to be an expression of the lyric concern with the verbal form of experience which follows its own internal logic, distancing itself from both the modern and premodern conventions under which experience is ordinarily understood. The independence of early modern literature’s social vision is purchased at the price of lyricism’s distance from both premodern and early modern social life. In Frye’s parlance, if the high and low mimetic poets preserve the independence — the imaginative character — of their vision, a vision which turns out to inform much of what seems in ordinary experience to be beyond the influence of human creativity, they do so as, what Shelley calls, the "unacknowledged legislators of civilization" (Frye, 1971, 95 [emphasis mine]).

c) Contemporary Lyricism.

But Frye also argues that if the preservation of the lyric influence in early and high modern literature is achieved through its distance from premodern and modern social conventions, lyricism is only preserved into contemporary conditions of modernity through its retreat to the very periphery of social expression. While maintaining its distance from the ideological content of early modern conventions, literature could still embrace prosaic and realist innovations in the language of the early modern market society as emancipatory forces by which capitalism dissolved what we have already seen Frye call "the concretions of feudal authority" (1990bb, 215). For, in this act of dissolution, the
influence of prose created leeway for a lyric concern with language that could not be reduced to either the prosaic or traditional metrical influences on it.

But with the industrial revolution and the triumph of capitalism over the vestiges of feudal tradition, capitalism turned demonic (Frye 1990bb, 215) — championing the demands of commodity form, not as one of the perennial facts of human nature which traditional authority tried to oppress, but as the sole determining consideration in a comprehensive plan for human action. In their new demonic form, the low mimetic conventions of prose and realism are reduced to the definitive verbal forms of capitalist oppression, so that the prosaic allowance for lyric expression vanishes in the rush to establish and maintain a truth-of-correspondence between the conventions of prose and realism on the one hand and market ideology's version of objective experience on the other. Under contemporary conditions, then, literature can preserve its lyric essence only if lyricism ceases to be merely a background influence upon prosaic and metrical conventions. Lyricism must become the explicit expression of its difference from conventions of prose and metre.

Like all demonic forms, capitalism deploys both the conventions of prose and metre as vehicles designed solely to produce certain of what we have seen Frye call kinetic and stock responses — ultimately a "conditioned reflex" (1957, 350) — in its audiences. The purpose of this deployment is to reduce modern audiences to a condition in which they are capable of only a passive response — both to the manner in which experience is represented by advertising and to the promotion of its commodities, and its exhortations that audiences adjust to social authority. Thus, contemporary capitalism deploys prose and realism in the pacification of audiences and effects this deployment by reproducing them as the "dead traditions" of mass culture (Frye, 1967a, 62).

As we have seen, for Frye, mass culture amounts to deployment of cultural forms, especially those of prose and realism, in close connection with advertising and propaganda industries, which rely on the mass reproduction and assimilation of images to achieve a primarily promotional effect (Frye, 1993a, 152). Relying on the already existing familiarity of prosaic and realist forms of fiction, mass culture deploys them in two complementary manners. First, mass culture saturates its audience with a parody of realist and prosaic fictional forms (1967a, 63) in their most "overwritten ... too earnestly didactic tone" — as with the soap operas, movies, and the narrative structure of an advertising promotion (1982b, 113). These forms of prose and realism become banal because they are nothing but "prefabricated statements" (Frye, 1991a, 262) which quickly become all too familiar, and stylized because the "one size fits all" nature of their prefabrication works against the supposed realism of their prose.
Thus, audiences will dismiss the "absurd and outrageous" artificiality of popular forms as beneath consideration, as harmless entertainments designed by their nonchallenging nature to comfort (Frye, 1967a, 26). But Frye argues that the aim of mass culture is dependency not conviction. With comfort comes the passivity of unconsciousness and the induction of a highly suggestible mental state, which allows mass culture to plant its images in "the rest of the mind" (73). When members of the modern mass audience have to make decisions about how to respond to reality, they will refer to the associations with popular realism planted in their unconscious minds through the suggestions of mass culture (26).

Frye explains that a second manner in which mass culture deploys prosaic and realist forms is as a parody of lyricism itself and is usually found in advertising, though also in the leading questions and suggestive rhetoric of many a propagandist's speech (1967a, 69). The technique is to isolate elements of the prosaic and realist forms popularized by mass culture presenting them in close association with images of commodities (66). The effect is to force the mind into a process of double association whereby both the realist elements in the speech or advertisement and the product or promotion with which they are presented fit into an association with one of the narrative forms of the good life that mass culture has planted ready-made in the unconscious mind through saturation. Frye's paradigm scenario for the effect of mass culture's implantation in the unconscious mind is contained in his sexist example of audiences who see "the blond" perched on the new car, do not believe it for a moment, and buy the car anyway (Denham, 1991, 75-6). Clearly the image of the girl on the car fits into a very tired formula in which the guy with the big car gets the girl. And the passive response which advertising induces is for the advertised car to find its way by unconscious association into that same narrative. Frye points out that these effects would not be so dangerous given competition. But the achievement of a monopoly by so many sections of mass culture — especially those connected with the printed word — renders advertising and promotion into propaganda (Frye, 1993b, 164). With propaganda comes pressure to conform, always backed up by the hint of force (Frye, 1993b, 164). Exemplary of societies in which the mass media have established a monopoly is the United States which, says Frye, "has built up an hysterical, competitive economy on a thunderous cannonade of systematic lying" (1971, 138).

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1In Chapter Five we shall explore how monopoly conditions in mass culture contribute to the neutralization of irony's capacity to resist mass culture's commercial promotions.
The two deployments of prose and realism described above, then, are responsible for reducing the verbal conventions of early and high modern literature to the objects of kinetic and stock responses. So deployed, prose and realist conventions induce kinetic responses because, at the level of consciousness, they are presented to and taken by audiences to be nothing more than nontaxing stimulants for the purposes of relaxation and escape (Bogdan, 1992, 112-120). And because the audience responds kinetically to mass culture, the formulas of mass culture gain admittance to that part of the mind that operates beneath conscious scrutiny where they inform the audience’s understanding of reality causing it to respond in a stock manner to experience, especially the experience of culture. In describing the reduction of literary convention by mass culture to objects of kinetic and stock response, Frye captures Adorno’s insight that their effect is to reproduce the unconscious mind and with it the individual in the very image of consumer society’s advertisement. As a result the capacity of the imagination for free associations of lyric poetry is curtailed. In mass culture, all associations are preplanned. By contrast, the associations of lyricism are spontaneous creations, not reducible to the relationship between words and any actual social condition.

Thus, Frye states that mass culture shows itself to be an ersatz version of culture, the kind that market societies dole out to their citizens — as they do with all the essentials of life — in diluted form. The function of this ersatz culture is to make life bearable without allowing anyone actually to live. For living is an active process in which individuals help create their environment out of their hopes and dreams. And though it employs the language of dreams and desires, mass culture only allows for the reproduction of the social status quo upon which it bequeaths an objectivity beyond the power of human interference.

In response to this reification of the literary conventions of prose and realism by mass culture, the preservation of lyricism as a literary form for Frye depends upon its emergence as a form autonomous of both prose and of the low mimetic domination of metre by prose. But this autonomy from the influence of modern prose and realism can only be achieved by the retreat of literature to the very periphery of social expression mentioned above. Such a retreat involves contemporary literature in an eschewal of both the easy communicability of prosaic conventions and the familiar depictions of contemporary social life represented by conventions of realism, an eschewal which puts literature at odds with the standards of intelligibility set by contemporary society. Yet this eschewal is not primarily a rejection of prose and realism, only the distancing from their established forms which would otherwise hold the lyric power of association in their thrall. As Frye points out,
the loosening of rhyme by Emily Dickinson and of stanzaic structure in Yeats are intended not to make the metrical pattern [common to an age of poetry dominated by the influence of prose] more irregular, but to make the lyric rhythm more precise. (1957, 272)

The goal of the lyric retreat to the periphery of social expression is not the rejection of modern society per se but the autonomy of prose from the prosaic and realist conventions of that society and the liberation of lyricism from the constricting sententiousness of established modern conventions, a sententiousness that has become inextricably associated with moralizing (Frye, 1971, 81). Thus, as we saw earlier, Frye notes that, while most popular poetry is sententious (either as an explicit statement or as an overly familiar allusion, it mirrors the moral lessons contained in the promotions of a consumer society), the actual conventions of contemporary poetry resist sententiousness. The sententiousness of popular literature so-called allows the verbal capacity of association to be harnessed and directed by the demands of established convention, demands that always take it in the same direction. By contrast, in rejecting easily communicable and familiar representations of experience contained in established conventions, literature allows lyric associations to extend to forms of realism and prose which their established conventions exclude.

The lyric escape from sententiousness, then, frees prose and realism from the demands of easy communication and familiar representation and makes them comprehensible as part of what Frye calls "the verbal universe." By treating all the associations with experience in literature as metaphorical associations between verbal conventions of sound, shape, and imagery, lyricism reintegrates prose and realism into an imaginative unity of experience. This imaginative unity of the literary universe is not determined by the conformity of verbal imagery to one definitive meaning. Quite the opposite. The imaginative unity of experience expressed in literature is the potential identity of different conventions. As a statement of potential identity, literature treats the various meanings and functions that different conditions of society have assigned to the same verbal imagery as necessary parts of its imaginary vision of experience.

We have seen, then, that modern lyricism expresses its difference from the established conventions of literary production for two reasons. First, established conventions co-opt the associative power of words in the expression of a unity of experience that is dependent upon the conformity of words and images to the meaning and function given them by market society. Thus engagement with established convention becomes an adjustment to prearranged social forms — not participation at all, really, but conformity and obedience. Second, in distancing itself from all established convention, lyricism maintains its difference from and so preserves its purely formal
identity with premodern and early modern lyricism. In other words, because modern lyricism functions differently from its premodern and early modern antecedents, it is able — even in the face of modernity’s reification of experience — to preserve their formal tendency to recreate experience as a human environment — the product of human desire.

It is this notion — that contemporary lyricism’s escape from the sententious emphasises the recreative role of literature — to which Frye refers when he cites Finnegans Wake (1939) as a primary example of the influence of contemporary lyricism upon literature.

If I have read the last chapter of Finnegans Wake correctly, what happens there is that the dreamer, after spending the whole night in communion with a vast body of metaphorical identifications, wakens and goes about his business of forgetting his dream, like Nebuchadnezzar, failing to use or even to realize that he can use the "keys to dreamland." What he fails to do is therefore left for the reader to do ... some such activity as this of reforging the links between creation and knowledge, art and science, myth and concept is what I envisage for criticism. (1957, 354)

In the manner of modern lyricism, Finnegans Wake allows its metaphorical associations to cluster about a great cycle or repetition of conventional literary themes so self-contained that they resist the link to waking life — waking life being any conception of experience common to an actual condition of society (Frye, 1957, 321). At the same time, its verbal patterns are pregnant with conceptual implications about the nature of experience. It is left to the reader to recognize in these implications a vision of society capable of including all of the diverse standards by which the manifold of history’s social conditions have understood experience, precisely because it does not conform to any of them (Frye, 1990, 149). What this social vision does conform to is the imagery that informs the standards by which societies judge experience, and the capacity of that imagery to give experience the shape of a human environment, one concerned primarily with the human struggle for abundant life. It is this imagery that informs every society’s efforts to give experience a particular shape and that has traditionally made its influence felt in the arts and literature.

But Frye argues that modern lyricism refuses to be an overt expression of that social vision’s influence. The associations of modern lyricism are so relentlessly metaphorical, so loath to allow for the foreclosure of definitive interpretation, and yet so bursting with conceptual implications that they require the contemporary reader to go beyond feeling the influence of this social vision in the arts. The social vision with which modern lyricism resonates can be recognized only in what the established conventions of mass culture pervert into a promotion of actual social conventions, that being the suppressed potential of social vision contained in the myths and conventions of literature to
influence the industry, the sciences, and the institutions of modern society in building a humane condition. Under the influence of modern lyricism, literary works must work against familiar standards of identification so that, from the perspective of the established realist and prosaic conventions of modern society, literary works have nothing in common but their opposition to familiar standards of interpretation. Yet, it is the essentially oppositional nature of modern literary works (that is, their individuality) that allows them to participate in the same conventions governing purely formal verbal association that have always operated in literary production.

Modern literature, then, becomes comprehensible as literature to contemporary readers only when its primarily metaphorical structure -- and the creative possibilities it offers up for the ordering of experience -- forces them to participate in the recreation of all literary experience as a social vision that modern society has suppressed. The aim of modern lyricism is to put not only literature, but readers as well, at odds with contemporary society, by revealing its essentially anti-literary tendency -- so that they might participate in the social vision that informs the whole of literature and not merely that of contemporary society.

As Frye says in *The Critical Path*, modern lyricism teaches criticism that it is through the diversity of its historic forms that all literary works recreate the same experience -- "that variety and novelty can be found only at the place of identity" (1971, 29). Thus, Frye's insight into the workings of modern lyricism gives criticism the vision of diversity in unity that Adorno would hold as being essential to the apprehension of any literary work worthy of the name. And Frye says of any criticism or reader that does not understand this central theme of literature, that not only will they not understand contemporary literature, that neither will they understand the literature of the past (29). Instead they will seek out the correspondence of literature to that uniformity of interpretation and meaning by which modern mass culture suppresses active participation in literature in place of a passive response to the promotions of contemporary capitalist society (99).

And so we come to Frye's seemingly paradoxical conclusion that it is only by distancing themselves from participation in the conventions of society that both literary works and their readers can participate in the social conventions with which literature has been involved all along. With respect to the work, this distancing is evidenced in an individuality of expression that seems to entail a basic distrust of communication itself (Frye, 1957, 103). Of the reader's part in this critical participation, Frye says that it "arises from a habit of reading or theatre going extending over many years" (1971, 28-9) and the familiarity born of that habituation with the "organizing literary patterns of convention, genre and archetype" (29). It is this familiarity with convention as it operates in a
literary, hypothetical manner concerned primarily with the figurative properties of words, that is, which allows readers to know what kind of structure they are entering and which "enlarges their expectation" about the kinds of experience literature can offer beyond those that can be satisfied by the conventions of mass culture.

The enlarged sense of expectation that comes from participation in genuinely literary convention, then, is the reader's response to these conventions as part of a potential or hypothetical unity of experience, a unity made out of the infinite variety of experience that literature contains. And because this unity is the potential identity of various things, the reader can participate in it only by rejecting the notion of definitive interpretation — "the notion that 'great' works can supply all the varieties of experience offered by merely good ones" (Frye, 1971, 29). As articulated above, then, the call by Frye's criticism for reader participation in genuine literary conventions counters the objection that his literary education is simply an elitist apology for the canon, and for what John Fekete calls its ideological expression of the "unity of variety" (1976, 49) which allows that certain "great works" have already said, and said better, what any number of lesser works might have to say. For, as we have seen Frye argue, convention operates in literature as the expression of a potential unity of experience that encourages the reader to accept no substitutes — no definitive canon — in their search for "infinite variety" (29). For it is within the infinite variety of literary production that the reader apprehends the same patterns of desire that inform an imaginative vision of society at odds with any actual social condition.

We see, then, that Frye's conception of the kind of participation that modern lyricism demands of literature and of readers alike works against the tendency of modern mass culture to reduce modern audiences to an absolute dependence upon conventions that conflate the workings of modern advertising and mass culture with the definitive form of experience. Modern lyricism is not primarily a rejection of convention, not even of prose or realism, but of the pretense that experience is intelligible only insofar as it conforms to the standards of established conventions of prose and realism in modern consumer society. By embracing language that, by the standards of contemporary conventions of prose and realism, is unintelligible, modern lyricism engages in a creative violation of these conventions. It exposes the purely verbal and therefore imaginative associations which contemporary prose and realism, operating in mass culture, have suppressed, and in the process reconfigures both prose and realism so that they can serve as contemporary contexts for the expression of these associations.
Reconfigured as contexts for the lyric power of association, prose and realism are liberated from their deployment by mass culture as mere reflections of modern consumer society to participate in the expression of a social vision that includes the entire diversity of literary production. At the same time, modern lyricism requires that the reading subject actively participate with literature in the imaginative recreation of experience as a social vision at odds with that of contemporary society, and so violates passive acceptance of the reduction of experience by contemporary prose and realism to actual conditions of contemporary society. But this violation reveals that the reading subject is more than its reduction to being a passive consumer of a culture, that readers' identity includes their potential role as creator and inhabitant of an humane social condition at odds with that of contemporary society.

In summary, Frye argues that contemporary lyricism is radically different from premodern and early modern lyricism. While premodern lyricism seemed actively to participate in the mythic conventions of its society, early and high modern lyricism employed the influence of prose and realism to distance itself from those same conventions. By contrast, contemporary criticism distances itself from the influence of prose and realism in a return to myth and, with myth, to participation in the only society with which literature has ever really been concerned, and that is the society which literature itself contains as the imaginative vision that informs all social conditions. But while each of these lyric displacements related differently to their contemporary societies, it was by this very difference that they were able to preserve the same concern with the formal character of language that operates in the literature of every age.

Thus, the encyclopedic nature that marks premodern lyricism's celebration of convention, the subversive quality that marks the manner in which early and high modern lyricism distance themselves from it, and the artifice that marks contemporary lyricism's seemingly absolute rejection of convention are revealed to be all alike. They all serve to transform and preserve the operation of convention so that it persists in literature as the purely verbal form of experience.

But it is contemporary lyricism which brings to the fore the concern with verbal form that is perennial to the lyric influence upon literature, and that reveals the lyric concern with form to be the essential component of what it is to create and read literature. For, it is in the nature of the lyric concern with verbal form to fashion out of literature an imaginative unity of experience that is itself like the historic unity of lyric expression — made up of the purely verbal and thus the potential associations between its very different historical expressions. But, as we have seen, the conventions of mass culture tend to link all verbal expression in an association with what modern consumer
society promotes as being actual experience. In the face of this reification of verbal convention by modern consumer society, contemporary lyricism must treat its associations of verbal form as stubbornly hypothetical. Lyricism must be militant in its rejection of any links between its associations and actual conditions of society. And it must treat the commonality between verbal images as a statement of disjunction between those images and the meanings with which different societies have linked them. Otherwise, the purely verbal and thus imaginative contributions that literary production throughout history have made to the social vision of literature will vanish in language practices that allow the experience of modern social conditions to speak for the whole of human experience.

Section E.

Adorno and Frye on the Influence of Contemporary Lyricism upon Criticism.

In Chapter Two we saw that Adorno, in effect, requires that contemporary respondents must take the essence of all artworks to reside in their linguistic quality. But we also saw Adorno warn that contemporary artworks express their linguistic quality by rejecting the association of language with easily communicable form. Thus he says that contemporary art needs aesthetic theory; and readers, an aesthetic education to acquaint them with the historic elements of convention that allows the language of artworks to speak. Otherwise, as he reminds us, citing the case of modern literature, "its principle of individuation never guarantees that something binding and authentic will be produced" (1991, 38). Criticism, therefore, is not something that Adorno considers to be simply an external imposition on the contemporary artwork. It has become an inherent moment in the understanding of art.

In this chapter, we have also seen Adorno maintain that because of its concern with linguistic form contemporary lyricism shows itself to be the literary generic influence, the genre whose presence makes the literary work literary. And like the linguistic quality of the artwork, the lyric genre expresses itself in terms of its rejection of contemporary society and the easily communicable forms it affords. We can assume then, that, for Adorno, if readers are to apprehend literature as a voice of opposition to contemporary society, they will need to learn the difference between its language and that of contemporary society.

Further, we can deduce that the engagement of individuals with the literary text depends on their understanding of literary language. For it is in that language that literature preserves the capacity to express subjectivity in terms something other than the bromides of contemporary ideology. As Adorno says of artworks, "To those who obsessively relate art works only to themselves" (1984, 348)
with no concern for what the work says apart from them, "the avenue of lived experience is closed, except in the false form of a surrogate manipulated by [mass] culture" (348).

Anyone willing, on the other hand, to learn the language of the modern lyric and "surrender" themselves, or "give themselves over to its form," opens up to the expression of a perspective from the social margins, one that gives an articulate — a social — shape to their alienation and voice to their aspirations. Thus, Adorno seems to equate the educated contemplation of the lyric influence in the literary work with a form of engagement that he calls "lived experience." It is through the lived experience of the lyric text that the reader’s subjectivity is aligned with and articulated as their own bodily experience of oppression; through lived experience they confront the truth of contemporary society as "a social situation that every individual experiences as hostile, alien, cold, [and] oppressive" (Adorno, 1991, 39), and the truth content of the "poetic work" (39) as "a protest against" (39) that society. Thus the contemporary reading of literature as lyric expression gives sustained and articulate shape to special insights by marginalized readers into this "individualistic and ultimately atomistic society['s']" (Adorno, 1991, 38) rendering of alienation into a universal condition: insights, according to Adorno, which otherwise appear in "forms however impure, mutilated, fragmentary, and intermittent — the only possible forms of [writing by the marginalized of society, of] those who have to bear the burden" (45).

In Frye’s analysis of Finnegan’s Wake (1939), we see a demand like that made by Adorno that contemporary reader experience of society in literature should be predicated on the reader’s acquiescence with the text’s rejection of contemporary reality and their concentration of the work as a centripetal and hypothetical construct. This demand is accompanied by one insisting that readers have not read until they have recreated a literary vision of society out of hypothetical association of verbal images so ferocious in their specificity that, from the perspective of what Frye calls the media of mass communication, they seem incomprehensible. Frye’s point seems to be, then, that the anti-literary influence of contemporary mass culture is so complete that the survival of literature depends on it taking on and being seen to take on an attitude of new militancy. That is, the only thing that any two literary works can be seen to have in common is their opposition to the "anti-arts" of contemporary mass culture (Frye, 1967a, 74). Unless contemporary readers and criticism participate in literature as they would in modern lyricism, literature will be lost to them.

For Frye, then, the critical recreation of literary works is, like lyricism, driven by the conflicting demands of literature and contemporary social conditions to reject the familiarity and easy communicability of conventions of mass culture and consumer society that have taken up the centre of
social experience. And this rejection of established convention has the effect of rendering criticism so peripheral to modern social expression that it can only recognize the verbal potential for a common expression of experience in what it takes in all literary works to be a statement a radical specificity. That is, by seeing the unity of literary experience in the unique character, what Frye would rather call the individuality of each literary work, criticism must take literary experience as being the search for "infinite variety" (Frye, 1971, 29) that no definitive version of experience can curtail such that it cannot be said of any literary work, "that has already been said elsewhere."

The upshot of criticism's apprehension of literature as an infinite variety of form is that it resists not only the conventions of mass culture but the tendency to a particular type of censorship that results from their perverted appeal to the imagination. That is, we have seen Frye's explanation of how mass culture deploys techniques of mass reproduction, conditioning its audiences to unconsciously associate its conventional expressions of the good life with the promotions of modern consumer society. The effect of the association between convention and product, then, is to link the conventions of mass culture with an imaginary — and thus perverted — idea of future happiness, which the members of its audience can have only if they adjust to the present social reality — the ownership of the products and participation in the activities promoted by contemporary consumer society becoming a symbol of their status as well-adjusted citizens (Frye, 1971, 137). Thus, the conventions of mass culture come to form a canon of adjustment, one based on the insidious insistence that any activity must be unintelligible if it does not conform to contemporary practice — and this insistence extends to the reading and writing of literature. It is the overriding tendency of modern consumer society, a tendency which formal institutions of education tend to abet, to order its conventions into a canon of adjustment that informs what Frye calls the "evaluating hierarchy" of much contemporary criticism and limits readers to the "evaluator's lists" (1971, 29).

The censorship involved in these evaluative hierarchies is not of a proscriptive but a prescriptive nature. It is a censorship based on the argument that the works which most conform to contemporary standards of excellence are the definitive expressions of "what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed" (Frye quoting Alexander Pope, 1990q, 126). And it redefines the freedom of literary scholarship, so that it ceases to depend upon the right of a body of literature to exhaustive scrutiny, and becomes instead the uninhibited search for excellence in accordance with established standards. But, based upon the imperative that the only definitive expression of experience is that potential totality of which every work in its specificity is an essential part, Frye's criticism answers, as we saw above, "that it is simply not true that the 'great' writers supply all the variety of experience
offered by the merely 'good' ones" (29). If modern lyricism has anything to teach criticism, it is that when even one literary work or interpretation of literary meaning is allowed to speak for others, participation in literary convention becomes impossible, and the possibility of an imagination educated in the generic forms of literature vanishes into ideological anxieties over the need to adjust to current social conditions. 

The lyric demand for infinite variety, which Frye sees as being proper to modern criticism, acts as a parody of the familiar conventions of realism governing mass culture, apprehending in literature an account of society so specific in its details that it includes what is unfamiliar about modern society. Such an account brings into focus the artificial nature of what mass culture presents as the familiar version of reality, and reveals the disjunction between its images of the good life and the totality of modern experience. It shows the conventions of mass culture and the consumer society they reflect to be part of a human interpretation of experience — a verbal pattern of myth — amongst other myths. And in its portrayal of what is unfamiliar by the standards of mass culture, it reveals the operation of conventions — and with them visions of society — that have the potential to interpenetrate with familiar conventions of realism in an image of experience that includes them all without being reduced to any one of them. Thus Frye’s observation to the effect that the ironic approach of contemporary literature starts with the objectivity of realism but works backward towards a participation in the subjectivity of myth echoes his call for a "scientific" distancing of criticism from convention. It also echoes Adorno’s observation in Aesthetic Theory that the ironic distance of "immanent analysis undoubtedly marks an important advance in the development of aesthetic science" (1984, 477). Says Adorno, "Entire branches of the science of art did not wake up from their pharisaical stupor ... until they adopted this method ... pursuing ... the important [questions] about the structural properties of works of art" (477). That is, for Adorno, the scientific distancing of convention from its association with ideology allows criticism to apprehend convention in literature as part of a purely formal structure expressing an imaginative totality of experience from which no perspective — even that of the social margins — is excluded. Critical distance, therefore, turns out to be the only vantage from which criticism, indeed any reader (even those of oppressed gender, race, or ethnicity), can participate in literary form under conditions that Adorno describes as anti-lyric. Without a critical reading that distinguishes between the literary operation and the ideological form of convention, contemporary readers will not even apprehend the literary work. Their apparent participation with the work, however intense that may be, will in reality be a succumbing to the stock and kinetic responses — what Adorno would call the preprogramming — of the culture industry.
CHAPTER FOUR:
WHEN NOTHING GOES WITHOUT SAYING:
FRYE AND THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SUBALTERN.

Section A.
Reading from the Periphery.

Thus far, I have argued, we see from Frye's comparison with Adorno that his insights into the effect of contemporary lyricism on literature and criticism entail the need for interpretation that privileges the literature and readings from society's periphery. According to my argument from Chapter Three, the lyric (that is, the centripetal and thus hypothetical) nature of the literary repetition of myth will not allow any statement of actual identity to enter the literary universe. Lyricism, and with it modern criticism, therefore, must regard the notion that one work can act as a definitive expression of literary experience which can say all that "another work could say" as a statement of actual identity between them. As we saw Frye say in the Critical Path, the lyric teaches us that the way to infinite diversity is through identity. That is, contemporary lyricism, by demanding that every association in every work be read as a centripetal one between different verbal images, forces the reader to confront the participation of every work with all others in the expression of literary myth. But, if lyricism teaches criticism that all works participate in the same mythic structures, it also teaches that they each do so in a different way. Says Frye, in the Stubborn Structure, each "particular story is a projection of the [mythic] theme, as one of the infinite possible ways of getting to the theme" (Frye, 1970, 170).

Frye's notion of infinite diversity in literary identity, then, entails that, as every work makes a unique contribution to the expression of myth, no work can speak for any other. That is, for Frye, it simply is not true that there are 'great works' capable of saying all there is to say about experience (1971, 29). Thus Frye's position suggests that there can be no definitive canon of literary works, that literary experience is incomplete until even its expression from the social margins has been heard. And it entails that criticism should resist any attempts to prescribe readings as essential, relegating all others to the status of unnecessary frills.

The influence of Frye's lyric principle of infinite diversity in literary identity extends beyond resistance to an exclusive canon to fight against the notion that there are exclusive or definitive interpretations of any literary work. That is, of the infinite possible ways in which literature takes readers to its mythic themes, as many as not are ironic (Frye, 1966, 135-145), with the result that
many works give the reader to understand that the theme which they seem to be imitating is not really their theme at all. Frye writes that irony presents a human conflict which, unlike a comedy, a romance, or even a tragedy, is unsatisfactory and incomplete unless we see in it a significance beyond itself, something typical of the human situation as a whole ..." (1970, 169). This is to say, something that can be expressed only in a work that registers the influence of all literary conventions and genres. And, in the contemporary era, where, as Frye says, all works seem to be lyric or ironic in their "pervading tone" (1990, 83), readers have only read properly when they get the nagging sense that every work is, to some extent, dissembling about whatever convention it seems to the reader it is following; thus it cannot be said of any work that it conforms definitively to any one convention. Frye’s understanding of the lyric also calls on criticism to resist so-called definitive readings of a text on the grounds that they pretend to have said everything that can be said about that text, and so, exclude other interpretative perspectives — usually those from the less powerful in society.

Because, Frye’s literary universe is one of potential identities — that is, one of identities between actually different things — it cannot, therefore, be apprehended by readings that claim some texts actually say the same thing as others — only better — so that those others do not have to be read. If Frye’s insights into contemporary lyricism have taught criticism anything, it is that claims to have discovered the expression of actual identity in literature will lead to the privileging of some texts over others; and with that privileging, the exclusion of society’s margins from literary experience. Like Adorno’s take on contemporary lyricism, Frye’s is that lyricism is the literary influence that insists on hearing what the margins of society have to say. For both thinkers, the lyric influence on literature rejects established views that, as established interpretation has said them just as well if not better, the concerns voiced from society’s margins can go without saying. In contemporary lyricism, indeed, in the whole experience of contemporary literature, nothing can go without saying.

In this chapter, I contend that Frye’s notion that nothing in literature can go without saying resonates with Adorno’s summation of the only alternatives left to artistic production and reception under conditions of the culture industry. In "The Schemata of Mass Culture," Adorno writes the following:

Responsible art [today] sees itself confronted with a paradoxical choice: either it develops purposive forms so unrelenting in their purposiveness that they come into open conflict with external purposes when pursued to the bitter end, or it abandons itself so unreservedly to describing the existent without paying the slightest attention to special aesthetic considerations that its very refusal to intervene in the aesthetic formation of the object actually reveals itself as a purer law of form free of any decorative ingredients. (Adorno, 1991d, 70)
For Adorno, then, the paradoxical choice of contemporary art is between the dictum that its purposes should be so peculiar to artistic production that these purposes would be unintelligible outside of art, and the dictum that art should be so ruthless in its representation of reality that it shatters familiar conventions of realism while simultaneously revealing their formal likeness to realist conventions that have been suppressed by contemporary ideology. Adorno argues that art has come to this radical pass because it has to contend with conditions in which

[i]magination is replaced by a mechanically relentless control mechanism which determines whether the latest imago to be distributed really represents an exact accurate and reliable reflection of the relevant item of reality. The only remnant of aesthetic semblance here is the empty abstract difference between culture as such and practice as such. (Adorno, 1991d, 55)

In other words, Adorno argues that art today must challenge both the external purposes of contemporary social convention and the aesthetic considerations of convention about what it is seemly to portray. For both have been caught up in an interpretive mechanism that reduces the art object to its actual relationship to reality — to something about which the social and aesthetic conventions of today can say all of import that there is to say, so that anything else can go without saying — with the result that the work's conventions no longer give expression to an inherent difference between art and objective reality.

We have seen Frye argue, in the same manner as Adorno, that modern literature and contemporary reading are forced to assume a militant attitude in response to the reification of society by the anti-arts of advertising, propaganda, and mass culture. In so doing, Frye advocates the same dicta for reading and literature as does Adorno for contemporary art. Frye argues, first, that the militant attitude of contemporary reading must treat the easy communicability of familiar contemporary conventions as evidence that they are associated primarily with external — ideological — standards of truth, morality, and beauty. Thus, the militant attitude of contemporary reading refuses to take familiar conventions as forms of unironic description, reading them in a fundamentally ironic manner. That is, contemporary reading deliberately refuses to read familiar conventions for their easy communicability, (mis)taking them, instead, as being estranged from reality and at the service of purposes so special to literary form that they are as unintelligible outside of their literary context as the sonata or fugue outside of music (Frye, 1957, 97).

The refusal of contemporary reading to read familiar conventions as if they were familiar renders them at odds with the external purposes to which they are normally connected in contemporary society. That is, contemporary reading apprehends the contribution of familiar
conventions to literary meaning in the failure of their communicative function to express that meaning. The failure to express literary meaning by familiar conventions, as they function within contemporary society, resonates through the form of every work that contains those conventions — a resonance felt in the literature of every era and condition of society. Paradoxically, it is in that formal resonance — the association between and within purely centripetal structures — that literary meaning resides.

Alternatively, we have seen Frye, in effect, argue for Adorno's second dictum, that the militant attitude of contemporary reading and literature also demands an ironic or revolutionary treatment of realism, a treatment so objective, so exacting — so unconcerned with prevailing aesthetic sensibilities — in its attention to detail, that it records aspects of real experience ignored as indecorous by conventions of contemporary ideology. Revolutionary realism exposes conventional views of reality — projected images selected from a wide range of the possible images out of which the whole reality of human experience is constructed and within which it is contained — as illusory. Thus does the militant attitude of modern letters regain for literature that sense of decorum — the concern with form — that ideology seems to have captured within familiar conventions of realism.

The upshot of both these approaches, which Adorno and Frye propose to be the only courses open to the arts and criticism under contemporary conditions of society is, as we have just seen, that they take every work through which literary meaning resonates and every formal detail of every literary work as entailing an essential and irreplaceable contribution to literary or artistic meaning. Like Adorno, Frye, as we have seen, recognizes that, in both the contemporary production of literature and in contemporary reading, nothing should be taken as "going without saying." Not only do those works written in the "great traditions" of storytelling make history stop and take notice, but lesser works, the fragments from minor traditions, are also essential instants in the process by which literature and the other arts ruffle history's smooth surface.

That Adorno and Frye recognize literature and the arts as having no definitive canon entails the sensitivity of these two thinkers to the priority that should be given to the poetic expression of subaltern perspectives. Adorno argues that the modern lyric is the embodiment of responsible art in its fight against the culture industry; against the culture industry's reduction of aesthetic convention to definitive measures "so called" of a work's actual identity, and the work to the object of conventional judgement; and against the tendency of aesthetic conventions to "speak for" and so obscure the expression of oppressed and alienated minorities. Thus, we saw Adorno proclaim that lyric poetry
recognizes that those "who have literally been degraded to objects of history, have the same right, or a greater right, to grope for the sound in which suffering and dreams are welded" (1991, 45).

As we shall see, this same sensitivity to subaltern positions — to the fact that, in literature, they cannot go without saying — is evidenced in Frye's treatment of the effect that minority attitudes have on literary production in *The Stubborn Structure* (1971), in the critical priority he gives to regional literature in his 1957 "Inaugural Address to Carleton University" and in his "Second Conclusion" (1982) to *The Literary History of Canada*, and in his unwillingness, in *The Secular Scripture* (1976a), to say that literary intent neutralizes the harm in literary expressions of racism.

In *The Stubborn Structure*, Frye argues that minority perspectives always have a literary priority over that of the dominant majority because, the distribution of power in actual social conditions being what it is, minority perspectives will more often entail failed aspirations than those of the majority. These will, perforce, inform an imaginative vision of society — of society not as it is, but as it might be if the minority were not thwarted by the majority. Accompanying the imaginative quality of the minority's ideal of society is the fact that the working out of that ideal almost has to involve a coming to terms with, or at least a working around of, a society that is more or less dedicated to the aspirations of the social mainstream. In other words, the minority position cannot ignore or deny the reality of the majority's point of view. Minorities can argue against the validity of the majority point of view, but not with the fact that the majority point of view entails a vision of society that many people find comprehensible. Dominant majority positions, on the other hand, have the luxury of not even acknowledging the aspirations peculiar to minorities, or the world views that inform minority aspirations. Too often, minority ideas and perspectives are reduced, in mainstream opinion, to those people most likely to hold them, who, in turn, are reduced to dysfunctional units of the social mainstream, to be altered or eliminated under conditions of extreme prejudice (Frye, 1971, 28-9). It seems to me that the upshot of Frye's analysis of minority positions is that expressions of the minority perspective are more likely to have the quality of literary myth than are those of the majority, which is more likely to produce social mythology of inorganic convention dedicated to reproducing actual social conditions. And, therefore, if we ignore the literature and arts of minorities, we are likely to ignore an informing influence on the development of civilization. One such literature, argues Frye, is that of "Hebrew Culture [which] drew ... strength from its resistance to Egyptian and Mesopotamian imperialism" (1967a, 56) and so became the source of the Judeo-Christian heritage that informs much of Western civilization.
In "Culture and the National Will," his 1957 address at Carleton University, Frye seems again to champion the minority perspective of one's own locale over the more global perspective of international literary traditions when he says that the educational systems of every country should give a certain priority to the literature of their own region or regions. For, he argues, an acquaintance with the manner in which the literary imagination collides with the landscape of a local region defines a citizen's knowledge of a country just as much as does their knowledge of its capital and major cities (Frye, 1957a, 5). Frye's point here is not that a region's literature should not compete in the broader literary culture — his point from The Modern Century (1967a, 56-7). It is, rather, that the literature of one's region is an essential part of the potential unity of literary experience that goes to make up the identity of any educated person, and thus it becomes an essential part of their potential identity with the rest of humanity. Without an acquaintance with the literature of one's own region, then, the reader becomes less free — an actual child — in that they let the views of another region speak for them.

The same vein appears in Frye's "Second Conclusion" to the Literary History of Canada, where he responds to the wholesale import of American culture and scholarship and its rationalization under arguments that freedom of scholarship "knows no boundaries" (1982, 74). In response to such arguments, Frye responds that "[s]cholarship may not, but culture does; and the only reason for having scholarship is that it is necessary for culture" (74). If, for example, free scholarship entails a wholesale importation of literary and scholarly works from the United States that eclipses indigenous Canadian literature and scholarship, then it will end up thwarting the cause of culture that it was meant to serve. For freedom of scholarship entails the right and the duty of scholars, writers, readers and critics generally to make a contribution to the growing bodies of scientific and literary experience that constitutes humanity's growing knowledge and social vision. It does not amount to the right of one society's authorities to speak for another.

While we might agree that the above are indeed examples of Frye privileging minority perspectives, we might also recognize that this privileging seems to apply only to the literature of minorities, and then, to minorities with a recognized cultural voice. Are there any examples of Frye's privileging readings from minority perspectives: especially from those minorities whose experience is not usually recognized as being distinct from that of their society's majority perspective?

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1 In The Modern Century, Frye argues that as "poems and pictures are born out of earlier poems and pictures, not out of new localities" (1967, 57), it follows that "[c]omplete immersion in international style is a primary cultural requirement, especially for countries whose cultural traditions have been formed since 1867, like ours" (57).
In *The Secular Scripture*, we seem to find such an example in what I think is Frye’s rather surprising statement that racist obscenity cannot be neutralized by serious literary intent (1976a, 168). But he makes this statement within the argument that since all people are to some extent the products of the attitudes contained in their contemporary mythology, all writers will to some extent recreate the social myth of their own time in his literature. Of course, Frye also argues that, inasmuch as the writer has produced a literary work, the attitudes — even racist ones — incorporated into the text are transformed into elements of a verbal experience in which they become one possible voice among many. That is, racist attitudes are transformed by literature through what Frye terms a process of "demonic modulation" — in which expressions of anxiety are contained within a literary vision of society that has the potential to allay all anxiety as unfounded (1957, 156-7). In *The Secular Scripture*, however, he points out that if social mythology is really to be transformed within literature, especially in contemporary conditions where literature is so often conflated with actual experience, then literary language must make its nature as a potential statement of experience very plain. In Frye’s parlance, contemporary literature must trudge the lower cycle of unredeemed experience, the lower cycle of literary experience being that vision of the potential redemption of society which concentrates on the details of what he characterizes as the fallen world and the actual divisions and conflicts which the potential for their reconciliation entails (Frye, 1976a, 173-175).

Thus Frye is arguing that contemporary literature must treat racist attitudes in a way that reveals both the need for their incorporation within a broader social perspective — one that transforms them from a society’s defining good into one of the more unsightly symptoms of its unhappy condition — and the potential nature of literature’s capacity to bring about this incorporation. Literature can provide new opportunities for debate and offer broader perspectives on the question of racist attitudes. But real debates will have to occur and actual social conditions and attitudes change before this larger perspective on racism is realized. This is to say that Frye recognizes that readers from racial minorities, when faced with racist literary content in the context of a racist society, cannot but take that content as obscene. And he is arguing that literature containing the unironic expression of racist obscenities cannot do its job as literature until there is sufficient social debate and change so that every reader, regardless of race, cannot help but find such content obscene.

Linda Alcoff (1988) criticizes the reactionary nature of "antifeminist" (271) arguments that racist language in literature is not offensive because of its disinterested and polysemous meaning — what Alcoff refers to as its "undecidedness" (271) — probably on the ground that the appeal to polysemy masks the univocal function of such statements in a racist society. From Frye’s argument
in *The Secular Scripture*, we can see that while he would rejoin that literature does indeed have a polysemous meaning, this fact does not relieve literature of the responsibility to treat racist language very carefully in a racist society. Literature must present racist attitudes in a form that emphasises the need for their critique within a broad social context. Otherwise the literary presentation of racist language violates the principle that literature is a potential expression of identity and allows racist attitudes to define a society’s entire identity, as they do for those individuals who get themselves identified with such attitudes (Frye, 1967a, 24).

But, if Frye’s argument for reading literature as primarily an expression of potential totality entails the privileging of subaltern perspectives in literature, why, then, does he seem to interpret literature in a manner that allows male voices to speak for those of women? There are many examples of this in his work, but one comes to mind that is characteristic of most of them and so bears examination. In *The Double Vision*, Frye argues that Christianity, shorn of its exclusive nature, might inform actual social discourse and action with the kind of interpenetrating and universal intelligibility that literature can only ever evidence in potential form. He maintains that "it would be a Christianity of a Father who is not a metaphor of male supremacy but the intelligible source of all being" (Frye, 1991, 58). What Frye does not say but must, if he is to be true to the perspective of the subaltern, is that "such a Christianity" would also be one in which not one white male would cringe when the name of the Father is invoked in conjunction with the claim that he is just as much the Mother – a holy mother whose daughter also had an earthly mother who is now as much the Black Madonna as she is the earthly incarnation of the White Goddess, and her demonic form, the Great Whore of Babylon. Now Frye might want to reply that all this goes without saying. But, I would argue that, until Christianity really has shed its exclusivity, and until a truly inclusive Christianity really does inform actual social discourse, such a Christianity exists only as an imaginative vision of its own suppressed potential in which, truly, *nothing can go without saying*. 
Section B.

Essentialism and the Appeal to Myth: Does not Myth Criticism Constitute an Imposition of a priori Categories on Reading Inimical to the Subaltern Perspective?

Even a reading of Scripture that acknowledged the identity of the Father with the Black Madonna, the White Goddess, and the Great Whore of Babylon, however, would exclude mention of God's identity with any apocryphal expressions of Judaic divinity. Frye's reading of "God the father as intelligible source of all being" seems simply to reinforce the ideological assumption that Christian symbolism is the explicit realization of a truth that Judaic mythology contains only in implicit and incomplete form. That is to say, from this supposedly more inclusive reading, within which "nothing goes without saying," we would have to assume that Christianity must speak for Judaism which, unless Christianity speaks for it, must be regarded as an expression of error.

Frye's commentary on "God the Father" may be part of a more systemic error in his critical thinking: namely the error of ascribing to ideologically exclusive symbolism — that is, myths and archetypes — the power to express a humane experience so inclusive that it transcends ideology. This absurd ascription would be indicative of what Jane Roland Martin (1994) describes as the de re essentialism of much patriarchal and modern thought (632-634). That is, de re essentialism searches for universal meaning in the features shared in common by every particular of experience (every phenomenon, object, thought feeling etc) that falls under a particular descriptive term (632). The feminist objection to de re essentialism is that it trivializes or even ignores the differences between particulars — especially when those particulars are individual women. According to this feminist objection, de re essentialism even attributes properties to them that not all women share (633-4) on the erroneous assumption that, as those properties are essential to women, they can be attributed to them a priori. Thus, the terminology of de re essentialism — especially as practised by mainstream modern and patriarchal discourse — is seen by feminism to choose as essential to textual meaning those characteristics which describe experience in the interests, and according to the perspective, of modern patriarchy. Perhaps the supposed priority Frye gives to the perspectives of weaker cultures, race, and region is merely an expression of bad conscience by the de re essentialism of what his critics call his patriarchal and liberal idealism: an expression of bad conscience that includes some extra attributes in his definitions of universal truth designed to "placate the natives," but which otherwise leaves his definitions as primarily expressions of the patriarchal perspective.

As part of his interpretation of terms as expressions of universal meaning, then, Frye might try to include features of experience that are important to the perspective of women. But such a
move cannot save him from the charge of de re essentialism. As a critic who is interested primarily in what linguistic symbols and literary works have in common, and who defines works and symbols in terms of what is common among them, Frye's critical definition of terms could never be able to include enough details of experience to keep from excluding the perspective of minorities and the marginalized. From the perspective of feminism, a criticism capable of including the perspective of minorities and the marginalized would need to understand meaning in terms of the differences between experiences.

Then again, Frye's criticism might be a way of resisting what Martin (1994) calls, the "definitional" (633) or de dicto (632) essentialism, into which feminist critics of de re essentialism in patriarchy are ever in danger of falling. Definitional essentialism involves the assumption that some images can never be retrieved or recuperated as, what in Frye's parlance is, part of literature's potential vision of humane experience (636 -- 638). For, according to definitional essentialists, images cannot be associated with definitions other than those that are racist, misogynist, and exclusionary so that their presence in narrative and discourse will always entail that something HAS GONE without saying. Writes Martin,

it is ... a mistake to ban categories a priori -- to deprive ourselves, in advance of inquiry, of access to conceptual frameworks and ideas that might be fruitful. Denying the existence of different kinds of definitions -- or different approaches to definition -- the category-banning policy assumes that a concept or category or term that has been given an essentialist definition must always and everywhere be defined in that way. This represents a faulty view of language. (Martin, 1994, 638)

For Martin, the problem with definitional essentialism and its recourse to interpretation that finds meaning in difference is that it becomes trapped in the same essentialism of which it accuses de re essentialists. Martin argues that, in eschewing terms traditionally associated with patriarchal discourse as irrevocably bound up in de re essentialism, feminists such as Hester Eisenstein (633)², for example, have sought to save the terms of their own discourse from the same fate, always

²Martin cites Hester Eisenstein's argument, in Contemporary Feminist Thought (1983), that feminist theory has tried to turn the tables on the do re essentialism by which men relegate women to the status of inferiors through recourse to what Eisenstein call a "new biologist" (Martin, 1994, 633 quoting Eisenstein, 1983, xviii). That is, feminists have attributed categories to a new definition of what is essential to the nature of women -- categories showing them to be superior to men. In her argument, Eisenstein criticizes the move to a "new biologist" on the ground that it merely recreates do re essentialism in another form. Eisenstein contends that the description of women's experience in all its richness requires the abandonment of essentialist terms for language that describes this experience in terms of its differences.
predicating their terms on the differences those terms would otherwise suppress. According to this solution, the term "woman" would appear in feminist discourse only in hyphenated form; that is, as black-woman, white-woman, aboriginal-woman, etc. (636). But, as Martin points out, each hyphenated form of woman submerges other differences. This is to say, there are differences between women of colour, between white women, and between aboriginal woman, where the hyphenated terms seem to suggest the assumption of unity within each group.

Feminist discourse can try to get round this problem by hyphenating the hyphens, but then it repeats the failed attempt by de re essentialists to get around charges of essentialism by adding more characteristics to its definition of what particulars have in common. In the end, argues Martin, the search for meaning in unqualified difference must result in giving up on terminology and language altogether. I take Martin to mean, here, that, if we are to think at all, we must have access to linguistic terms and symbols. For Martin, it is when feminism abandons definitional essentialism and explores other approaches to definition, that feminism looks most likely to avoid the problem of exclusion in discourse.

I will argue that Frye's criticism represents one of, what Martin calls, the "other approaches" to definition. His is an approach that seeks not commonalities in definition, but commonalities among symbols that persist through their association with many different definitions. In Frye's anagogic conception of literature as the expression of a verbal universe, every definition with which a symbol is associated is potentially part of its identity, not to be argued with in advance (Frye, 1957, 124). As we shall see, however, in Frye's cosmology, every definition with which literary symbols — myths — are associated is also subject to an ironic scrutiny which exposes its attempt to act as the definitive, the final word, about what that symbol means. This literary irony turns the reader's attention towards the literary symbol's formal connection with an ever-widening circle of symbolic and definitional associations within which literary meaning is contained.

At first sight, Frye's alternative approach to definition seems to concur with the assertion of definitional essentialism that certain images are inextricably associated with exclusionary definitions, and are not compatible with an inclusive and emancipatory discourse. That is to say, he acknowledges that, if the attempt by criticism to recuperate symbols from their association with ideology were limited to readings that simply ignore the ideological associations of symbols, apprehending them instead as associated with more universal and inclusive meanings, then, the prior attachment of these symbols to ideology would make such readings absurd. For instance, Frye
refers to the Biblical story in Genesis of Abraham's two wives, in which one wife became jealous of the other and succeeded in getting her rival sent into the desert. Paul says that this story is an 'allegory' [of a more universal truth] (Galatians 4:24) in which the excluded wife represents bondage of the Jewish law and the accepted one the freedom of the Christian gospel. A Jewish reader of Paul's interpretation, seeing that Jews are identified with the Ishmaelites and the Christians with the Jews, might well say that this view of the story was about the most preposterous that it was possible to hold, and that a method of this kind could say anything about anything. (Frye, 1991, 78 [emphasis mine])

But, if Frye by his own admission, regards as problematic the anagogic thrust to associate myth with ever-wider meaning and reading, why does he think it is a solution to offer more of the same? As we will see from Frye's response to Paul's "preposterous" reading of the Genesis passage, Frye thinks that the inadequacies in Paul's wider reading can only be remedied with calls for an even wider reading. Frye writes, "a further advance in meaning is clearly needed, something in a more catholic direction, such as 'Freedom' is within the orbit of God's will and bondage is outside of it" (Frye, 1991, 78 [emphasis mine]).

If the purpose of Frye's appeal to a "further advance in meaning" is simply to recuperate the symbol — attaching it to a meaning so general, so glib, so detached from experience that no one could take offense at it — then he has merely reconfirmed that myth criticism allows the critic to "say anything about anything," even reprehensible, exclusionary things. But, Frye is really saying that, as centripetal structures, myths point beyond ideology to a meaning that is, at the same time, of universal and intensely personal import — a meaning "that takes us beyond the story['s symbolism] into the reordering and redirecting of our own lives" (Frye, 1991, 78).

To repeat, for Frye, the anagogic relationship between myth and universal meaning is contingent and hypothetical. That is, inasmuch as they are literary, all myths are in an hypothetical and associative orbit around a cluster of issues which any reader would recognize as being of concern to a human community — concerns with preservation of life, liberty of movement, with food and shelter, with the satisfaction of sexual desire and the like. But, as Frye is careful to point out, the association of myths with these concerns does not make the myths universally intelligible. And even recognition of the association between particular myths and universal truth is contingent upon the reader's acquaintance with the traditions in which those myths appear. Thus Frye writes that it would be inadvisable to assume that an Adonis or Oedipus myth is universal, or that certain associations, such as the serpent with the phallus, are universal, because when we discover a group of people that know nothing about such matters we must assume that they did know and have forgotten, or do know and won't tell, or are not members of the human race. (Frye, 1957, 118)
The effect of anagogy's identification of literary myths, which are not universally intelligible, with the expression of concerns that are universal (primary) to humanity is to render that association into a double irony. That is, the anagogic association of myth and concern exposes a demonic — a dystopic — side to myths normally connected with the expression of utopia, at the same time exposing a utopian element in imagery that is normally reviled and suppressed as a demonic exposition of "life as we do not want it to be" (Frye, 1963, 34). Reading at the level of anagogy renders all myths, and the literary works they inform, into shimmering alternations between utopic and dystopic expression, simultaneously recording their inadequacy as statements of ideology at expressing primary concern, and their potential, as the verbal forms of possible experience, to do just that.

The effect of anagogy's rendering of myth into the simultaneous expression of dystopia and utopia is twofold. First, reading at the level of anagogy entails a re-examination by criticism and the reader of all the details of literature, their experience of it, and the ideological structures that inform that experience. It is a re-examination that alienates the reader from those details which they took to express what is good, and beautiful and true, exposing those details as part of the illusions of ideology. This process reacquaints the reader with details they have ignored or reviled as depraved, alien, and unintelligible, showing them to be part of a human reality greater than that of contemporary experience.

As an example of the manner in which anagogy renders familiar images of truth, beauty and goodness into their demonic opposites, Frye cites the difference between the ideological valorization and the anagogic rendering of God as he described in the Old Testament. He writes:

The single [ideological] vision of God sees in him the reflection of human panic and rage, its love of cruelty and domination, and, when it accepts such a God, calls on him to justify the maintaining of these things in human life. The double [anagogic] vision sees this as taking the face of God in vain, as it were, and tries to separate the human mirror from God's reality. (Frye, 1991, 83)

In other words, anagogy does not try to justify the inhumanity of the God of the Old Testament; rather it recognizes him instead as a construct of human ideology and the human anxieties with which that ideology is associated.

Frye illustrates the manner in which anagogy renders demonic imagery intelligible as expressions of a wider human community, with reference to the New Testament image of the Samaritan. He writes, "We may note that the ... story [of the good Samaritan] ascribes a genuine charity to someone outside both the Jewish and the embryonic Christian communions" (Frye, 1991, 78). In the case of the good Samaritan, it is the image normally associated with the hated alien, by
both Jewish and Christian communities, through which the Gospel chooses to express the capacity for human charity and community.

The second effect entailed by anagogy's simultaneous rendering of myth into expressions of utopia and dystopia is that, whether they are encountered as part of familiar utopic imagery that has been made strange by anagogy, or whether they are associated with demonic imagery rendered by anagogy into part of the human condition, the reader must embrace all the details of literary experience as part of the potential expression of universal concern, even though this is humanly impossible within any single reading. For Frye, anagogy teaches that

to participate in [the literary vision] of human society means entering into a common bond of guilt, of guilt and of inevitable compromise. I am not saying that we accept the evils of what we join: I am saying that whatever we join contains evils, and that what we accept is the guilt of belonging to it. (Frye, 1982c, 161)

Anagogy also teaches that familiar standards of beauty, truth and goodness are always extraliterary, ideological and therefore demonic (Frye, 1957, 115). When we embrace even that which we normally associate with the beautiful in literature, we must do so for reasons that would be "strange" to contemporary assumptions about beauty, respecting the obligation literature places in its practitioners to always "follow [such standards] from a distance" (113). Frye says this principle that criticism must respect the distance of literature from contemporary standards is evidenced in modern assessments of Shakespeare's greatness that would be unintelligible to Shakespeare let alone his contemporary audience (345). In the same vein, I take the respect for distance demanded by anagogic criticism to entail that, when literature presents readers with the idealized image of womanhood, at the level of anagogy, they must take this idealization to be an expression of irony, one which prizes female experience for reasons that contemporary patriarchy would find strange, even unintelligible.

At the level of anagogy, Frye argues, literature must be seen to effect a continuous disintegration of myth, exposing hidden associations with the demonic imagery in mythic expressions of utopia and recuperating the potential for utopic expression in imagery that is normally associated with the demonic. This entails that there is no a priori set of undisplaced myths around which literature orbits, even as an hypothetical structure.

At the level of anagogy, then, the disintegration of myths by literature shows the myths themselves to be "displaced" expressions of primary concern, that is, to be expressions of primary concern tailored to particular social contexts and historic situations. As we saw above, the primary concerns with which myths in literature are associated are very general. That is, the generality of primary concerns can only be expressed in statements so aphoristic that they are capable of
encompassing the whole of human experience, in statements such as: Life is better than death: Better to eat than to starve: Better to be free than a slave, and so on. These Frye calls primary human concerns.

For Frye, the role of myth is to relate these concerns to particular contingencies of human life, so that the myths at the centre of the literary experience of readers must vary from culture to culture, class to class, and region to region. As Stephen Yarbrough (1994) points out, even Frye's cosmology is contingent upon his position as a reader. Frye's point, then, is not that literature orbits around a cluster of myths, but that, at the level of anagogy all culturally distinct clusters of myths interpenetrate with each other in their orbit around a common centre of origin (3, 11).

Frye sees familiar myths as flagging the expression of concern in any work where the reader encounters them. As an expression of irony, and of the ironic attention to literary detail, the form of the individual work then dissolves the illusion that its myth is associated with a definitive articulation outside the literature of which the work is but an imperfect copy. In Frye's own parlance, the work shows that myth is not some wisdom behind literature but that contained in the art shown forth by every work of literature in which the myth appears. That is, myths, for Frye, are not what works copy but what their details embody. When Frye writes, then, that without an acquaintance with the story of the prodigal son, students are lacking an indispensable part of literary education, he is not referring specifically to the account of that story found in the King James version of the Bible, but to the art the prodigal son shows forth in every work that contains him.

The literary work dissolves the link between the myth it contains and the articulation of myth with which the reader is most familiar, entailing for the reader a falling back of familiar associations - - the work's "overthought" (Frye, 1990v, 57) -- from the foreground of the work's meaning. With this falling back of familiar associations, "other things said which are subordinated but still audible" (Frye, 1990j, 23) -- that is, hitherto unrecognized forms of myth -- become apparent within the form of the work, as part of its "underthought" (Frye, 1990, 57), forms to which the familiar associations with myth are potentially identical as expressions of primary concern. These hitherto unapparent forms of myth include not only myths from the reader's own tradition but also the mythic traditions familiar to everyone who will ever read the work.

The [individual] work itself has acquired a history: it has picked up centuries of former readers, and brings something of their reading down to us as a part of its own meaning. It will also go on into the future, so that definitive understanding at any stage is not even theoretically possible. (Frye, 1990e, 96)
At the level of analogy, the reader’s familiar mythic structure is seen in the individual work to “interpenetrate” with other structures of myth, structures which the reader would hitherto have dismissed as alien to their concerns and experience. Ultimately, then, literary myth is the confounding of familiar — ideological — associations with myth through the ironic attention to detail in each literary work.

But Frye also argues that if readers attend solely to literary details, ignoring the role of myth in the form of the literary work, the influence of ideology on myth will go unchallenged. Unchallenged, myth as ideology becomes the invisible and an a priori influence that directs their apprehension of literary detail, no matter how thorough their attention to detail may be. Thus, Frye argues against interpretive strategies designed to “demythologize” the text. Such strategies, while demanding "likeness" to reality "generally want the exact opposite" — likeness to conventions [they are] familiar with (1957, 132). The reply of Frye’s criticism is that attention to the role of myth in literature is the only way to guarantee against a top-down discourse dominated by a priori symbols, and the subversion of criticism capable of honouring the subaltern perspective.

It might be objected that to understand literature as the potential identity between various mythologies is simply to reaffirm liberal ideology. For, as we have seen, this understanding of literature entails that literary works effect a disintegration of ideological assumptions about personal identity and the recuperation of personal identity as a potential part of a wider human identity. Such a literary disintegration of identity into part of a wider humane formulation will not change the fact that the identity of white male readers is affirmed by their occupation of the centres of social authority in contemporary patriarchy. It may, however, reduce women and minorities, who remain marginalized by patriarchal conditions, to silence, thereby drowning their struggle to maintain a distinctive identity in a sea of pluralism. That is, the difficulty experienced by members of marginalized and minority groups, in maintaining an identity different from that imposed by mainstream society, entails that they require what Deanne Bogdan (1992) calls the "consolidation" (144) of alternative identities in literature, and the right to refuse the myths of the social mainstream as simply alien.

I take it that Frye would respond to the above objection as we have seen him do in The Stubborn Structure. That is, he would argue that the literary vision of potential unity in difference destabilizes the "reality" upon which the social privilege of majority groups is grounded, thereby undermining the rationale for excluding the voices, and more importantly, the bodies of minority group members from participation in the common weal. In this response, Frye is referring, among
other things, to the power of poets identified in the *Anatomy*, their power to undermine the limiting of debate by majority groups to what can be contained within the majority perspective. Writes Frye, even social institutions with an "enlarged perspective" (1957, 127) cannot "contain an art of unlimited hypothesis" (127). Such an art exposes the tendency of liberal pluralism to pull back from expanding the "cultural envelope" (Frye, 1980, 5; 1990i, 87) too far, at some point, to refrain from entertaining the possible validity of perspectives other than their own. Thus, in *The Critical Path*, Frye comments that, while democratic societies operate as open mythologies capable of tolerating and absorbing perspectives from other mythological sources, even in those societies there is a tendency to hysteria always threatening to close or limit their mythologies.

An example of how this hysteria puts limits on the freedom of debate comes from a position by conservative economists and pundits that, until recently, was all the rage. According to that position, the questions of whether deficits have to be paid off and of whether they can be paid off by other means than cutting government services have been decided once and for all. So while it is possible to hold debates on how fast cuts should be made, and on what particular cuts should be given priority over others, debate cannot be extended to whether there should be cuts at all.

Still another example comes from the tendency of each scholarly discipline to deny the validity of knowledge claims by other disciplines, even after those claims have been verified by a discipline’s own investigative methodologies and epistemological standards. I am reminded of an article in a recently published psychology anthology (Friedman & Carterette [eds.], 1996) at the end of which the authors pronounced that it is finally time for scholarship to examine the cultural and social effects surrounding music cognition. To the objection that literary criticism has been examining such effects for some centuries, the authors would be typical if they responded that *literary criticism only tells stories about stories*: its findings are not grounded in an empirical examination of actual behaviour or the kind of neurophysiological research that would render them valid as knowledge about cognition. That the authors of this article seem to endorse this typical response of the sciences to literary criticism is evidenced by the fact that they dedicate almost the entire length of their article to a description of empirical analysis and neurophysiological research before even allowing that scholarship could consider social and cultural influences on music cognition.

For Frye, the hysteria that accompanies even open mythologies is evidence that debate — the treatment of issues as hypothesis — in conditions of liberal pluralism does indeed orbit around undisplaced myths of concerned truth. Thus, liberal scholarship will welcome the expression of polysemy in literature only so long as it leaves these myths intact. For the undisplaced myths of
liberal society represent the limits of tolerance by the majority perspective. As a structure of infinite hypothesis, literature reveals the contingency of the majority's myths of concern, and so calls into question liberal society's relegation of certain lines of argument and expression to the status of the false or irrational.

Conversely, literature as a unity of differences saves minority perspectives from relegation to the fantastic, to mere storytelling, worst of all to the symptoms of individuals who have nothing in common but their inability to adjust to mainstream society, a relegation that renders minority perspectives into pathology. Frye sees literature, read at the level of anagogy, as the potential identity of perspectives that are actually quite different. It is this potential for identity, mined from the details of literary experience, that makes it possible to contemplate minority perspectives as those of human identity, without falling into the idealism which imagines that the actual achievement of social conditions that would affirm such an identity could simply be thought into existence.

In his attention to a totality of human experience as a potential form brought forth only in the literary details of the work, Frye's critical recourse to myth at the level of anagogy follows Adorno's dictum. That is, it demands of art and criticism an "artless" attention to detail as the means of achieving that independence of form which resists the reduction of artworks to ideology. It is this independence of form, discovered at the level of anagogy, that demands literature be read as that expression in which nothing goes without saying, which demands that the reader embrace the perspective of the subaltern.

For Frye, then, literary myths are ultimately not a priori — that is, essential or undisplaced — forms of primary, or universally intelligible, concern. Indeed, at the level of anagogy, where every literary expression is a displaced expression of primary concern, there are no undisplaced myths. Rather, familiar versions of literary myth act as those hypothetical and thus contingent expressions of concern against which all the fixed stances of ideology — including their own — are rendered contingent. The myths of literature point the reader in directions they cannot follow. In so doing, literary myths transform the admonishment that literature is an expression in which nothing goes without saying into the command that the reader embark on an exploration of experience, identity, and community that cannot end until the least of humankind has been heard.
Section C.

Bogdan on Frye and the Spatialization of Experience.

Deanne Bogdan understands that Frye does not see myths as those universal structures around which literary form orbits, that he recognizes that myths themselves revolve around primary concerns and that their association with primary concerns is contingent upon their hypothetical and ironic employ within literature. Still, Bogdan is not convinced that Frye’s criticism escapes the label of “top down” discourse. That is, she fears that Frye’s is a view of literature that bleaches the risk and uncertainty out of literary experience. And she suspects that, in the tradition of the Enlightenment and patriarchy, Frye gives logical priority to a “critical response” which holds off indefinitely from letting the bodies of the oppressed participate in literary experience in favour of their possessing it as an object of study (Bogdan, 1992, 109-112).

For Bogdan, Frye’s reading neutralizes any tendency in reading towards a “bottom up” formulation of identity that might occur when the oppressed and alienated bring their lived experience to literary form. She sees Frye’s reading as privileging the quest for knowledge about literature over engagement with the text; that is, the critical apprehension of literature as a simultaneous and spatial structure guarantees against the disappointments of actual literary experience in time. While Bogdan avers that Frye acknowledges the possibility of an ideal literary experience in time, she notes that he eschews the “gambling machine of ideal experience” (Frye, 1971, 29). Rather than surrender to reading as participation in a temporal experience so intense that it topples both ideological structures of interpretation and the illusion that they constitute knowledge, Frye opts for the study of literature as a spatial construct of images and conventions. According to Bogdan, then, Frye’s poetics mistrusts the intensity of “Longinian” ecstasis, as a result of engagement with the text. He prefers the cooler Aristotelean approach3 which affords audiences a comfortable distance from actual experience (Frye, 1957, 66) — a distance from which they can contemplate literature as the “typical event” or form of “how things are” (Bogdan, 1990, 151).

But I would argue that, if Frye seems to favour aesthetic distance required by Aristotelean recognition, it is to prepare us for a Longinian intensity of experience and identity with the text that is

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3In Chapter Seven of *Re-Educating the Imagination*, Bogdan uses Martha Nussbaum’s analysis of Aristotelean catharsis to argue that the dramatic point of catharsis is less the result of an evocation of fear and pity than of the aesthetic attitude; that is, the suspension of judgement which renders the reader/viewer capable of learning from the presentation of scenes “capable” of evoking fear and pity (Bogdan, 1992, 179). For Bogdan, as for Nussbaum, catharsis is an act of critical recognition, resulting from the reader’s/viewer’s detachment from the tragic action, and Bogdan maintains that it is this critical distance that Frye’s system of reading privileges over engagement with the text.
not simply an affirmation of Enlightenment ideology and patriarchy. And, as I will try to show in the coming section on feminist responses to mass culture, Frye will not invite the bodies of the oppressed to the text before they have inhabited it with their minds. But, he does so to rid their minds of colonization by the bromides of advertising, propaganda, and mass culture — a colonization of mind that, in turn, reduces the bodily experience of literature to the stock and kinetic responses of a promotional society. In the ensuing sections on Sinclair Ross’s "The Painted Door," a literary work used by Bogdan in her chapter entitled "From Meditation to Mediation" (Bogdan, 1990), I want to show how Frye’s spatialization of literary experience paves the way for an ironic reading which renders the spatialization of literary experience into one of the chief problematics of contemporary literature and reading.

1. Dianoia and Mythos

In the Anatomy, Frye writes that literature, like all works of art, is experienced both by the ear as mythos — the progression verbal sounds in time — and as by the eye as dianoia — a structure images to be grasped simultaneously. Both experiences are aspects of the same literary form: the experience of the literary work in time is that of structure in motion, and the spatial experience of the literary work is that of a progression rendered into structural form (Frye, 1957, 83). This Bogdan articulates in her chapter primarily through the following quotation that "dianoia [is] perceived as mythos and mythos [is] perceived as dianoia" (Bogdan, 1990, 150).

From this description of the literary work, Frye seems to have solved the problem of whether criticism should give priority to the reader’s participation in the temporal experience of the work, or to the reader’s study of the work’s meaning, which apprehends the work as a whole existing simultaneously in its various parts. He seems to aver that the work, qua literature, is not experienced in time until it is experienced as a progression. Furthermore, the work cannot be experienced as a progression until the reader recognizes what the work is progressing towards, namely, the recognition scene in which the progression of images is revealed to be the embodiment of a simultaneous literary structure.

Thus, the temporal experience of literature must be preconditioned by the study of literary imagery and structure. Frye is not arguing so much that the temporal experience of literature should be regarded as precritical until readers have grasped it as a spatial experience. He is saying that, if the temporal experience of literature is to occur at all, it must be prealigned with knowledge of literary structure. Frye acknowledges the possibility of an ideal experience of literature in which intensity of
participation and clarity of vision coalesce, and the experience of literature in time spontaneously coalesces with the experience of literature as a structural whole. He warns that such experiences are extremely rare, and can not be counted on to guide the reader through literary experience. Only when they can go into literature with their eyes wide open is intensity of experience something in which readers can risk involving themselves. All of this Bogdan agrees with and recognizes in her chapter.

Bogdan's problem with Frye's supposed identification of temporal and spatial experience in literature is that it demands that all readers read in terms set down by Enlightenment conceptions of rationality and the conditions of modern patriarchy in which such terms are implicated. She sees Frye as not allowing the intensity of temporal experience into critical employ until it is trained to follow the text as a progression towards a recognition scene, at which point the experience of the text in time resolves itself into the spatialization of experience. This critical training of engagement must guarantee that the recognition scene is chosen in terms of the need to interpret the work at that distance from "lived experience" that is prized by the critical and objective calculations of contemporary rationality.

While Bogdan concurs generally with this position (1992, 161-90), she interprets such a response to literature as one that prohibits readers from bringing the experience of their bodies, subjectivity, and intuition in literary experience. In so doing it bars women and minorities — whose experience is one of alienation from the rationality of contemporary patriarchy — from breaking into, and exposing meaning in, the text at points Enlightenment standards of objectivity would regard as premature — the result of irrational, even incoherent thinking. Thus, women and minorities are forced to experience the text as resolving into the traditional recognition scene, and to identify against their own experience of the text as embodied, feeling, and intuitive beings at odds with conditions of patriarchy. For Bogdan, Frye does not let Longinian intensity into the critical experience of the text until it can be guaranteed to align itself with Aristotle's cathartic effect and its resolution into the vision of "the way things are."

2. Sinclair Ross's "The Painted Door" — Bogdan's Reading.

As an example of the ideological effect that Frye's valorizing of spatialization in literary experience and its connection with the recognition scene have on the apprehension of textual meaning, Bogdan analyses a traditional reading of Sinclair Ross's short story (1966) "The Painted Door."
"The Painted Door" is the story of a good woman whose life is destroyed by one act of moral weakness. The story is about Ann, a young wife dissatisfied with her slow witted but faithful husband, John, and their lonely, stultifying life of drudgery in an isolated farming community. On a certain day, and against Ann’s pleading that he not leave her alone, John goes to visit his father’s farm, leaving Ann to paint the bedroom door with paint that will not dry in the winter cold. Thinking a storm will prevent her husband from returning until the morrow, Ann succumbs to the temptation to sleep with her visiting neighbour, Stephen, a man whose charming manner and good looks have long attracted her. Afterwards, stricken with remorse, Ann realizes that her love is unreservedly for John, after all. She vows to herself that she will atone for her act of unfaithfulness. "For tonight, slowly and contritely through the day and years to come, she would make amends." (Ross, 1966, 215) But, the next day John is found frozen against a fence. Apparently, he did attempt to return that night, but, blinded by the storm, missed the house and wandered past it to his death. Or so Ann thinks, until, seeing the palm of her husband’s hand, she notices "a little smear of paint" (Ross, 1966, 215).

Commenting on the story’s ending Bogdan writes:

Within the aesthetics of total form, the story almost invariably induces stasis as the flash of lightning wherein thought and feeling coalesce. The reader sustains a powerful shock of recognition that John indeed had returned home, and after seeing the two in the bedroom, slipped away back into the storm. There results a suffusion of aesthetic pleasure, arising from the immediate impact of dianoia perceived as mythos, and mythos perceived as dianoia. Simultaneity of expression and illumination become both a function and enactment of the interconnection between the reader’s feeling and the awareness of the author’s craft. ... The conjunction of mythos and dianoia precipitating stasis in this story resides in the final recognition scene, where the "little smear of paint" performs two major functions: first, it fuses plot and character, revealing in graphic terms the tragic consequences of Ann’s moral choice; second, it ascribes the burden of John’s death unequivocally to Ann, who assumes responsibility for the fatal painted door, literally and metaphorically. Here the poignancy of ironic reversal — Anne’s coming to realize her love for her husband too late — devolves upon the author and reader sharing certain moral and intellectual assumptions, certain tenets comprising Aristotle’s "thought," that is, ideology.

This reading of "The Painted Door" entails accepting a certain "given" about "women’s place" in sexual relations, viz., marital fidelity is a moral good that supersedes the exploration of a woman’s sexuality or the expression of doubt about her marriage. There is simply no dramatic interest to this story unless this dictum is in some way contravened; and in order for it to be contravened, author and reader must first mutually accept the validity of patriarchal constraint on female sexuality, at least for the purpose of "enjoying the story." In short, the mechanism of plot and character ... eliciting stasis, demands that Ann make a moral choice that goes against her. (Bogdan, 1990, 150)
Bogdan is arguing that, for Frye, *mythos* and *dianoia* meet at the recognition scene in "The Painted Door" as that vision of a good woman's one fall which has consequences that haunt her for life. And because the story is one with the consequence of life-long guilt for a woman who "falls," for the purposes of the story, the reader must believe that a "good" woman is one who respects the dictum that sexual fidelity is more important than self-realization. That is, the reader must agree that Ann will believe, and is justified in believing, that her guilty act is responsible for John's death, in order for the story to work at an aesthetic level. This form of suspension of disbelief is what Bogdan calls into question.

The reader might refuse to accept the worldview in which good women must respect the priority of sexual fidelity over self-realization, concluding that John's death might be more the result of his realization that his treatment of Ann has driven her away from him. But then the story would be less believable — less "oh so true to life" — and the recognition scene would be deprived of its tragic, its dramatic, point. For, as Bogdan points out, Frye's notion of the recognition scene — where the reader's experience of the story in time fuses into a spatial vision of the story's meaning — entails that the reader respond to the scene as to a revelation of necessary and universal truth; with a sense of what, in Maxime Greene's parlance, would be "This is just how things are, and I didn't know it" (Greene, 1986, 240, quoted by Bogdan, 1990, 151).

This is not to say that Frye sees literature as a structure of belief or an expression of truth. Quite the opposite. Rather, Bogdan avers that, for Frye, if the reader suspends judgement about the truth of a story, so that they "accept every word given ... in the text without question ... and withhold [their] response to the end," then they will encounter in the art of the story the "total form" of possible human experience, and with it, lessons of human experience with applications beyond what we know or believe about it. In the case of "The Painted Door," the lesson is that "death [at least of one's happiness] is the price of experience" (Bogdan, 1990, 151).

What Bogdan objects to in Frye's rubric — and its demand that the reader "postpon[e] response" (Bogdan, 1990, 152) until the recognition scene and the spatialization of literary experience into total form — is, as Judith Fetterley argues, that "it requires fifty percent of the population to identify against themselves in order to embrace it" (Bogdan, 1990, 153). That is, Frye's poetics of total form conflates the experience of women who insist on taking the text personally (who insist on participating in it as an expression and conformation of their own identity) with the acting out of anxieties and prejudices that typify the expression of hysteria in contemporary society. Bogdan writes
that if a woman reading "The Painted Door" get[s] mad[,] angry that the mechanism allowing the
story to work at an aesthetic level presumes and perpetuates a value system inimical to women, [then] [w]ithin the ideology of total form, this would be regarded as a stock response, for a genuine literary
response would require accepting the story on its terms, rather than the reader's" (Bogdan, 1990,
150).

Bogdan is certain that Frye would take the reader's anger at the recognition scene to be
evidence that they are "looking for truth" (Sidney 53, quoted in Bogdan, 1990, 151), and so are
"doomed to circular argument, locked into continually lining up the belief systems thought to be
contained in the story with 'a set of associations that [they] already ha[ve] or at least know about"'
(Frye, 1965, 131, quoted in Bogdan, 1990, 152). For Bogdan, the spatialization of literary
experience as total form has the effect of conflating patriarchal and Enlightenment perspectives as
those of all humanity, and so, of relegating women to a "subspecies of men or men's reading"
(Bogdan, 1990, 151). Frye's spatialization of literary experience thereby obscures the "feminist
purview" "on the price of human knowledge" as revealed in "The Painted Door";"that 'death so often
becomes the price of women's knowledge'" (Bogdan, 1990, 151). Yet, as Bogdan would argue, it is
just such a purview that exposes what Frye takes in literature to be the total form of experience,
unbounded by the limits of ideological bias, as but that "partial form" of experience which is occupied
by modern patriarchy and the Enlightenment.

3. The Painted Door — in which I Present what I Think would be Frye's Probable Rejoinder.

Just as Bogdan has observed, Frye does indeed describe the mythos of the literary work as a
progression towards a point of fusion with dianoia, and consequently he requires that the reader
postpone their response until every word of the text has been read. But, I would argue, it is not
necessarily the case, for Frye, that the most important aspect of the work's progression is that it move
toward a recognition scene, or that the reader is free to respond even after they have read every word.

If Frye sees the moments in the narrative of a work united in their progress towards the
recognition of total form, he also sees them as "tiny flashes of significant moments which reveal the
whole of [civilization's] meaning" (Frye, 1957, 61). Frye asks the reader to postpone response while
reading from the text from beginning to end. But, he also leaves the text open as that ever generous
and available resource which readers can revisit, finding their way into the total form of experience
through details that went hitherto unnoticed in the first reading, where the motivation was to keep turning the pages and get to the resolution at the end.  

What Frye is also saying, then, is that, while total form presents itself at and as the resolution of the narrative, it also manifests itself in the narrative's unresolved details. While the reader's experience of the text reaches its apotheosis at the recognition scene, an ironic revisiting of the text, in which details are seen to work against the narrative flow, provides epiphanies as well. These ironic epiphanies in the details act as visions of total form that can work against "taking the recognition scene" straight, as it were, transforming that scene into its demonic counterpart and forcing patriarchy to give up sole claim to total form. To illustrate the role of an ironic rereading of narrative detail functions in Frye's poetics, I will analyze the role which ironic devices, as Frye might describe them, play in "The Painted Door."


Bogdan's analysis of "The Painted Door" concludes that the work's dramatic point is tragic. I am not sure Frye would agree. There is an asymmetry between the actions and the fate of Ann — whose one moral slip leads to the death of her husband, her hope for love, and a lifetime of unbearable guilt — that is more characteristic of Frye's description of the pharmakos in ironic literature than of what he understands to be the tragic hero.

Be it the surfeit of nobility that blinds Brutus to ignoble motives in his coconspirators, the towering jealousy of Othello, the almost pathological tendency to introspection and suspension of judgement by Hamlet, there is always in the tragic hero an aspect of hamartia or a character flaw of a magnitude matching that of the calamity brought about by the hero's action. Also, the hero's initiation of agon (conflict) sets him on a course of action so destructive to the social order that only his downfall can restore the cosmos to its prior equilibrium. If there is a character in the "Painted Door" with sufficient hamartia to incite the tragic agon, with its resolution in pathos (catastrophe), it is John, not Ann. As I hope to show, John is beset by a towering blindness, and, with it, a

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4Bogdan also gestures towards Frye's recognition of the need for the reader to further postpone response. In her third chapter from Beyond Communication (1990), under "Total Form as Movable Feast" (183-188), Bogdan argues that total form (Frye's conception of literary experience) entails the primacy of ecstasy in literary experience, and with it the need to treat the text as an ongoing resource, rendering a "movable feast"(187) of ever shifting recognition scenes. But since Bogdan understands Frye as emphasizing a spatialization of literary experience that works against the more fluid reading of the literary text as movable feast, she feels that she can theorize such a reading only by going beyond the limits of Frye's "order of words." By contrast, my own reading of Ross's "The Painted Door," makes the case that the movable feast can be theorized without stepping outside Frye's critical system.
Herculean devotion to his own image as slave to the feminine ideal, which equals in magnitude to the
titanic act of self-destruction he causes, an act that takes his domestic world down with him.

I would argue that John and the tragic action of "The Painted Door" are pushed to the
background by the story's concentration on Ann. And Ann is less a tragic hero than a pharmakos,
that is, what, to Frye, would be "only somebody who gets isolated from [their] society" (Frye, 1957,
41), someone who "is innocent in the sense that what happens to [them] is far greater than anything
[they] ha[ve] done or provoke[d]" (Frye, 1957, 41). As always happens, according to Frye, when
pharmakos characters, Hester Prynne, Billy Budd, and Tess are foregrounded in their stories (Frye,
1957, 41), Ann's foregrounding as pharmakos "deepens" her story's "ironic tone" (41), with the
result that the dianoia of "The Painted Door" is rendered from that of tragic image into blank ironic
stare. What critics such as Kenneth Mitchell (Bogdan, 1990, 151) have taken to be the tragic
depiction of things as they are -- Aristotle's typical event -- is rendered by irony into the depiction of
things as they happen to be -- a purely random event. To illustrate how irony is foregrounded in
"The Painted Door," we need to revisit the story in terms of Frye's conception of irony's effect on
the development of character, action, and imagery, the part they play in highlighting the isolation of
Ann, and the manner in which this isolation nullifies any meaning or consequence that might be
attributed to Ann's actions.

In "The Painted Door," Ann lives with a man who commits what, in Frye's parlance, is the
sin of sacrificing their present chances for happiness to a future that can never be as he imagines in
the present (Frye, 1971, 172), one who dedicates himself to a future in which he can acquire material
goods for Ann, but at the expense of her soul.

Then the days which began at half-past four and lasted till ten at night; the meals at
which John gulped his food and scarcely spoke a word; the brute-tired stupid eyes he
turned on her if ever she mentioned town or visiting.

For spring was drudgery again. John never hired a man to help him. He
wanted a mortgage free farm; then a new house and pretty clothes for her.
Sometimes, because with the best of crops it was going to take so long to pay off
anyway, she wondered whether they mightn't better let the mortgage wait a little.
Before they were worn out, before their best years were gone. It was something of
life she wanted, not just a house and furniture; something of John, not pretty clothes
when she was too old to wear them. But John of course couldn't understand. To him
it seemed only right that she should have the clothes -- only right that he, fit for
nothing else, should slave away fifteen hours a day to give them to her ... Year after
year their lives went on in the same little groove. He drove the horses in the field;
she milked the cows and hoed the potatoes. ... but the only difference that it all made
was to deprive her of his companionship, to make him a little duller, older, uglier
than he might otherwise have been. (Ross, 1966, 194-5)
John's sacrifice of himself to the ideal of a comfortable future for Ann gives him a feeling of worth, and his life a meaning so complete that the sacrifice becomes an end in itself. "To [John] it was not what he actually accomplished by means of the sacrifice that mattered, but the sacrifice itself, the gesture ..." (195).

Sacrifice, then, becomes a statement of John's own self-affirmation. That is, sacrifice becomes his means of atoning for what he sees as his unworthiness of Ann's regard, a sense of unworthiness evidenced by his having "been bewildered by it once, her caring for a dull-witted man such as him" (191).

There was in [John's] devotion a baffling, insurmountable humility that made him feel the need of sacrifice. And when his muscles ached, when his feet dragged stolidly with weariness, then it seemed that in some measure at least he was making amends for his big hulking body and simple mind. (Ross, 1960, 195)

As such, sacrifice becomes essential to John's own identity such that the reader begins to suspect that he would resist the prospect of life without the occasion for it, even if that would be what Ann really wants. The reader is led to sense that, because John finds his self-affirmation through sacrifice, he misunderstands Ann's pleas that he change, finding in such pleas the only the motivation for further self-sacrifice.

"John," she would begin sometimes, 'you're doing too much. Get a man to help you -- just for a month --' but smiling down at her he would answer simply, 'I don't mind. Look at the hands on me. They're made for work.' While in his voice there would be a stalwart ring to tell her that by her thoughtfulness she had made him only the more resolved to serve her, to prove his devotion and fidelity. (Ross, 1960, 196)

But, it is precisely because John is sacrificing "for her" that Ann cannot speak out against the fact that his sacrifice is also crushing their prospect of happiness together.

It was his very devotion that ... forbade her to rebel ... But now, alone with herself in the winter silence, she saw spring for what it really was. This spring -- next spring -- all the springs and summers still to come. While they grew old, while their bodies warped, while their minds kept shrivelling dry and empty like their lives. 'I mustn't,' she said aloud again. "I married him. He's a good man. I mustn't keep on this way ... (Ross, 1960, 197)

Because John's sacrifice of their mutual life manifests itself as his sacrifice for her, Ann's growing dissatisfaction is accompanied by a debilitating sense of guilt. When John proposes to go to his father's farm one winter day, leaving Ann alone to face a winter storm, her resentment becomes uncontainable. But the accompanying guilt causes her to minimize any expression of resentment with repeated assurances that John should "[p]lay no attention to me. Seven years a farmer's wife -- its
time I was used to staying home alone" (Ross, 1960, 190) and "I know — I'm not really afraid... Pay no attention to me. It's ten miles there and back, so you'd better get started" (191).

Any expression of resentment by Ann is neutralized by her own feelings of guilt and terror: her guilt is at the thought that her resentment might shatter John's fragile self-image. "And she, understanding, kept her silence. In such a gesture [of sacrifice], there was a graciousness not to be shattered lightly" (Ross, 1960, 195). Her terror is that, in so doing, her own self-image as good woman and faithful wife will be called into question — that she will become the object of disapproval. Terror neutralizes not only Ann's expression of resentment but also the will to do anything of which John might disapprove lest it be construed as a sign of ingratitude. Ann's terror is evidenced in the "hysteria" (203) she displays when, with John having left for the day and the storm setting in, she is unable to get out to the barn and tend the animals. She says "'They'll freeze in their stalls — and I can't reach them. He'll say it's my fault. He won't believe I tried'" (203).

The reader is given to understand, then, that even before she makes what Bogdan calls her moral choice to betray John, Ann's condition is already one made unbearable by an unremitting guilt and terror that tie her to the prospect of a future without freedom, without real life. Living with John, she suffers under a tyrannical kindness that misunderstands her and so renders her mute. His misunderstanding plays on her feelings as the "good daughter" who cannot stand to disappoint those who have been so kind on her fear that she will be adjudged wicked and selfish — a bad girl.


Ann's condition is already one of endless guilt, with the almost unbearable prospect of a life without happiness, with a man unable to appreciate the fruits of happiness. This prospect seems to be altered by the arrival of Stephen — a man seemingly capable of enjoying her, not simply of providing for her.

[John] always stood before her helpless, a kind of humility and wonderment in his attitude. And Stephen now smiled on her appraisingly with the worldly-wise assurance of one for whom a woman holds neither mystery nor illusion ... She felt eager, challenged. Something was at hand that hitherto had always alluded her, even in the early days with John, something vital, beckoning, meaningful. (Ross, 1960, 204)

Stephen appears to represent a "quickening" of Ann's self-knowledge and freedom, "[arousing] from latency and long disuse all the instincts and resources of her femininity" (204). And, should she succumb to his advances, who would know?
Of course, it is Ann who knows. First, she knows, or soon discovers, that Stephen is really capable only of enjoying himself — not her.

She came to understand that for him no guilt existed. Just as there had been no passion, no conflict. Nothing but the same appraisal of their situation, nothing but the expectant little smile, and the arrogance of features that were different from John’s. (Ross, 1960, 214)

If John is the instantiation of patriarchal concern for the well-being of women — that is, the well-being of women understood exclusively as the ground of male identity — Stephen is the selfishness of patriarchy stripped bare. He is a fictional incarnation of the Biblical injunction to Eve: she shall long after the man, and he will lord it over her. Ann evidences Stephen’s true nature when "wistfully still, wondering sharply at their power and tyranny, she touche[s] [sleeping Stephen’s features] a moment with her fingertips" (Ross, 1960, 214).

Second, Ann knows, or discovers after sleeping with Stephen, that there is no alternative to John and the possibility of his disapproval. Her own unnamed fear — the fear that she will be perceived as a bad girl — leads Ann to understand that her future is with John — and guilt. It is to keep terror at bay, Ann will atone. "For tonight, slowly and contritely through the years to come, she would try to make amends" (215) — to be a good girl again. Again, her future prospects have been reduced to a life of guilt made tolerable only by the prospect that her greatest fear — unbearable disapproval — will not be realized.

John, however, does find out — and kills himself. In an ironic sense, John’s death and Ann’s disillusionment with Stephen combine to free her from both the concern and indifference of patriarchy. Both John and Stephen seem to have exited from her life, taking the expectations of patriarchy with them. Yet, this strange freedom is only more of what Ann has already experienced of life, for, patriarchy has colonized her very soul. Thus, that she should become wide-eyed at the smear of paint is indicative of her confrontation with the prospect not only of life-long guilt but also of terror. She will have to live not only with guilt at the knowledge that John found her out and so killed himself but also with the realization of her worst fear — that his final assessment of her is one of disapproval and that she can never make amends.

But, if a life of guilt and terror are the result of Ann’s "moral choice" to sleep with Stephen, it is not a real choice. Had she refused Stephen, Ann would still face the prospect of a life plagued by guilt and terror. For Ann has already been unfaithful to John’s devotion in her soul. As we have already seen from the onset of the story, she is shown to resent the fact that John, by making sacrifices for her, has made a sacrifice of her life to the preservation of his own identity. But her
resentment makes her feel guilty, and in her guilt, she hears in John's failure to understand her a strain of condescension and disapproval which are the objects of her greatest terror — that she might be thought a bad girl.

Thus, "The Painted Door" is the story of a woman who — as what Frye would describe as pharmakos — happens to become isolated from the only two contacts — John and Stephen, both of them male — who connect her with the human community. In the end, what she does, or why she does what she does, has no bearing on whether she will be isolated or not. Likewise, her guilt is, what in Frye's parlance, would be the guilt of living in a guilty society. That is, whatever Ann does is so constructed by the patriarchal society in which she operates that she will still be guilty — even to the depths of her soul.


We see, then, that Ann is operating within a fictional irony where nature and society are depicted as indifferent to her character or her actions. If "The Painted Door" were a tragedy, the imagery of the storm would be an instance of the pathetic fallacy magnifying the significance of the heroine's choice — clear signs of impending chaos in anticipation of her error. Typically, as in Macbeth, and King Lear, however, such climactic portents are accompanied by sheets of rain, thunder and lightning. In "The Painted Door," the storm is a snowstorm. Its blinding stinging fury is like the sand storms one could imagine in T.S. Eliot's The Wasteland, which render the desert a labyrinth. In Frye's parlance, the desert as labyrinth is an ironic, demonic image, in which nothing is clearly anticipated, where each and every turn, is folly. In the patriarchal labyrinth through which Ann wanders, the cosmos can neither be settled or unsettled by her acts. Either way she turns, the outcome will be the same.

7. "The Painted Door" and the Problem of Writing Tragedy in an Ironic Age.

Thus, we have seen that, in "The Painted Door," there is a tendency to the foregrounding of irony in character, action, and, imagery that pushes the tragic elements of the story into the background. The tragedy, however, remains. The image of the "double wheel around the moon" (Ross, 1960, 189) is clearly an omen of the fate that awaits John, a fate which rests with his own decision. Likewise, the scene in the bedroom — first experienced as Ann's dream and then her waking reality after the fact — is really a recognition scene for John, shaking the scales from his eyes
and forcing him to understand what Ann has been trying to tell him all along — that he has made her life with him unbearable.

But the story renders the recognition scene from the subaltern perspective of Ann. As such, it is a recognition of the world as a continuation of the same unknowing she has experienced throughout the entire story. Under the influence of irony, the tragic recognition scene is exposed as a form of misrecognition. Tragedy's supposed insight into "the way things are" is exposed by irony as simply another rendition of "the way things happen to be." And the "tough moral world" inhabited by the characters in "The Painted Door" is shown to be a construct of patriarchal ideology.

Of course, the foregrounding of irony in "The Painted Door" is no more successful than tragedy at conveying what a moral universe divested of its association with ideology would look like. But irony does turn the reader's attention from readings which take the work to be an affirmation that the world it describes constitutes the total form of experience. In so doing, the work resonates with all other literary images. For, from the perspective of irony, they all attempt to give expression to an experience of community which their conventions, by themselves, are inadequate to achieve. As we have seen Frye observe in reference to *Finnegan's Wake*, it is up to the reader to draw together the associations within this resonance between literary images and to transform them into "a dream for awakened minds" (Frye, 1963a, 43), one in which the vision of things as they should be appears in the midst of the all too apparent misery that is typically mistaken for reality. In their resonance with the rest of literature, the ironic and so unresolved images in "The Painted Door" are afforded some independence from, and resistance to, the work's implication in patriarchy.

8. The Painted Door and Irony: Hearing the Subaltern Speak.

I have tried to show that, understood in terms of Frye's critical cosmos, "The Painted Door" could be read primarily as foregrounding the ironic associations with character, plot, and imagery, and, as such, is less concerned with the depiction of a tough moral universe than with the problem of whether or not tragedy can be written in an ironic age. In the parlance of Theodor Adorno, this concern with a problem that is really only intelligible within literature gives "The Painted Door" its independence from the external purposes of contemporary ideology.

Further, if my interpretation of how Frye's anagogic criticism would read "The Painted Door" is correct, then, we must see that his reading of the operation of convention in "The Painted Door" is much like Adorno's reading of *Missa Solemnis*, recounted in Chapter Two. That is, just as Frye's criticism would find tragedy inadequate to the task of depicting the moral universe in "The
Painted Door," so, argues Adorno, are classical sonata form and thematic development in the *Missa* inadequate to the task of expressing the emancipatory sentiments of a revolutionary age. Continues Adorno, this treatment of sonata form and thematic development is evidenced by the foregrounding of older polyphonic conventions, rendered ironic by the background influence of sonata form, a compositional move not unlike the foregrounding of irony in "The Painted Door." That the ironic rendering of polyphonic form in the *Missa* is also unable to give expression to emancipatory sentiment is taken, by Adorno, to be a result of the influence of sonata form, thematic development and, ultimately, the revolutionary age with which they are associated — a sign that it is the revolutionary age itself that has betrayed the emancipatory sentiments it was supposed to embody.

Adorno concludes that, by identifying the failure of ideology to give expression to the emancipation of humanity, the elements of sonata form and polyphony in the *Missa* — like the tragic and ironic elements in the Painted Door interpreted in accordance with the criticism of Frye — afford their work some resistance to cultural aging by associating it with a continuity of artistic practice that is permanently at odds with ideology. Adorno’s analysis of the *Missa*, like the above analysis of "The Painted Door," indicates that, in the art of an ironic age, the progression towards apotheosis — in Bogdan’s parlance, "stasis" (Bogdan, 1990, 150) — is to be taken as ironic. That is, if the artwork is to be seen to contain the whole of civilization, then civilization must be that negative image of community lurking in the work’s unresolved dissonance and revealed by taking stasis ironically.

9. Northrop Frye: Could He be Essentially an Ironic Reader?

Admittedly, it is not clear from Frye’s own writings on Canadian literature that he would take my analysis of "The Painted Door" as being consistent with his critical system. Indeed, more than once (for instance, see Frye, 1982, 80) Frye has commented that, unlike American literature, Canadian fiction tends more towards tragedy than irony. Still, the character Ann does seem to fit Frye’s description of the *pharmakos*. And her foregrounding in the story does seem to emphasize the ironic elements of character, action, and imagery. That it should do so is not inconsistent with Frye’s insight that all literary genres operate in every work, some in the foreground and some in the background, and that the genre of irony tends to reveal most clearly that no one genre can say all there is to say about the meaning of a work (Frye, 1990v, 4).

We have already seen Frye aver that each literary work is a progression of imagery (Frye, 1990j, 23). But we have also seen him say that if we take that progression ironically as a primarily lyric expression, that is, as not only progressing towards the recognition of the work’s association
with external truth but as a sequence of images that cohere for reasons of sound, rhythm, diction, conceptual implication, and the like, then we recognize expressions of experience "subordinated but still audible" that are at odds with the work's association to external truth (23). This is to say that by concentrating on literary works as problems of verbal expression rather than as types of association with truth, criticism starts to get some sense of the unity that resides as "hypothesis" in "even the most chaotic poem ever written" (Frye, 1957, 77) — a unity which is contained by the chaos, not a uniformity that denies the chaos was ever there in the first place. It is this unity that constitutes that total form of experience of which patriarchy is but a part.

I take Bogdan to have argued that some of what Frye calls those "subordinated but audible things" brought by irony to the fore of reading consciousness resonate with the bodily experience of readers who, in Bogdan's parlance, have been "bewildered" by, and are at odds with, patriarchy (Bogdan, 1992, 145). The identification of these readers with the subordinated expressions of difference in the text is intense to the point of being a kind of engaged participation, in face of which all irrelevant associations with ideology fall away of their own accord. Bogdan argues that, for such readers, there is no need to delay response until the work can be apprehended as a spatial structure — even when that structure is, itself, an ironic expression of order in chaos. For them, the only possibility of apprehending a unity which does not require that they identify against themselves resides in the work's expression of multitude. Frye would not agree, for the most part, that such bewildered readers really exist. But, an explication of his disagreement must wait for Chapter Seven and Frye's possible response to Bogdan's argument for a "poetics of refusal."

Section D.

Frye and the False Pluralism of Postmodern Culture.

In Section B, on the appeal of Frye's criticism to myth, and Section C, on Frye's spatialization of literary experience, we have seen Frye advocate readings of literature consonant with Adorno's dicta for art in contemporary society. That is, art must be produced and apprehended as pursuing purposes so special to itself that they are at odds with the external purposes of modern society. Failing that, art must so concern itself with the detailing of modern reality that, in its appeal for forms capable of giving coherent expression to reality's details, it shatters the forms which ideology imposes on that reality.

The consonance of Frye's criticism with Adorno's dicta entails Frye's respect for the place of detail in the expression of the literary work's identity. That is, his reading apprehends in literature the
extreme purposiveness and ruthless representation of the details of reality that are characteristic of contemporary art. As a result, his criticism sees in every detail of every work an irreplaceable part of the expression of literary myth, so that every work must be counted essential to that myth's expression. Frye's critical respect for detail, a respect that can find unity only in multeity, is essential to the apprehension of literary form in an age where, as Adorno argues, mass culture is so eager to speak for us all.

Frye's appeal to myth as an expression of primary concern, then, turns out not to be a form of essentialism so much as the concession to Jane Martin's (1994) insight that we must have recourse to categories if we are to think or express ourselves. But Frye avoids the implication of his literary categories of myth in essentialism by treating them as contingent expressions of universal concern to be taken as ironic as often as they are taken as straight. How particular myths in literature are taken, even whether or not they are even recognized by the reader, depends entirely upon how they are contextualized within the details of each work that contains them, and upon reader's prior knowledge of convention. Whether they are taken as straight or ironic, for Frye, literary myths act as hypothetical structures, inseparable from the works that contain them, so that the details in any work are essential vehicles of the meaning of literary myth. And because the work's details can act as the literary context for the whole of literary mythology, the association of these details with an individual myth reveals formal similarities between it and forms of myth previously unrecognized.

Thus, in Section B, we see that Frye's respect for the part literary details play in apprehending literary myth entails that his mythic categories are not involved in that type of essentialism that deploys categories to exclude alternative points of view for what they are, all the while representing those categories as legitimate elements of pluralist discourse. Quite the opposite. His literary myths operate as ironic counterpoints to the reification of experience under exclusionary categories, thereby allowing literature to effect an extreme attention to detail that shatters the monopoly familiar conventions hold over the interpretation of experience and allows subaltern voices to come to the fore of literary expression.

Likewise, in Section C, we saw Frye's concern that literary narrative should be apprehended primarily as progressing towards its recognition scene and expression as a simultaneous -- a spatialized -- structure is not simply the anxiety that literary experience should be confined within Enlightenment conceptions of rationality. Frye is also concerned with the spatialization of experience as the precondition for a reading that takes the recognition scene to be a statement of irony. That is, Frye is arguing that, in the recognition scene, the literary work's structure is to be taken as
hypothetical, constructed from the potential for unity that is contained within the chaos of discordant and dissonant images which also inhabits the work.

In accordance with Adorno's first dictum — that contemporary art should be so intensely purposive that its purposes are at odds with those of external reality — the call by Frye to read the literary work as a potential unity in actual chaos turns the reader's attention to peculiarly literary purposes concerned with doing justice to the expression to universal meaning, and so highlights the contribution that hitherto unheeded literary details could make to the solution of this problem. In turn, the highlighting of previously unheeded details allows readers with perspectives and experience relegated to the periphery of society to participate in the work as an expression of identity at odds with the construction of identity in the social mainstream. Frye avers that, as a potential unity in actual chaos, the literary work becomes a form of resistance to attempts by conventions of the social mainstream to present themselves as definitive expressions of an actual human identity and society. Literature effects this resistance by incorporating mainstream conventions into its recognition scene and then subjecting them to an ironic scrutiny, exposing their identity with universal truth as incomplete. Thereby, literature reveals that expressions of identity from the social mainstream are as hypothetical as those of literature, and exposes as illusion their claim to be expressions of actual identity.

Frye sees the critical scrutiny of the difference between mainstream conventions and those of literature as being of the utmost importance in conditions of modern mass culture where, as we saw in Chapter Three, such conventions inform our unconscious assumptions about the shape of reality, that is, of what is universally true of human experience. Thus, Frye expresses his delight at a teacher who had his students seek out the rhetorical conventions in advertising, and shows satisfaction at their dismay which occurred when they discovered that advertising was offering them imaginary constructs in the guise of unmediated presentations of reality. In this exercise, myth was exposed as wearing the guise of truth. And Frye holds that myth can only be an emancipatory structure when it is freed from such pretensions to take its proper place as a poetic and hypothetical construct.

I take it that what Frye is advocating, in the above example of critical pedagogy, is that students or readers be called upon to take advertising slogans personally, as statements of fact and truth with the authority to influence their actions and thus their lives. As soon as they do this, readers and students alike will see that the slogans do not really conform to any world that they have ever experienced, that the power of these slogans comes from their being cleverly situated visual or verbal figures. And I hold that, for Frye, if this exercise were taken a bit further, the students would
finally see that, when scrutinized by conscious analysis, the visual and verbal structures of advertising are not even all that clever. An analysis of their form reveals their interestedness, their investment in presenting the world as conforming to the interests of a company that wants the viewer to buy their products. Further, such an analysis would reveal that these structures can only succeed in their design if they can appeal to, inform, and reinforce the unconscious assumptions about what viewers need to do and have in order to adjust to the world as it is. Once the conscious mind gets hold of them, they are exposed as partial and interested forms of reality.

Frye's lauding of this critical pedagogy extends beyond its application to advertising — which makes no explicit claim to be hypothetical and so denies itself an artistic status — to the products of mass culture, which he considers sub-literary (soap operas, movies, jokes, magazines, and comic books). While they are, like advertisements, a form of interested rhetoric, Frye considers the products of mass culture to be sub-literary because they pretend to effect a fictional or hypothetical nature and so, the pretence of being art. In the case of mass culture, then, Frye seems to think it permissible that respondents should take even purportedly hypothetical constructs personally, as expressions of ideology, to expose the interested rhetoric posing as hypothetical constructs. For Frye, then, the remedy to conditioning by mass culture involves literature in a tacit critique of mainstream convention, where the simple comparison of literary conventions with those of the social mainstream leads to a damning indictment of mainstream conventions as expressions of ideology.

It may be objected that the above example of what Frye has in mind as a form of tacit critique is appropriate only to the mass culture of modern conditions, not to those of postmodernity. After all, such a critique seems to be grounded in the following argument: Advertising conflates rhetorical content with the presentation of the truth. While the artifacts of mass culture purport to be hypothetical or imaginative constructions, the fact that they deploy rhetoric in the same manner as advertising belies their sub-literary nature as concerned — ideological — forms of rhetoric. Therefore, there is a clear dichotomy between the artifacts of mass culture and literary works such that the reading of good literature acts as a remedy to bad — to sub-literary — literature.

But contemporary media theorists, Ian Angus and Todd Gitlin, in *Cultural Politics in America* (1989), and J. M. Bernstein, in *The Culture Industry* (1991), argue that under postmodern conditions advertising has abandoned the illusion that it represents truth, adopting instead the artistic pretensions that characterized modern mass culture. At the same time mass culture has taken on the more overtly promotional quality of modern advertising. As a result in this shift from modern to postmodern
paradigms, the distinction between sub-literary and literary works is blurred, with the effect that even works of the literary avant garde are reduced to more of what mass culture can flog.

In Ian Angus' analysis, the different media in mass culture have come together to promote diverse lifestyles which may be enjoined by consumers purchasing varieties of products. Thus, the conditioning of the mass audience has given over to the conditioning of a myriad number of diverse ones. The fiction of the modern "individual" consumer, to whom the market delivered the good life as an epistemological absolute, has been replaced by the fiction of epistemologically relative lifestyle choices to which the multifaceted postmodern personality is at liberty to subscribe as the illusion of choice. In reality, just as the modern individual was a member of a mass market conditioned to uniform tastes, so the postmodern personality conforms to the lifestyles manufactured in accordance with the needs of postmodern capital. The reality behind both the projected unity of the modern world and the projected diversity of the postmodern one is that of hegemonic oppression in an administered world.

Bernstein maintains that postmodern mass culture is the response of monopoly capitalism to the fact that homogenization was increasingly becoming counter-productive to the expansion of markets. Says Bernstein (1991), "[n]ew needs for new commodities had to be created, and this required the reintroduction of the minimal negativity that had been previously eliminated" (Bernstein, 1991, 20). To the ends of the "restless production" (20) of "new commodities" (20) and "lifestyles" (20), the culture industry has co-opted the new and the shocking from the purview of autonomous art, where they had been employed in pursuit of a "transformation of the fundamental structures of daily life" (20).

Todd Gitlin holds that this change of tactics -- whereby mass postmodern mass culture co-opts the shock of the new, which modern mass culture suppressed -- introduces into mass culture a tired sense of irony which mirrors the increasing deaestheticization of autonomous art in the modern period. Every proposition, even those of advertisements, requires a jaded audience, a response which views it as hypothetical. In spite of this, audiences are supposed to buy, not because the advertisements or spectacles of mass culture speak the truth, but because they embody the epistemologically contingent lifestyles to which the audiences choose to belong (Gitlin, 1989).

Writes Ian Angus, in the mythology of postmodernist consumer culture, different clusters of media images (advertisements) present different lifestyles (and the products that adorn them). These lifestyles are authenticated by their applicability to the real life aspirations of consumers. In keeping with postmodernist diversity, mass culture represents a wide range of different lifestyles in response
to the very different real life aspirations of members from different audiences. Of course, any consumer's aspirations might be broad enough to encompass a number of different lifestyle choices, and they are free to indulge in any or all of them if they can afford it.

Postmodern mass culture inverts its own mythology: by creating seductive and idealized pictures of a good life, lifestyles condition the aspirations and shape the lives of the people who buy the props (the beer, or the trips to Florida, or the "Life 55" plans) and live out the identities portrayed in lifestyle advertising. Angus concludes that, as a marketing ploy, mass culture in postmodern society encourages its audience to think of substantive truth as contingent, a warmed over flim-flam which can be taken or left by the individual as the whim suits (Angus, 1989, 102). In so doing, mass culture conflates legitimate pluralism with the illusion of consumer choice. That mainstream criticism defends traditional readings of the canon as being unproblematic aspects of an experience that emancipates the imagination does nothing to disillusion the postmodern reader about the extent to which the canon has been implicated in the promotions of postmodern mass culture and patriarchy. Such defenses serve only to further hide what has become true of art in contemporary society, that the only remnant of literary experience is in the abstract and empty difference between what mainstream criticism actually takes to be literature and what it does not — between what Adorno calls "culture as such and practice as such" (Adorno, 1991d, 55).

This is to say that under such postmodern conditions, where the promotions of advertising no longer purport to be anything but rhetorical play, mass culture freely engages in promotion as a form of rhetorical — that is, literary — irony, indistinguishable from the irony in what Frye would call serious literature. Under such conditions, there seems to be no illusion of truth for Frye's tacit critique of mass culture to expose.

I contend, however, that what we have seen to be Frye's analysis of the distinction between literary content and ideological association in literary works anticipates and moves to expose the ideological content hidden in the shift of mass culture to its postmodern paradigm. We should recall that Frye's reading of Henry V (Frye, 1990j, 23) and what I have presented as his possible reading of Ross's "The Painted Door" (1960) tries not only to avoid conflating the work's ideological content with truth (an endeavour for which Frye's criticism is well known). What is less clear — and what I am reiterating here — is that Frye is always concerned as well with the problematic relation of literary meaning as the total form of the work's imaginative content and ideology. I would argue that Frye, in effect, proposes that the same lesson is required to address the effects of postmodern advertising and mass culture. For he acknowledges that while, in their modern forms, advertising and mass
culture have a residual irony — at a certain level, mature readers recognize that advertising is "only" rhetoric — such rhetoric becomes dangerous when advertising and mass culture gain a monopoly over the production of a society’s rhetorical forms. In the absence of competition, the rhetoric of advertising becomes the form of imaginative experience so that experience beyond that of its commodity forms becomes, quite simply, unimaginable. Thus, for Frye the monopoly nature of contemporary advertising and mass culture conflates imaginative form — even that of the literary mainstream — with the ideology of modern market society.

In opposition to this tendency towards monopoly, Frye’s reading of the literary work exposes as mere surface rhetoric — or ideological "overthought" — what the cultural mainstream took to be the work’s literary content. That is, Frye shows how the work’s "overthought" is but part — and not the most important part — of the work’s literary content. In so doing, Frye’s readings also reveal how the cultural mainstream — informed by the monopoly conditions of mass culture — has mistaken ideology, and its rhetoric of commitment — for the language of free play. Frye’s reading of literary works, therefore, entails that literature should be apprehended as what, by 1981 and the postmodern era, he was calling a "counterculture" to mass culture: one serving as a "counterenvironment" from which to interrogate the "merely" rhetorical elements in what amounts to mass culture’s self-presentation as the imaginative form of truth (Frye, 1993a, 152). Thus, Frye’s call for pedagogies involving a tacit critique of the ideological content in advertising still has relevance in conditions of postmodern conditions of mass culture. But, as we will see in Chapter Five, that is because Frye’s critique, in effect, extends to interrogating the validity of the conventions of advertising, mass culture, and even literature — not simply the claim of these conventions to represent reality, but also their claim to participate in the ironic subversion of ideology. In his tacit critique of contemporary culture, then, Frye seeks out the concerned rhetoric of belief and commitment masquerading as postmodern expressions of ironic subversion. That is, his reading of literary works primarily as an ironic disruption of the linear tendency of narrative towards a fixed recognition scene plays a primary part, and so acts against the tendency of mass culture to read all texts in terms of an extreme linearity, one that neutralizes the subversive power of irony and deafens contemporary audiences to subaltern voices. That is, Frye’s criticism sees in literature an ironic recuperation of form from which acts to remedy the tyranny of linearity imposed on experience by mass culture and the ideology of patriarchy.
CHAPTER FIVE:
UP AGAINST THE CULTURE INDUSTRY:
HOW FRYE'S COMPARISON WITH ADORNO SHOWS HIS CRITICAL
THEORY TO RESIST THE NEUTRALIZATION OF IRONY BY MASS CULTURE.

A. Introduction

Thus far, this thesis has been a comparison of the critical theories of Adorno and Frye. By highlighting crucial similarities between the two theorists, this comparison endeavours to show that Frye's criticism is not simply a reaffirmation of liberal idealism. That is, through this comparison I have tried to illustrate how Frye's criticism also seeks literary meaning in historical discontinuity of convention and its disintegration within the artwork. I have also tried to show how his criticism gives credence to the insights derived from the intense engagement of literature in time, especially by individuals from marginalized groups, over those derived from the text's mediation by the reifying categories of modern mainstream ideology and interpretation.

Thus we saw in Chapter Two that Frye may argue for the continuity of convention through the history of literature and the participation of all literary works in an imaginative totality of literary experience. But we also learned that Frye does so because, like Adorno, he recognizes that the historic discontinuity of conventions and their disintegration within the literary work can only be apprehended in terms of the artwork's participation in an imaginative totality, a totality at odds with the one imposed on the experience and interpretation of culture by contemporary ideology.

In Chapter Three, we saw Frye and Adorno concur that the influence of contemporary lyricism may entail the turning away of literature and reading from engagement in social convention. By so doing, however, lyricism ensures that the participation of readers in all literary works will celebrate a vision of history and society alternative to the one contemporary ideology and mass culture try to precondition readers to accept as fate, an alternative vision that also gives articulate voice to the most marginal and isolated social perspectives.

Finally, in Chapter Four, we were shown that Frye only seems to subordinate temporal engagement and the insights of the subaltern to the spatialization of literary experience, that is, the rendering of literary experience into the study of literature as a structure of preordained categories. Actually Frye is, in effect, following Adorno's dicta, both of which require that literary works be apprehended as being radically at odds with the aims and reality of contemporary society. To do so, Frye's criticism involves aligning the structure of the literary work with reader's experience of it into
a form of what I would call virtual time. That is, as we saw in my reconstruction of a "Fryean" reading of Sinclair Ross’s "The Painted Door" (1960), the reader’s experience of the text becomes a process of revisitations over time that result in the apprehension of myriad recognition scenes and with them imaginative expressions of primary concern that have hitherto been suppressed. Reading literary works as virtual time, then, is shown to expose and undermine their hidden ideological content, and so acts as a model for reading the false presentations of polysemous meaning by which the postmodern culture industry creates the illusion that contemporary society is one from which no views are excluded.

The thrust of my argument so far, then, is that, like Adorno, Frye sees in conditions of contemporary society a mass culture capable of co-opting the literary representation of reality into stereotyped formulas: the literary expression of subjectivity into advertising that caricatures the spontaneity of lyric association, and the literary expression of imaginative identity into false images of polysemy and pluralism. In such conditions, Frye, in effect, concurs with Adorno that criticism can apprehend in literature only the hope for what has not yet been achieved, a hope that can be articulated only in terms of the failure of contemporary society to live up to its promise.

Surely Frye’s left-wing critics could argue that such a view constitutes a retreat to idealism, after all. That is, Frye maintains that literature expresses a vision of society that results not from actual social change but only from the potential for it. And he holds that, as a result of this vision, literature becomes a power with the capacity to effect social change. But we saw at the beginning of this thesis that, according to Marx, only actual social changes — that is, changes in social production — can initiate social change. To think otherwise is to attribute causal efficacy to society’s superstructure — i.e., its cultural institutions — which is a form of idealism. And, according to the argument in the thesis, thus far, Frye’s view of literature is like Adorno’s view of art, so that Adorno’s must be an expression of idealism as well.

In this chapter, I will contend that both thinkers would reply to such an objection that, as an expression of the imaginative possibilities in contemporary society, literature and the arts act as a part of social infrastructure. That is, in Adorno’s parlance, they are a special part of actual social production, giving expression to what society is capable of achieving right now, but what the culture industry has conditioned that society to assume it cannot do. Against this conditioning there are only literature and the arts, which, in Frye’s parlance, contain in their form the record of all that society has accomplished and of what it still could accomplish.
But this answer to the objection that Frye is an idealist gives rise to another objection: this time from Marxist, Fredric Jameson, and feminist Deanne Bogdan. Jameson says it is simply not true that the culture industry succeeds in suppressing the whole of human consciousness. Writes Jameson:

theories [of] ... mass culture [such as Frye's] ... rest on a peculiarly unconvincing notion of the psychology of the viewer, as some inert passive material on which the manipulatory operations [of mass culture] work. Yet it does not take much reflection to see that a process of compensatory change must be involved here, in which the henceforth manipulated viewer is offered specific gratifications in return for his or her consent to passivity. In other words, if the ideological function of mass culture is understood as a process whereby otherwise dangerous and protopolitical impulses are 'managed' and defused, rechanneled and offered spurious objects, then some preliminary step must also be theorized in which these same impulses -- the raw material on which the process works -- are initially awakened by the very text that seeks to still them. (1981, 287)

In other words, Jameson argues that, far from eliminating conscious resistance to the status quo, the culture industry offers spurious goods in order to manage, defuse, and redirect the consciousness of discontent that it provoked in the first place. That is, Jameson sees the culture industry provoking in its audience a residual sense of irony that things are not as they seem, and with that irony a sense of class resentment which it must then manage.

Likewise, Bogdan, as we saw in Chapter Four, argues that women come to patriarchal culture -- I would assume this includes mass culture -- "bewildered" (1992, 145). That is, they have been taught by life under conditions of patriarchy that all is not as it seems, and are "angry" at attempts by male culture to shape their psyches in conformity with a "value system inimical to women" (1990, 151). According to Jameson and Bogdan, then, mass culture ignites the very fires of conscious resistance it is designed to manage -- with the result that it may sow the seeds of the very resistance it was meant to curtail.

To these objections by Jameson and Bogdan, I will respond that Frye and Adorno know full well that individuals bring a residual irony to their encounters with culture industry, and with it, the potential for resistance. Both thinkers argue, however, that having deprived them of their cultural memory, the culture industry actually deploys that irony in a double action that neutralizes any capacity for resistance. First, because of its monopoly on cultural expression, the culture industry is able to erase the cultural memory of conditions in which life might have been different than it is now, with the effect that it is able to distort the viewer's sense that all is not as it seems into the conviction that beyond the goods offered by the culture industry there is nothing. Second, because they are convinced there is nothing else, viewers will eagerly embrace those forgotten conventions that the
culture industry recycles in an ever more dehumanized condition as the form of the new. Thus, the culture industry is able to rechannel the ironic rejection of its conventions by viewers to those conventions of which they have tired. In the end, the culture industry does not have to appease its victims, as they have become addicted to its formulas. Even in their discontent with what it offers, contemporary viewers turn to the culture industry for more of the same.

Further, I will argue that, according to Frye and Adorno, mass culture presents viewers with familiarity with form, but never with form itself, and certainly never with the history it contains. When confronted with the falseness of the culture industry’s promises of actual happiness, viewers have no access to the remedy offered by the imaginative possibilities for happiness that form embodies. Art, on the other hand, expresses what the culture industry hides from its viewers; that is, its cultural memory and the capacity for creative innovation occasioned by the persistence of this memory into contemporary cultural production.

It is my contention, therefore, that, for Frye and Adorno, literature and the arts give positive expression to the negativity of contemporary society which, as we saw in Chapter Three, Adorno says contemporary society itself can only embody in negative form. This is to say that the structure of contemporary society may embody the wrong which the culture industry hides and which makes its expression false. But, as that society can no longer imagine any tangible alternative to its present condition, it has lost the capacity for effective protest. Only literature and the arts, which depict contemporary experience in terms of what it has manifestly failed to become, can embody the wrong done to that experience as a protest against the ideology that wronged it.

Section B.
Adorno and Frye on Mass Culture and the Neutralizing of the Unconscious.

In this chapter, I want to return to an objection voiced by Frye’s left-wing and social critics that the insights of literature and the arts can follow only on and result only from actual changes in social infrastructure — the means of production — and that to think otherwise is to advocate idealism. For, in apparent disregard of this objection, both Adorno and Frye share a belief in the capacity of works of literature and art to express an imaginative vision of the emancipated individual under social conditions that, according to them, are characterized by a lack of progress towards emancipation. From the perspective of Frye’s critics, then, both he and Adorno might be open to the charge of idealism. A comparison of views by Frye and Adorno on the culture industry, however, reveals that both thinkers regard culture itself as a part of the infrastructure of social change, a part necessary to
the expression of social developments of which contemporary society is capable, but which, as we see below, have been suppressed by the culture industry.


As we saw in Chapter One, Adorno's criticism coheres with the Frankfurt School's analysis of society under conditions of late capitalism. According to the same, modern society has developed the productive capacity necessary to ensure the emancipation of the individual, a condition in which creativity is no longer the preserve of an elite from which the labouring classes are excluded but one in which the individuals of all classes can share. At this stage of social development, the raised consciousness in individuals arising from access to a society's creative resources — its culture — should recognize the absurdity of the continued economic disenfranchisement that is characteristic of modern capitalism, giving impetus to the demise of modern capitalist relations (Friedman, 1981, 168).

But the Frankfurt School analysis also acknowledges that neither the raised consciousness nor the demise of capitalist relations that were supposed to accompany modern social and economic development have occurred (Friedman, 1981, 169). Adorno explains this failure as resulting from an unexpected development in modern capitalism: its capacity to neutralize the modern development of individual consciousness through its organization of a consumer society regulated by a culture industry (194-5). It is the culture industry that has set up an ersatz culture (Bernstein, 1991, 8), one that reproduces what were authentic cultural artifacts and conventions in forms associated only with their value as commodities, and that "retards" the capacity of individuals to apprehend cultural artifacts as being anything other than commodities (Adorno, 1991b, 41). Under the culture industry, then, a regression of consciousness is effected (41). Now, even though individuals of all classes are now confronted with the cultural resources of their society (1984, 26), their ability to recognize in the arts an expression of social resistance in support of progressive alternatives to the status quo is confused. And they are trained to conflate the artistic vision of human development towards a life governed by relations greater and more humane than those of commodity form with the development of commodity form itself (Adorno, 1991b, 50-85).

Given this analysis of the culture industry, we can assume that Adorno would answer Frye's critics with the observation that, by itself, the ironic scrutiny of convention — even that which exposes hidden historic differences between them — is no remedy to the effects of the culture industry. For, as it does with all cultural artifacts, the culture industry separates irony from its "historic posture" (1984, 322) in the artwork which might have allowed it to "point beyond" contemporary commodity
relations. In so doing the culture industry "hypostatizes" irony's "immanent analysis of form" into one of pure dissolution which shows that there is nothing past the illusion of reality which those relations embody (258). In other words, ironic critique might expose the inhumanity of the culture industry, but such a critique will signify nothing to when, as Adorno observes, "the people today have already forgotten that there was ever a notion of what humanity was like" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 156). Thus, Adorno argues that if there is to be resistance to the culture industry's neutralization of human progress, it must come from artworks, acting as that part of real production in society (1984, 7, 335) that preserves the potential for progress as a form of tangible possibilities realizable in the imagination of contemporary viewers (347). Only thus can society preserve the image of progress in an age where all actual social developments have been diverted into an historic trajectory towards the megaton bomb (Bernstein, 1991, 3).

2. Frye and the Role of Mass Culture in the Neutralization of Consciousness.

In like manner to Adorno, Frye describes modern society as one capable of merging the experience of the premodern labouring and leisure classes into that of every individual — of replacing the leisure classes with the affluent society (Frye, 1970, 6). But he also describes it as succumbing to a capitalist and thus "oligarchical" tendency, one neurotic about maintaining the machinery of production and distribution, and hysterical at the prospect of a revolt from below (1971, 138).

The tendency of modern capitalism to oligarchy neutralizes the democratizing effect that its society's capacity to dissolve the barriers between labour and leisure life could realize by reducing the life of every individual in that society to a matter of oiling its economic machinery — to nothing more than the production, distribution, and consumption of its goods (1970, 6). Under late capitalism, life becomes an alternation between work and idle diversions whose only purpose is to provide respite from the routine of work (6). In such a condition life is not living so much as a "mere waiting for death" (6) over which the individual has no control and from which there is no escape. It is a condition that expresses itself in alternating boredom and panic — both of which express themselves "in smashing things" (6).

Frye argues that to counter the potential for resistance that comes from this deadening of modern life, and rechannel that restive energy into the conditioning of docile and compliant citizens, capitalism unites the manipulative techniques of advertising and the coercive power of propaganda in the new communications media to impose culture on the masses from above. This mass culture is neither properly a culture nor it is really a popular form — though it is often given the misnomer
popular culture. For modern mass culture so-called is not something that the masses create, so much as another commodity to be consumed (Frye, 1993a, 152). And far from firing the popular imagination, mass culture seeks to impose the same deadening quality upon the imaginative faculty that contemporary capitalism imposes upon the whole of modern life.

Against the reduction of consciousness to complete passivity, Frye argues for a criticism that apprehends literature and the arts as the record of what society has done, which persists into and is recreated in contemporary society as the imaginative image of what it could still do (1970, 105). In other words, he argues for a view of literature, not as something that follows on and mirrors social production, but as the real form of that production, a form that includes the image of unrealized capacity. For Frye, the educated reader apprehends in literary tradition an imaginative image of unrealized capacity, an image with the power to evoke in the reader an active critical response to all conventions — especially those of the mass media — to their tendency to demand in readers a passive acceptance of the form that they give to reality (1967a, 20). For Frye, like Adorno, then, literature and the arts are a part of society’s infrastructure: the production of a capacity for consciousness without which society’s somnambulatory procession towards disaster must be inevitable.

Section C.

Adorno and Frye on the Culture Industry and the Neutralization of Irony.

In the second part of this section, I want to return to the objection implied in Jameson’s comments on irony in mass culture, and in Bogdan’s comments on the bewilderment of women in conditions of patriarchy, that Adorno and Frye respectively fail to acknowledge the existence of a residual irony in conditions of ideology. That is, each assumes that, under conditions of mass culture, viewers of culture are conditioned to respond passively to anything that culture has to offer. According to the above objection, then, both Frye and Adorno do not acknowledge the consciousness-raising energy inherent in contemporary conditions. This consciousness raising — ironic — energy is evidenced in what Jameson cites as the tendency of the culture industry to give expression to the very discontent it is designed to manage. It is also evidenced in what Bogdan cites as the tendency of the cultural mainstream to "bewilder" women into a state of disbelief by so obviously demanding that they identify against themselves.

I want to show that while both Adorno and Frye acknowledge that, indeed, there is a residual irony in the culture industry and in the response of viewers to it, both thinkers maintain that the culture industry has co-opted this irony as part of the mechanism by which it neutralizes resistance in
its audience. In other words, they would say that the culture industry does not so much inadvertently produce the irony it was designed to suppress, but, rather, that the culture industry deliberately reproduces irony in a neutralized form in order to avoid occasioning an authentic or truly critical irony.


In his analysis of the culture industry, Adorno points to its reduction of leisure time to an extension of work — a temporary relief from drudgery that makes that drudgery bearable. At the level of consciousness, this extension of work into one's leisure time is perfectly apparent to the consumer of mass culture. "Even in self-surrender [to the illusions of the culture industry] ... one knows that he [sic] is basically marking time," that even "in his enjoyment he is simultaneously betraying the possible and being betrayed by the existent" (Adorno, 1991b, 49). Thus consumers are in a state of constant disappointment with the products that they always so eagerly accept. Thus Adorno writes that "[p]eople fall for this fraud because they secretly sense that the principle they follow [in the conventions of mass culture] is the fraudulent tit-for-tat of exchange" (1984, 335).

But because they have been deprived of memory by the culture industry — because their initial acceptance of the culture industry's products was at the level of the unconscious — consumers of mass culture cannot learn from their disappointment. That is, Adorno says the secret of the culture industry's influence over its mass audience is the mass reproduction and repetition of the formulas it presents. By repeating them until they become ubiquitous, the culture industry ensures that its audience will be familiar with those formulas only because they are ubiquitous, not because the audience's members have actually tried to acquaint themselves with the actual workings of these formulas (Adorno & Horkheimer, 147-8). As a result, members of the mass audience can have no actual memory of these formulas, only of their disappointment at the failure of the latest formula to fulfil its promise of happiness (126-7). For the viewer cannot actually remember if there is any real difference between the latest innovations of the culture industry and those that they have recently rejected out of disappointment (Adorno, 1991b, 49). If they could, they would realize that the culture industry's "characteristic innovations are never anything more that improvements in mass production" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 136).

Thus does Adorno argue that the rage which inevitably follows the viewer's disappointment becomes the conscious rationalization for their acceptance of the next line of products that the culture industry presents as new and exciting. The consumer takes his acceptance of what the culture industry
presents as new and different to be based on the realization that what he liked last year — last month, even last week — has become out of date. "$[\text{He}]$ would like to ridicule and destroy what yesterday [he was] so intoxicated with, as if, in retrospect, to revenge [himself] for the fact that the ecstasy was not actually such" (Adorno, 1991b, 49) Irony — the conscious disillusionment which recognizes that the products of the culture industry are not what they would seem — becomes a mechanism for their acceptance, and for the victory of the conditioned unconscious over that of conscious discernment.

This is to say that, for Adorno, the culture industry fills the experience of its viewers with formulas which they then take to constitute the image of experience, simply by virtue of their familiarity. In so doing, the culture industry conditions its viewers to respond unconsciously to the lie it reproduces as though that lie were the aesthetic expression of truth which it extinguishes" (1979, 135). And because irony has become isolated from the "immanent constitution of the work of art" and its expression of possible experience, irony must accept the will of the conditioned unconscious (Adorno, 1991b, 29). For it has no access to conscious alternatives.

The culture industry's reification of irony, then, turns the struggle of modern criticism against tradition and the conventions that embody it into a struggle against yesterday's struggle. For, in the culture industry, what today is the old fashioned was yesterday "the new way of listening." And both the "out of date" and "with it" sounds have become one in their total obedience to the shallow alterations that the culture industry made to the artifacts of their day. In such circumstances, the current critical attachment to irony and its struggle against the upholders of aesthetic tradition becomes like the struggle between old timers and youth, in which "the bigots who complain to the radio stations in pathetic-sadistic letters of the jazzing up of holy things and the youth who delights in such exhibitions are of one mind" (Adorno, 1991b, 49).

Even the totalizing of irony by modern criticism — in which all the conventions of capitalist society are scrutinized for a spontaneity, newness, a liberation of humanity and nature which are expressed only by their absence — falls victim to the culture industry's false promise of a future subject to the inevitable forces of progress, available to critics and consumers alike, if only they embrace "the tolerated spontaneity of [commodity society's] collective excesses" (Adorno, 1991b, 49). Such a totalization of irony becomes part of that praxis that "does not want to hear anything about [the limitations of simply rejecting past ideology for the promise of future progress] as long as the practical ordering of the world has not yet been achieved" (Adorno, 1984, 342). Underlying the culture industry's victory over irony is the individual's inherent sense of powerlessness in the face of
late capitalist society — "that the security and shelter under the ruling conditions is a provisional one, that it is only a respite, and that eventually everything must collapse" (Adorno, 1991b, 49).

In late capitalist society, the individual's day is a marking of time. The drudgery of work blends and the respite of leisure blend into each other as part of an interminable waiting for the end of things — an end that like death the individual is powerless to avoid (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 142). Faced with this condition, individuals are only too eager to trade the struggle for real progress and change for obedience to what we have seen Adorno call "the tolerated spontaneity of collective excess" — to give up the struggle between unconscious conditioning and conscious discernment (1991b, 49). In fact, they are all too ready to accept the misuse which the culture industry makes of irony — a misuse that renders conscious discernment into the handmaiden of unconscious conditioning (1979, 167).

2. Frye on the Neutralization of Irony by Mass Culture.

In earlier chapters, we have seen Frye describe advertising as a conditioning of consumer decisions, one that bombards the mind with images and promotions whose assertions are so ironic — so absurd, silly and shallow — that the conscious mind dismisses them as being beneath serious scrutiny. Thus do the images of advertising slip beneath conscious discernment in a continuous stream until they become familiar to the unconscious as the embodiment of the good life.

But Frye also argues that, provided there is some exercise of social control, advertising does not present too serious a problem. By social control, Frye seems to mean the assurance by society of that variety in the "kinds" of educational and commercial (1971, 136-37) pluralism necessary for individuals to mature so that they may be capable of what operates for Frye as a secondary sense of irony, reflecting upon and attaining some critical distance from their assumptions — even those of unconscious origin. What I am calling second irony entails the ironic distance maintained by mature individuals from the belief that advertising conventions represent "truth," a critical distance that goes beyond the simple dismissal of those conventions from conscious scrutiny to the appreciation of how they might be put to "honest work," "illustrating the affinities in structure and imagery between the 'best'- that is, the literary — and the 'worst' — that is, the sub-literary — in the individual's entire cultural experience" (Frye, 1970, 85). And social control also seems for Frye to be that requirement by society that, unlike propaganda, advertising does not become coercive. That is, Frye sees the need to keep advertising from implying some threat which inspires the will to associate the rhetorical presentations of advertising with truth even though it is capable of telling them apart.
In modern capitalist societies, mass culture breaks down the social controls that separate advertising from propaganda by operating through the new media of mass communication — especially television — and their control by advertising (Frye, 1993a, 152). For Frye, the effect of the new communications media is two-fold. First, as we saw in Chapter Three of this thesis, they tend to achieve an ever-increasing monopoly over (1993b, 164) and homogenization of the form of what passes, in contemporary society, for the cultural experience of individuals. In the early 80s Frye argued that this tendency of the modern mass media and culture has increased in the contemporary — I would say the postmodern — era, any talk of decentralization and diversification being nonsense (1993c, 173).

Second, while the products of mass culture are highly formulaic, demanding that viewers "follow" the ordering of image and event through which they are presented, their vehicles — the new communications media, especially television — tend to so foreshorten the act of presentation that viewers cannot synthesise the formal ordering of these products into a meaningful context (Frye, 1990e, 94). This twofold effect of the new communications media reduces the cultural experience of viewers to the shock or stimulus caused by exposure to "content they have not been adequately prepared to receive" (94); one associated with the physically titillating (Frye, 1971, 153 -154) — the tendency to lust and bloodlust (Frye, 1976a, 26); one reinforcing and reinforced by the unconscious assumption — planted by advertisements in the minds of viewers — that consumer society’s satisfaction of humanity’s primary concerns at a "purely physical level" (Frye, 1990v, 45) constitutes the good life in its entirety.

We mentioned that Frye understands liberal and democratic society as allowing for a second ironic deploy — the supposed result of that society’s cultural and commercial pluralism — by mature individuals, one that gives them the freedom of some critical distance from and reflection upon the misuse that advertising made of irony in the first place. But, as we have just seen, the homogeneity of mass culture destroys the underpinnings of that second irony while simultaneously simulating it in unreflective form. For, mass culture drowns out all divergent — and thus all authentic — cultural expression with its own forms. At the same time mass culture abuses irony to shock and panic viewers into willingly associating those forms with the narrow vision of life offered by the bromides of advertising. Thus does mass culture reproduce — misproduce? — the shock, the making strange, of culture in ersatz form. The discomfiting of sensibility, the result of the art work’s ability to make the familiar anew, is displaced by the shocks of mass culture that render the sensibilities inchoate. Thus, rendered inchoate, the sensibilities conflate the new and interesting with what is actually more of the
same. Like Adorno, then, Frye sees mass culture as depriving audiences of conscious access to form, and so, of the cultural memory that would allow them to distinguish the actual differences and similarities between traditional and contemporary expression.

And Frye also argues, like Adorno, that the shock value of a product of mass culture is achieved by sleight-of-hand: it is presented at such a speed that audiences are not able, at one or even a few exposures, to assimilate and so recognize its tired similarity to other products — and, because mass culture cannot resist re"presenting“ a successful product millions of times over, it is only a matter of time before any given product of mass culture loses its shock value — becoming old hat. To remedy this inevitable tendency on the part of its audiences to ennui, mass culture has recourse to an infinite process of "new" recyclings which, as Adorno says, the mass audience embraces to avenge itself on those commodities that have most recently disappointed them.

Having robbed individuals of the ability to remember its conventions — especially as they originally appeared in the arts — mass culture has left its audience only with the memory of a weariness that comes from over-exposure to they know not what. Convention is thus reduced by the new media to something that can be "repeated and then forgotten" (Frye, 1971, 151) and once forgotten to be recycled as the "new" content of the mass media (151). By depriving them of their memories, then, mass culture is able to assuage the boredom of audiences with its inherent sameness by giving them more of the same only with its content slightly altered by a touch of recycled literary convention. Of course, the inevitable consequence for literary convention is that it is deprived of its literary quality so that only its capacity as advertising to draw the mass audience remains.

In effect, mass culture treats individuals as consumers — as objects to be stimulated and directed towards the purchase of marketable goods. Having disassociated the individual’s consciousness from the imaginative forms of community contained in their cultural heritage — and having remedied the boredom and despair that should result from such a disassociation of consciousness — the shocks of mass culture are accompanied by and associated with the bromides of advertising, which, having planted themselves in the unconscious — and in the absence of conscious alternatives — become the images of community upon which the individual draws in determining what their role in society should be (1967a, 26-7). Thus does mass culture reduce its audience to the passive response which advertising has always sought, but to which the ironic distance achieved by the mature consciousness has always offered up some resistance. As Frye writes in The Critical Path:
All [the new communications] media have a close connection with sources of social authority and reflect their anxieties. ... in the United States [and other capitalist countries] they reflect the anxiety of the economic establishment to keep production running. [Thus mass culture becomes] the steady insinuation of suggested social attitudes and responses that comes pouring from the active mouth of A into the passive ear of B. Wherever we turn, there is the same implacable voice, unctuous, caressing, inhumanly complacent, selling us food, cars, political leaders, ideologies, culture, contemporary issues, and remedies against the migraine we get from listening to it. As I have tried to suggest from this list, it is not only the voice we hear, but the voice that goes on echoing in our minds forming our social attitudes, our habits of speech, our processes of thought. (Frye, 1971, 147)

For Frye, then, it is through mass culture that the social controls separating advertising from the coercion and compulsion of propaganda are shattered. Under the regime of the new communications media, resistance is not so much impossible as self-defeating. For the new communications have altered individual consciousness so that now even the ironic distance that afforded mature individuals some resistance to the insinuation of an association between advertising and truth, even that irony has been co-opted into the conflation of rebellion with the "knowing" acceptance of the association between truth and the rhetoric of mass culture.

Frye knows that mass culture's attempt to reduce individuals to consumers — "hence objects to be stimulated" -- involves "a large element of mechanical and involuntary response" (1971, 147-8). But, like Adorno, he argues that "there is resentment too, a resentment which turns to panic when it becomes obviously impossible to escape" (148). Resentment of individuals at the ubiquitous stimuli of mass culture is also directed at the efforts of modern society with which that reification is closely connected — society's effort to reduce their lives to alternating routines of work and of idleness which is no more than an extension of work. As we have seen, however, mass culture has curtailed access by individuals to that cultural heritage contained within the arts, within which they might have become acquainted with the possibility of a human experience greater than that associated with the stimuli of a consumer society.

Bereft of a social vision alternative to that of the shocks of mass culture, individuals have no recourse but to resist the vision of mass culture in silence. And the only recourse open to silence in an environment where noise is everywhere — even deep in the minds of the listener — is through white noise — the cancelling out of noise with counternoise, of shock with countershock. About acts of countershock, Frye writes that "[a]ll such acts, however silly or vicious in themselves, are acts of countercommunication, acts noisy enough or outrageous enough to shut down that voice and spit at that image [of mass culture] if only for a minute" (1971, 148). The search for new sensory
experiences, for new shocks "of a kind that mass media cheat us out of and that socially approved narcotics fail to provide [is found among other places] in rock music, which wraps up the listener in an impermeable cloak of noise" (149). Attempts at countershock seek to create a space for the revival of the type of community that mass culture has shattered, to replace the prison-like conditions of mass society (150) within which individuals are isolated and yet have no privacy (1967a, 38), with "noisy and strident" festivals (1971, 150). What Frye has in mind here are such events as the rock concerts, "love ins" and demonstrations of the 60s subcultures.

But, for Frye, the attempt at countershock was and is doomed to failure (1971, 148). For its effect, countershock seeks to appeal to the same media of mass communication as do the shocks of mass culture, and so is equally bereft of memory. Its power to communicate, then, is dependent, like the products of mass culture, upon its stimulative effect and the unconscious associations that individuals have been conditioned to make between stimuli and advertising. The only difference between countershock and the shocks of mass culture is that countershock seeks to outdo the stimulative effect of mass culture, to produce shocks more intense and outrageous than those offered by mass culture. But, in an era when everything presented by the mass media — even that which is shocking — was taking on an ever more homogenized form, the presentation of countershock was a difference that is no difference at all. For, in seeking to recycle the old as new, mass culture must always dress its content up in forms more shocking than those in which its content last appeared. Whatever the motivations of its audience, the attempt at countershock seems, in the end, to be nothing more than part of the trend by mass culture to the shock of the new. For this reason, Frye writes that what were called the subcultures of the 60s were actually dupes of mass culture and quickly absorbed by it (1993a, 152).

For Frye, countershock only occasions more of the very A-to-B communication by mass culture that it sought to silence (1971, 147-9). Because it participates in the same mass media and so is bereft of memory in same manner as the products of mass culture, the true nature of countershock is that of mass culture itself. And resistance based on this attempt at countershock is no more than an organ of mass culture — one in which "the 'linear' panic [engendered by the media of mass communication] about keeping up, getting with it, meeting the demands of a changed situation, and the like is intensified" (Frye, 1971, 152). Thus, Frye argues that countershock was an attempt to deploy irony in a rejection of mass culture, an attempt motivated by what we have seen Adorno refer to as disappointment at the falseness of its promises. But Frye also concurs with Adorno that mass culture was able to transform disappointment, and with it, the ironic sense that all is not as it would
seem, into terror at the prospect that there is no escape, that there is nothing beyond what mass culture has to offer.

In the panic that ensues, argues Frye, even resistance to mass culture turns into a rush to embrace more of the same. "So, far from encouraging a shift from linear and fragmented to simultaneous and versatile response, the electronic media have intensified the sense of a purely linear experience which can be repeated or forgotten" (Frye, 1971, 150-51). Thus does Frye understand how the individual's ability to see through advertising is reduced by mass culture into an inurement to, disappointment in, and a rejection by mass audiences of what yesterday was shocking. Thus, the resentment and panic resulting from the sense that there is no escape, to which Frye refers when he talks of the effects on individuals of a society that has reduced life to a waiting for death, are transformed by mass culture into a near perfect conflation of rebellion with acquiescence. Resentment is deflected from consumer society as a whole, to only those commodities that have become "old hat." And, as Adorno tells us, the panic that ensues from the viewer’s sense of helplessness in the face of commodity society drives them to embrace the illusion of newness in the wonders and surprises that next year's models hold in store (1979, 151; 1991b, 49).

Thus does mass culture effect in its viewers what Frye describes as the willing association between its rhetoric and the form of truth. That is, Frye argues that while mass culture cannot destroy the capacity of individuals to tell the difference between its rhetorical formulas and the truth, it can pressure individuals into recognizing the need for a "willingness to unite" that shock -- the one produced by the latest rhetoric that mass culture has on offer -- with the authority of a "direct address" -- one that confronts audiences with that unmediated truth which older "establishment" forms of address have concealed (Frye, 1970, 88).

We are continually being persuaded to fall into the habit, by pressure groups trying to establish th[at] same kind of authority, and by certain types of entertainment in which the kinetic stimulus is erotic. I recently saw a documentary movie of the ... singer Paul Anka. The reporter pried one of the squealing little sexballs [sic] out of the audience and asked her what she found so ecstatic about listening to Anka. She said, still in a daze: "He's so sincere." The will to unite rhetorical and direct address is very clear here. (Frye, 1970, 88)

Like Adorno, Frye shows how the capacity of modern society to outgrow capitalism, to resist its tendency to reduce life to the drudgery of work and its extension into leisure time, is neutralized by mass culture. Under conditions of mass culture, the tendency of modern thought to irony and the resistance that it should engender has been transformed into a will to unite the form of truth with the newest commodities of consumer society. And the priority of difference in modern expression has
been reduced to that unreflective rejection of the past which allows the new media to recycle it in a superficially changed form.

Frye holds that, under conditions of mass culture, if criticism — and here he would include that of the critics mentioned in this thesis — if criticism gives priority to the ironic response to convention and to the differences in cultural expression that such a response entails, and if criticism does this solely to discredit and reject conventional norms in the search for a reality unmediated by convention, then such criticism can only be characterized as an "ironic provincialism" (1957, 62) which dismisses the literary past as implicated in ideology only to reproduce it in a form that is implicated in the ideology of the present day. For mass culture has distorted the ironic rejection of the past into a mechanism by which the past can be recycled as the face of the future. It is this same misuse of irony that allows modern capitalism to betray the potential of modernity to create a truly popular culture, conflating the hope for its achievement with the delivery of a "packaged commodity which an overproductive economy ... distributes as it distributes food and medicines, in varying degrees of adulteration" (Frye, 1976a, 26). And it is this society's distribution of mass culture that conflates the panic that individuals must feel at seeing their lives reduced to the consumption of adulterated goods with a panic to get "with it" that finds solace in the latest offerings of consumer society. As would Adorno, Frye must conclude that the simple prioritizing of irony and the deconstruction of convention will find no negativity — no unintentional imagery of resistance in mass culture (1984, 309). That is, he has shown in his explication of mass culture's operation through the new media and of its association with advertising, that for mass culture, even the imagery of resistance becomes a form of product endorsement.

For Frye, if there is a negativity to contemporary society, it must be expressed in a form of presentation different from that of mass culture — one where the "medium really is the message" and not where that slogan has been distorted to mean, as it has by mass culture, that, regardless of the medium, the message is always the same (1971, 152). Such a presentation would have to be at odds with the new communications media, whose demand for conscious attention to, but not the conscious appreciation of, convention and form, is all too familiar. In this sense, it would be a form of counterculture — at odds with the pretensions of the mass media — relying on the unfamiliarity of its presentation to make the familiar anew. For Frye, as for Adorno, such a counterculture — the expression of modern society's capacity for emancipation and the consciousness necessary to achieve it — can be evidenced only in literature and the arts. For them, literature and the arts have become part of the progress of social production and not simply a reflection of it.
Section D.

Frye and Adorno on Literature and the Arts as Ironic Recuperations of Form and on the Resistance of Literature and the Arts to the Contemporary Neutralization of Irony.

In this Section, I want to show that, for Adorno and Frye both, art resists mass culture through its concern with form. According to my argument, Frye and Adorno see the culture industry as impatient with the formal properties of its conventions, inducing audiences to reject those conventions as false or as out of date whenever they get too close to making a conscious acquaintance with them. By contrast Frye and Adorno argue that works of literature and art recuperate form, even in its association with the false consciousness of the culture industry, as a source of imaginative possibilities. Thus, Frye is with Adorno in seeing the role of irony in art as one of bringing the discipline of form to bear on the conventions of mainstream ideology. Both thinkers admit that, from the purview of contemporary ideology, the imposition of formal discipline on convention by artworks must have the appearance of their failure to achieve a conventional form, and of their retreat from society into a radical and uncommunicative individualism. But they argue that, if contemporary artworks are seen to retreat into individualism, it is to give expression to an individuality which contemporary society cannot accommodate, one which forces the reader to contemplate a society that it would require the whole of consciousness to envision, not just that narrow application of consciousness required by contemporary rationality.

For Frye and Adorno, then, irony, operating within the work of art or literature to recuperate the formal possibilities in convention from their association with ideology, reverses its neutralization by the culture industry within which it operates as a mechanism designed to convince audiences that there is nothing but ideology. Thus do their arguments entail that any criticism which sees resistance to ideology in the ironic rejection of convention is itself in danger of being implicated in the ideology of contemporary mass culture.

1. Adorno on Irony and Form in Art.

Adorno would have it that art is neither simply a reflection of advances in social consciousness, nor is it an expression of false consciousness — claiming insights into the human condition that present social development cannot support. Far from it, he sees art as a real process of production in modern society so that art is that part of the contemporary infrastructure necessary to
preserve the potential in modern society for resistance to commodification even as the culture industry has neutralized totally the realization of that potential.

But, as the above account of irony in the culture industry has shown, if art and criticism are to resist the effects of the culture industry, it will not be sufficient for them to deploy irony in simple opposition to convention. As we saw in Chapter Three, art and with it criticism are driven by the culture industry to the margins of contemporary social expression, a purview from which the operation of irony and convention seem much different than they do at expression's industrial centre. From this vantage point, the lyric expression of irony — its historicization of convention and individualization of the art work — must be seen not to simply reject conventions as false consciousness, to recuperate them within the art work's purely formal concerns. For, it is as purely formal concerns that the expressive essence of conventions as giving expression to tangible possibilities for the achievement of a true humanity comes to the fore.

For Adorno, then, art opposes the culture industry's neutralization of irony by recuperating purely formal concerns from conventions that the culture industry induces its audience to reject as simply false or out of date. Thus, the artwork's treatment of convention is in direct opposition to what we will see to be the culture industry's impatience with form. We saw above that, for Adorno, the culture industry influences its audience through its repetition of formulas, which becomes familiar to audiences as the form of experience solely because of their ubiquity. According to Adorno, however, the culture industry ensures that audiences will not look beyond the seeming familiarity of its formulas, attempting to appreciate them as forms of expression, by presenting them in a manner that, in Adorno's words, sets a "new tempo" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 138). That is, the formulas of the culture industry are presented in an accelerated manner which demands that "the weary eye" keep up with every stimulating image, so that "one has to follow everything" (139), while at the same time being unable to concentrate upon the formula as a whole. Members of the mass audience are required to feel the stimulating effect of the culture industry's formulas without being able to consciously apprehend anything about them beyond their first sensuous impression. Thus is the viewer required to embrace but never to appreciate the conventional aspects of the culture industry's commodities. Says Adorno,

[viewers] are unable to respond within the structure of the [commodity], [but neither can they] deviate from its detail without losing the thread of the story; hence the [commodity] forces its viewers to equate it directly with reality. (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 126)
When viewers finally tire of a certain commodity, they will see only the falsity of its promises, never the alternative formal concerns which its conventions — elements of them, at least — could express.

In response to the culture industry's implication of mainstream convention in ideology, then, Adorno argues that artworks must deploy elements of convention, subjecting them to the language-like laws of form (1984, 13) so that they might give voice to a capacity for progress that modern society suppresses.

Adorno maintains, however, that, as formal concerns, conventions can only achieve the expression of potential progress; their actual nature remains that of ideological "complicity and culpability" with the culture industry (1984, 297). But it is by virtue of its self-reflective exposition of its own complicity and culpability with ideology that the artwork gives expression to a new humanity "notwithstanding." For Adorno holds that the artwork's voice is realized through the purely formal interplay between historic incarnations of convention and content, an interplay that gives expression to possibilities for experience for which the ideologies associated with those conventions are associated cannot account. And because conventions cannot actually be divested of their associations with ideology — because that association is an inherent part of their conventionality — their success at giving the artwork a voice is also an expression of their failure as conventions.

For instance, in "Music and Technique" (1977) Adorno argues that "the development of music in time ... is the continual production of something new rather than of what has already been" (94). That is, the manner in which a musical piece progresses cannot be decided in advance by any convention, as if the piece must simply reproduce it. Other formal considerations must be allowed to come into play. From the perspective of those who see the operation of conventions as requiring the rigid conformity of their works, such considerations will seem to be errors. And to the extent that convention represents the expression of their own ideological standards, the interposition of other formal considerations upon the work must seem, from their perspective, like the atomizing of convention. Adorno, however, sees such considerations as the breakthroughs required by the work to complete its form. For him, the operation of a convention in the musical work must force new formal considerations, ones occasioned by the work's content, to assert themselves in a unique manner, so that the expression of these formal considerations in the musical work represents the realization of the convention's formal possibilities. Adorno avers that Schoenberg's apparent mistake in his Violin Concerto represents an advance in serial technique, not its refutation (94). Thus did the Violin Concerto's recuperation of the formal possibilities indicated by serial technique redeem that avant-garde principle from a tendency towards commodification that was becoming apparent even as
the concerto was being written. For Adorno, it is this same tendency of avant-garde principles to commodification that allows industrialists to hang avant-garde paintings in their offices because they complement the abstract designs on the wall paper (1984, 325).

The artwork's subordination of convention to formal concerns and its intermingling of convention with content gives voice to an inherent potential within conventions for expression that their actual or ideological expression as conventions suppresses. And those historic incarnations of convention that sought, as ideology, to determine the work's meaning are forced as formal elements within the work to resonate first with other incarnations of the same convention and then with all the conventions of artistic production in a configurative constellation of conventional images and interpretative techniques that register themselves in the form of the artwork (1984, 105).

Because the art work is a formal expression of possibilities, in spite of itself — of its connection with ideology — it always recalls the potential identity between the voices of traditional convention, contemporary convention, and the newest content which in turn will become conventionalized. These voices are identical as the expression of the possible humanity that contemporary society is capable of achieving but that contemporary ideology has suppressed so completely that the achievement of actual humanity has been completely expunged from society even as its attainment is being proclaimed.

The irony of the culture industry exposes the falsehood and so rejects the validity of past conventions, but only as part of a ploy aimed at conditioning the unconscious of its consumers, at insidiously shaping and then playing upon their hopes and fears, readying them to embrace the next conventional reproductions that it puts on offer. And so the culture industry's employ of irony achieves a disjunction of rational scrutiny and unconscious association that puts both at the culture industry's service.

By contrast, the ironic perspective of the artwork looks beyond the associations between conventions and ideological pretension to non-aesthetic truth, to the potential for expression inherent in the resonance between past and present conventions — as formal elements — that is produced by their confrontation with the material conditions of a new society. Thus, artistic irony sees in convention a "reality" — or experience of possible society — contained in resonating associations of dream and memory, a reality whose apprehension in the art work requires the fusion of rational scrutiny and unconscious recollection in what Adorno calls the whole consciousness (1984, 347).

The contrast between irony in the culture industry and that of irony in artworks capable of some resistance to the industry's influence indicates how the individualism of modern art is not so
much an idealist escape from social reality as a part of the social production necessary if modern individuals are to become fully conscious of that reality. The individualism of the artwork — its concern with a social condition capable of accommodating individual desire — acts as a remedy to the culture industry which conditions individuals to desire whatever it provides.

Adorno, therefore, argues that the social content of art is often contained in its expression of individual desire. Such desire is a rejection of social concern. It is rather an expression of concern which contemporary society cannot accommodate, and which supposes a social vision that can — one made up of multiple perspectives. For example, Adorno says that the lasting appeal of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* is due more to the play’s being the expression of the kind of love between two people that no political order could tolerate, than it is to the play’s account of internecine social strife. According to Adorno

what is social about Shakespeare are notions like ‘individual’, ‘passion’ characteristics like the bourgeois concreteness-of-thinking in Caliban, the unreliability of those merchants of Venice, the idea of a partly matriarchal world in *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, the disgust with power in *Anthony and Cleopatra* and even Prospero’s attitude of resignation. In contrast, what Shakespeare takes directly from Roman history in terms of social conflicts between patricians and plebeians are irrelevant chunks of classical studies. (Adorno, 1984, 360-1)

The expression of a social vision composed of multiple perspectives, the artwork "takes the individual outside himself [sic]." That is, the artwork fuses the capacities for rational scrutiny and imagination in the individual into a consciousness that individual identity really amounts to potential membership in a community capable of genuinely accommodating all human desire and not simply of offering up ersatz forms of the same. And because the artwork educates the individual’s consciousness about the "potential" nature of the community to which individuals really belong — a community that has been suppressed by modern society even as that society attained the means of achieving it — the artwork transforms the individual into a "zoon politicon" capable of struggling against consumer society for the satisfaction of needs that modern conditions have made possible. Thus Adorno says that the individuality of the artwork "affronts prevailing needs by throwing new light on the familiar, thus meeting the objective need for consciousness that might ultimately lead to a change in reality" (Adorno, 1984, 345).

It should be noted that Adorno is careful to point out that the effect of the artwork is to ensure only the possibility of change — to meet the objective need for consciousness that MIGHT lead to real change. For, contrary to what Jameson says (1981, 287-288), Adorno sees in culture no "utopian impulse" (Jameson, 1981, 288), that is, no reflection or documentation of actual
developments in consciousness, only the capacity to produce a higher consciousness in those individuals with ears to listen and eyes to see. And such individuals are hard to come by in a world dominated by the culture industry, which so blinds individuals to their privation that it betrays no false consciousness — even under the light of ironic scrutiny.

In response to such a totalizing co-optation of human discernment by the conventions of the culture industry, criticism can view the history of artistic expression as a series of discontinuous and suppressed initiatives, and as a trail that often vanishes from the view of art historians only to reappear in the most unexpected places. If criticism is to recognize a continuity of artistic expression through history, it is as one of sustained opposition to history itself, a continuity that ever casts doubt on the pretense that history embodies a necessary progression towards an improved humanity.

The deliberate tendency of artworks to give expression to experience in terms that are strange to familiar and easily communicative forms makes them inaccessible to audiences that have been conditioned by the culture industry to find any but familiar and easily communicative forms of expression incomprehensible. And yet, unless they are to give up their capacity for resistance to the culture industry, artworks cannot embrace conventions in their familiar form. That is, artworks must recreate conventions anew — and so in unfamiliar form — so that they turn the viewing attention towards the interplay of symbol, sound and image within which the hidden possibilities of human experience find expression. In modern conditions, criticism — and its capacity for "self-reflection" (Adorno, 1984, 467) that familiarizes viewers with the tendency of artworks from different eras to employ conventions in ways at odds with both the prevailing practice of their time and each other — becomes a necessary moment in the consciousness-raising function of the artwork (475). Through modern criticism, then, art is seen to be the true negativity of the culture industry (1984, 322). For it is art that embraces the conventions that under the culture industry are irrevocably implicated in ideology, but in a manner that gives voice both to that implication and the possibility that conditions could be otherwise.

For Adorno, the neutralization of consciousness by the culture industry has ensured that the art and criticism of modern conditions must be part of the social infrastructure of a society — that they do not simply reflect developments in consciousness but are integral parts of that development (Adorno, 1984, 343-345). In an individuality that sets it at odds with the practices of the culture industry, the modern artwork takes the conventions and techniques of past artworks in its ironic embrace, treating them as historical "traces" out of which to recreate a vision of history that runs counter to that of contemporary society (1984, 52). And in so doing, the artwork shows how
conventions — in all their historic and ideological difference — are capable of creating a conscious expression of possible human community which the culture industry was supposed to have suppressed once and for all.

But the very individuality (Adorno, 1984, 330) — the very idiosyncratic employ of irony — that made the artwork's deploy of conventions something other than ideology also requires that, in an age when the unfamiliar and the incomprehensible have become almost irretrievably conflated, the artwork must eschew easy communicability of familiar forms (337). Thus it falls to the reflective power of criticism to reacquaint individuals with the peculiar artistry of artworks. That is, as we saw in Chapter Two, criticism "must retrace the dynamic laws of art of which works themselves are unaware" (186). For it is in this artistry that the individual as a member of modern society comes face to face with the artwork's "expression of social ferment" (337). Ferment is the reaction of art to society's betrayal of humanity's birthright; that is, the promise of a society without scarcity or fear, in which they whose labour makes the production of culture possible and they who enjoy the fruits of that production are the same person.

If Frye's criticism is to avoid the charge of his critics that his imaginative totality of experience — its potential nature notwithstanding — is but a flight into idealism, then, like Adorno, he must show that his critical insight into the ironic turn of convention by the artwork is necessary to free irony from its captivity by mass culture, and modern society from the illusions that keep it from the realization of a free humanity.

2. Frye on Irony in Literature: His View of Literature as a Counterculture, and of Criticism as a Counterenvironment.

In our analysis of Adorno's account of the neutralization of irony by the culture industry, we saw that the culture industry evidences an impatience with the conscious apprehension of form. For Adorno, this impatience with form is the mechanism by which the culture industry ensures that the mass audience will respond to its formulas as something made familiar by repetition, so that mass audiences will remember each formula only in terms of its failure to deliver on promises of happiness. Thus, he argues that the mass audience is capable only of an irony that sees through the falseness of those formulas with which the culture industry is finished in any case, an irony that rejects those convention by embracing what the culture industry offers as new. Adorno concludes that if art is to recuperate irony from its implication in the workings of the culture industry, then it most employ irony not in the rejection of the culture industry’s conventions, but in the recuperation of their
formal possibilities from their association with ideology. Only thus can art give voice to the imaginative alternatives that the culture industry suppresses.

As we will see below, in his account of the difference between literature and the sub-literary, especially as the sub-literary is exhibited in mass culture, Frye also notes an "anxiousness" on the part of social mythology and mass culture that is evidenced in its impatience with form (1957, 91). Like Adorno, Frye recognizes this impatience with form as the mechanism which severs the consciousness of readers from their cultural memory, and any insight into the actual sameness of what mass culture offers up as new. Likewise, Frye sees contemporary literature and the arts as forming a counterculture to that of the mass media, one that engages in a "relaxing" of the reader's "will" to simply keep up with the presentations of the mass media (88). As "counterculture," literature effects this relaxation of the will by slowing down the speed of presentation in an attempt to recuperate for reading consciousness what mass culture is so eager that its audience should simply dismiss as false (1993a, 152). Thus, Frye, like Adorno, sees literature and the arts as being engaged in what he calls the abbreviation of presentation by the media (Frye, 1990e, 94).

For Frye, the abbreviation of presentation by the new electronic media, and the disassociation of memory and consciousness from form that this abbreviation entails, forces literature and the arts back into a concern with the words and images which are the true form and content of any communication. Thus Frye argues that, the claims of mass media defenders notwithstanding, the printed page remains the most spontaneous and mosaic form of presentation, especially when it is the container of literary form.

Frye contends that while every form of presentation has a linear and simultaneous aspect to it, mass culture exploits the tendency of the new media to accelerate the linear aspect of presentation in a manner that subordinates the presentation's articulation of its simultaneous structure to its communication of a particular stimulative effect or a rhetorical point. Of course, contemporary ideology exploits a similar if lesser tendency to acceleration in the printed medium. Thus, Frye defines the truly sub-literary as "the works of literature that are really disguised forms of rhetoric," which "attempt a moral stimulus" in a way that literature never would (Frye, 1990v, 77).

What separates literature from the sub-literary is the sub-literary's impatience with the literary imagery it employs — its tendency to foreclose upon literary development subordinating that development to the message it is meant to communicate in a kind of "naive allegory" (Frye, 1957, 90). Frye writes that "[t]here is the naive allegory 'so anxious' to make its own allegorical points that it has no real literary or hypothetical centre ... that is, an allegory which is simply discursive
writing with an illustrative image or two stuck into it" (1957, 91). The tendency to the sub-literary obviously precedes the advent of the mass media, characterizing much of what Frye calls educational literature (90). But, as we have seen, the mass media so conditions the unconscious in the whole citizenry that even those areas of education that have been concerned with the literary are increasingly under pressure to treat literature as literature as a "rhetorical analogue" (Frye, 1971, 66) to contemporary truth.

Indicating its identity with presentations of the new mass media, Frye says that "the normal form of naive allegory is that of the transient spectacle" (1957, 90), in which "[u]nder the excitement of a particular occasion, familiar ideas suddenly become sense experience and vanish with the occasion" (90). Like the "electronic media," its presentations "vanish ... so quickly in time we can make no sensible use of them without falling back on the continuous ego" (Frye, 1990, 75), which operates on the assumption that individual experience is that of "adjustment" (1971, 137) (read "docility" and "obedience," 137) to social norms. Under the pressure of the electronic media, and in response to what we have seen to be the fragmentation of experience by modern consumer society, the tendency is for educational institutions to treat literature as a naive allegory of a new "social mythology" "containing all the essential answers, at least potentially, so that it contains a veto over scholarship and imaginations," one based on the surety that "concerned issues have a right side and a wrong side, and that those who are simply right need not tolerate those who are merely wrong" (Frye, 1971, 155).

In contemporary society, then, where the dominant media of presentation all show an impatience with form, attempts at creativity within those media have been forced, along with literature into the position of a counterculture, charged with "trying to relax the will" (Frye, 1957, 88) by slowing the acceleration to stimulus with associations to experience so unfamiliar that audiences cannot follow them without attention, that makes "genuine modern poetry" appear "too difficult because it is moved too far from the modern public" (Frye, 1970, 103). Like Adorno, then, Frye sees that efforts by literature to recuperate form require that it subject familiar — "linear" — presentations of form to innovations that risk rendering them unintelligible to contemporary readers. But, for Frye, literature must treat the familiar presentation of form in this manner lest contemporary readers remain unable to distinguish between literary presentations of form and its presentation by mass culture.

Just because Frye sees literature as reacting against the extreme linearity with which the mass media present their conventions, that is not to say that he thinks that literary works give up linear
presentation altogether. Quite the opposite. Frye acknowledges an obviously linear component to the textual presentation of every literary work — as the chain of words and their representation of a procession of verbal images or mythos that keeps the reader’s attention from beginning to end (1957, 77). But he also maintains that these images function as elements in a structure of imagery or dianoia which the work also contains and which the reader can apprehend simultaneously as a kind of theme or meaning of the work (1957, 83). This apprehension is often associated with a particular point in the work or recognition scene where all the linear developments of the work seem to coalesce (1966, 139-40).

But Frye makes it clear that, in the literary work, it would be wrong to see the recognition scene as absolutely fixed or even as the primary point of entry into the structure of the work. For, he says that, though a discursive written form such as an argument demands that the premises must be drawn together in the conclusion at the work where the work’s point must be made, the literary work is less a concern with reaching the end than it is with presenting a unity built out of a complex of diverse images: "in a logical argument," writes Frye, "we follow a course of words until we reach the end: in literature, the following of the narrative is less urgent, and what we see at the end is a unity of varied particulars" (1990v, 74). Here, Frye is arguing that, while the apprehension of the simultaneous pattern is a sort of second reading that follows the apprehension of works in linear form, in literature this second reading has an opportunity to follow hot upon the linear apprehension of the text, of breaking in upon the reader’s consciousness at any point in the reading. For, while it is at a familiar recognition point that the linear reading of the literary text tends to coalesce into a simultaneous pattern of meaning, a stubborn "underthought" of "discontinuity" persists within that literary pattern. This enduring discontinuity of literary imagery resists definitive synthesis "because [it] indicates other contexts then that of logical and sequential connection" (Frye, 1971, 120).

The capacity of the literary work’s structure to break in upon the reader at any point in the text is enhanced by the text’s artifactual nature. That is, the printed text remains available for scrutiny to an extent that the presentations of the new media still have not matched, so that readers can return to the work at any point, and as many times as they choose. Thus does the reader’s temporal experience of the text become a form of "virtual time": in "real time," this includes every encounter that the reader has ever had with the text. Read in virtual time, the text’s recognition scene becomes a compilation of all the points of recognition that the reader has ever been able to make between the work’s individual images and its structure as a whole.
Frye, then, sees the element of linear presentation in the literary text as an expression of ideology (of what we have seen him call the work's overthought) to be disrupted by the ironic, the purely centripetal influences in the work. Frye, however, does not view this disruption of the work's linearity as a rejection of its ideological conventions so much as their incorporation into the work's underthought as elements of the literary displacement of myth. This is to say that Frye's analysis of linearity in literature is like Adorno's analysis of progression in music. For, Adorno sees the progression of the musical work as subordinating the work's conventions to formal demands which, from the perspective of ideology, must look like mistakes. And we hear Frye echo Adorno's view of how literature must look from the purview of ideology when says that literature is a largely a matter of false starts and mistaken identities (Frye, 1963a, 35).

From what we have seen above, Frye regards the literary expression of underthought as working against the ideological notion that the book is a purely linear narrative progression towards a fixed recognition scene. As an expression of underthought, then, "the book becomes a focus for community [not because it is a statement of truth to which the community should conform, but because it] may come to mean, simultaneously, any number of things to any number of people" (Frye, 1990u, 75). Such a community is one "having a relation to reality which is neither direct, nor negative, but potential" (1957, 93) one in which "all poets are potentially positive contributors to man's [sic] body of vision" (1971, 127).

Frye would also argue that the work is a focus for community because of its extreme individualism, that is, its refusal to conform to any particular vision of society, or to express a single vision to which actual society must conform. But through its individualism that, from the purview of ideology, looks like a distrust of communication and a rejection of convention, the book expresses a multifarious vision of possible society, whose apprehension requires that the boundaries of what constitutes a recognizable community should be extended beyond those of ordinary consciousness.

For Frye, then, the consciousness required of readers by the social vision in any work of literature recognizes the potential unity of disparate social sentiments and anxieties as being informed by the same human concerns for the provision of shelter, food, companionship, and individual integrity. The consciousness expressed in literature, therefore, involves what Frye calls the "awakening of the titanic self" (1957, 105) that rises when the ego sleeps, and throws open "all the doors of perception in the psyche, the doors of dream and fantasy as well as that of waking consciousness" (1990v, 82-83). It is a self that recognizes the artificiality of the actual barriers between individual, class, and nation, and the prevailing needs that occasioned them.
Like Adorno, then, Frye sees the concern of contemporary literature with the expression of individual subjectivity and consciousness not as a rejection of society, but as the affirmation of one capable of giving the same priority to the primary concerns of humanity as does literary language. This accounts for the refusal of literature to embrace the language of secondary — of ideological — concern, a refusal characterized by what Frye calls the primitive nature of literary language.

Frye describes primitivism in literary language as

really a protest against the mechanical dehumanizing of life ... where the term primitive is used in a psychological sense. Man driving a car, writing at a desk, playing golf or selling razor blades is civilized man. Man admiring a sunset, quarrelling with his wife, demonstrating for peace or committing suicide is primitive man. That is, he is man preoccupied with the existential situation of his own humanity, with the emotions, speculations, hopes, despairs, and desires which belong to that situation ... Poetry is continually bringing us back to the starting-point, not necessarily of time, but of social attitude. And, as society becomes more dominated by mechanical and technological features, and as a myth of progress tends increasingly to alienate the poet from his society, the poet's conception of his social role changes accordingly. (1971, 89).

For Frye, the primitive nature of literary language, its insistence of expressing concerns at odds with those of the prevailing concerns of society, puts the contemporary author — and the reader as well — in a position of opposition to contemporary society, one of tacit insistence on real social change.

But the consciousness required by literature, then, recognizes that readers cannot initiate real social change by "creating 'another society' or a 'new society'" (Frye, 1971, 156). For Frye, new — revolutionary — societies unconsciously reproduce the limited and limiting structures of concern from their old society. Only by getting some critical distance on their own society, that is, "by releasing the real form of the society they are in" (156) can readers discern the unrealized capacities of their society in conditions of oppression and alienation and the change in consciousness required if society is to release these capacities. In Adorno's parlance, Frye seems to see literature and criticism as those elements of social production capable of raising consciousness to a recognition of modern society's potential to liberate the individual even as that potential is oppressed by actual social conditions.

We have heard Frye's warning that literature must "revolt against the conventions established in [their] own day, in order to rediscover convention at a deeper level" (1957, 132). And they must do this in an age where individuals have been reduced to members of a mass audience which accepts the conventions of the day so unreflectively that it must respond to literature as an "alien" (1970, 87) structure — as something beyond comprehension, "meaning nothing, or infinitely less" (1967a, 19).
And we saw Frye argue that, in response to mass culture, contemporary literature has risked appearing unintelligible to its audience.

Thus, for Frye as for Adorno, it is in contemporary conditions that criticism comes to the fore as a creative act in its own right. By itself, literature can oppose. But without criticism, and its capacity to familiarize readers with the literary operation of convention and its capacity to challenge the anxieties of the present age, that opposition will not lead to creative changes in consciousness. Thus, Frye writes, "it is one of the tasks of criticism now to help mobilize [literature] in the direction of its ultimate goal, which is the creation of a counterenvironment" (Frye, 1993a, 152), within which individuals might effect social change.

For Frye, the end of criticism is not simply reader knowledge about literature, but their possession of it. The critical study of convention in literature must be a failure unless it leads them beyond "the stage of stock response" (1970, 83) into which they have been habituated by mass culture — the muddled educational theories (1971, 153-4) and illiterate teaching (1970, 93) that reinforce it. "Nothing will drive the shoddy constructs [of this conditioning] out of mind except the genuine forms of the same thing" (1970, 105). Nothing will free readers from the culture industry except their familiarization by criticism with conventions operating independently of the associations and value judgements of contemporary experience and their participation with these conventions as part of an imaginative structure of infinite possibility contained in every literary work. The counterenvironment to be created by modern criticism and the arts is one within which individuals can start to be conscious that, for the first time, societies cannot give priority to the secondary concerns of ideology that divide region, culture, and humanity without putting human survival at risk.

Frye evidences the conviction that contemporary criticism should regard the arts as a counterenvironment from which to observe a culture at odds with mainstream accounts of cultural history in his admission that "there is a discontinuous quality in the larger historical tradition [of literary expression]. Something that has disappeared for years or centuries may suddenly reappear; conventions long ignored or forgotten suddenly materialize again" (Frye, 1990i, 86). In the history of society, no literary convention can consistently give expression to its creative energies or the hope for a better future that such energies entail. And in this, Frye echoes Adorno's sentiment that a history of resistant art could only appear discontinuous from the purview of ideology. For both thinkers, the imaginative power of literature is ever being suppressed, arising again but inexplicable and unlikely circumstances. The continuity of literary convention as an expression of humanity's progress towards emancipation is realized only within that tradition of potential experience contained within each
artwork, and upon which the conventions of literature make their influence felt in manners subtle and strange.

Yet this possible continuity is the only resistance humankind possesses against the juggernaut advance of modern ideology. Writes Frye:

> If we ... regard [ideology] as the basis from which literature and the other arts emerge -- [and, of course, this is precisely what mass culture would have us do] -- we shall eventually come to a vision of humanity as a crazy Oedipus obsessed by two overmastering desires: to kill his father God and rape his mother Nature. By 'his father' I mean the source of his life, whether we calls it God or not. For such a rabid animal ... reason is simply a faculty that intensifies his viciousness. (Frye, 1990i, 91)

Like Adorno, the end indicated by the rationality of modern enlightened societies is not democracy, for Frye, but Auschwitz and Armageddon. Only the faint hope cast by literature and the arts stands between humanity and its imperial destiny.

In light of Frye's analysis of modern mass culture, I think it is this caveat against destiny that sets him apart from liberalism and his critics alike, that shows his understanding of literature as counterculture and the role of criticism in creating a counterenvironment to be like Adorno's understanding of art and criticism as those aspects of social production capable of giving voice and hope to the nonidentity which is their society's soul. Without such a counterenvironment, criticism, the arts, and the experience of them are all subject to the neutralization of irony by a culture industry capable of rendering what we saw Fredric Jameson refer to in contemporary society as "the awaken[ing]" of "dangerous and protopolitical impulses" (1981, 287) stillborn. For, I would argue, both Frye and Adorno describe criticism and the arts as facing a reification of experience by mass culture that is capable of bewildering even the most already bewildered readers into acquiescence.

E. Conclusion.

On the basis of Frye's comparison with Adorno in this chapter, Frye's criticism will be shown, in Chapter Six, to entail that all other attempts to theorize the capacity for protest in the text - - and this includes the theorizing of his literary and left-wing social critics -- are destined to be incorporated into a simple rejection of the culture industry's old material. As we will see, this rejection has been engineered by the culture industry itself: that is, the culture industry encourages viewers to reject its overly familiar material for its most recent releases. In so doing, the culture industry creates the illusion that viewers are rebelling against tradition by embracing the shock of the
new. What they are actually embracing is the same old material recycled in more dehumanized packaging.

Chapter Six, therefore, will answer the objection underlying the concerns of Frye’s literary and left-wing social critics that his criticism does not give sufficient priority to irony and its rejection of convention in the interpretation of texts. This answer will be that because each of Frye’s critics fails to see through the culture industry’s conflation of the new with recycled tradition, like all other theories of protest against convention, theirs are liable to become implicated in the culture industry’s conflation of the new with the apparently new. Only by seeing through the illusions of the culture industry can criticism hope to discharge the responsibilities forced upon it by contemporary experience. And such insight requires the acquaintance with our cultural heritage as it is embodied in the operation of conventions in literary works that is theorized in the criticism of Northrop Frye.

I will proceed in my argument by dealing with each of Frye’s literary and left-wing social critics to show that they have failed to grasp Frye’s insight into the culture industry’s neutralization of irony, an insight revealed in this chapter’s comparison of Frye and Adorno. In treating each of Frye’s critics, this section will also show that without an insight like Frye’s into the neutralization of irony in contemporary society, criticism cannot discharge its contemporary responsibilities. That is, their critical theories cannot hope to honour the role that irony, individuality, orality, historic detail, the depiction of reality, the negativity of ideology and the role of the body play in the experience of the text. For they will not be able to discern how all of these items have been counterfeited by the culture industry.
CHAPTER SIX:
FRYE'S CRITICAL SYSTEM RECONSIDERED:
REVISITING FRYE'S LITERARY, LEFT-WING AND SOCIAL CRITICS
IN LIGHT OF WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED BY COMPARING FRYE AND
ADORNO ON MASS CULTURE.

A. Introduction.

In Chapter Five, we saw how Frye, in effect, concurs with Adorno that the culture industry effects a neutralization of irony through its impatience with the conscious apprehension of form. It is this impatience, built into the very presentation of the formulas that are mass reproduced by the culture industry as a surrogate of actual experience, that isolates members of its audience from their cultural memory and causes them to confuse their ironic resistance to convention with the embrace of recycled forms of the same commodity. For Frye's criticism, as for that of Adorno, literature and the arts resist this neutralization of irony through their ironic recuperation of form, which distinguishes them from the conventional productions of the culture industry and articulates a vision of society alternative to the one represented by the culture industry. In this chapter, I want to argue that Frye's critical treatment of literature confounds each of his critics and their particular claims that the imaginative categories of his criticism fail to live up to the responsibilities facing criticism in contemporary society. And I will do so by showing how Frye's criticism, far from being an escape from the rigours of irony, recuperates the same from conditions of mass culture.

Chapter One saw how each of the nonfeminist literary critics illustrated how Frye failed to live up to a particular responsibility facing modernist criticism. Be it Wimsatt on individualism, Krieger on irony, Hartman on orality, or Fletcher on historic difference, these modern literary critics understand the responsibilities of contemporary criticism to entail a respect for artwork's reflection of progressive aspects of modern life hidden by ideology and its domination of everyday language.

While contemporary left-wing and social critics recognize the same responsibility of criticism as do Frye's literary critics, they argue that the expression of the progressive aspects of modern life is not limited to a peculiar -- a literary -- type of text. The difference of modern life from the logocentric and idealist ideology that dominates it finds subversive expression in every text. What is needed is a criticism capable of finding, in the very ideologemes of capitalist discourse, the inherent longing for an alternative to history -- one capable of finding in the logocentric structures of Western discourse the tendency of language to deconstruct those structures in the search for an absent referent.
Thus, Fekete, Graff and Eagleton argue that criticism must read all texts as expressions of ironic realism—products of an advanced social consciousness capable of subverting the illusions of the ideological conventions with which they are associated in an expression of reality. Jameson extends this critical responsibility to the analysis of contemporary mass culture, and Woodman to the very nature of language itself.

Frye concurs with his critics about what is entailed in the responsibilities of contemporary criticism. But he shows how the allegiance of each critic to the "reality principle" and the theoretical opposition of irony and convention plays to the purposes of a mass culture which conflates the ironic subversion of convention with its own "shock of the new." Thus, Frye can argue that by conflating critical resistance with the affirmation of mass culture, his critics have rendered counterfeit their execution of criticism's responsibilities. In effect, Frye's critics have embraced the culture industry's surrogates of individualism, the priority of irony, historic difference and detail, the longing for an alternative to history, and the longing for an alternative to patriarchy in contemporary life. From this argument, I would conclude that the many authentic insights made by Frye's critics into the nature of art and its relation to society entail their untheorized and unacknowledged assumptions about the autonomy of literary structure that are consciously articulated in Frye's critical system.

I will proceed in my argument by showing that, far from rejecting the priority of irony in literature, Frye sees literature as the embodiment of what, we have seen Bogdan argue, is an ironic recuperation of romance (See Chapter One of this thesis). And I will try to show that Frye's criticism describes literature in this manner to illustrate the distinction between literary form and its surrogates in mass culture, and to expose the manner in which mass culture employs those surrogates to beat down, Adorno would say, to "forcibly retard" (Adorno, 1991b, 41) the capacity for resistance in all—even the most "bewildered" (Bogdan, 1992, 146) listeners.

Section B.

Frye's Critic's from Literary Theory Revisited.

1. Kreiger's View on Irony.

From the perspective of Murray Krieger, Frye's apparent down-playing of death, disaster and irony is seen, at least ostensively, to constitute his abandonment of modern criticism as a confrontation with the problem of modernity. For Krieger argues that it is by virtue of incorporating irony as the primary tool of modern criticism that critics hope to see the workings of modern reality
correspondent in the internal workings of the poem, allowing the poem to open for readers the problem of modernity — the destructive realities of the human condition — and "to convert the handicaps of finite existence into victories for the imagination" (Krieger, 1966, 8). The priority given to irony by modern criticism entails that irony should be seen in literature to expose the manner in which the representation of life by the comic and romantic genres, and to a lesser extent tragedy, papers over the cracks and fissures of modern existence. From the perspective of modern criticism, then, irony allows us to see in modern society a threat to the possibility of poetry — to its "aura" (119) or extreme individuality — and to identify a correspondence between the workings of poetic irony and social elements of resistance to that threat.

But, according to Krieger, Frye's criticism emphasises comedy and romance, and so dwells on the literary symbolism of

rebirth and not death, not on the descent to the underworld but on the return and the upward movement within the cycle which man uses to construct his destiny. Similarly irony, which has become so conclusive a literary (and existential) quality for critics before Frye, is seen as the lowest reach of the downward movement of displacement from pure myth, to be gone through almost before we arrive at it; for irony derives its major excitement for Frye from our capacity to see in it, paradoxically, the beginnings of the upward movement that can return us to the undisguised gods (Krieger, 1966, 10).

In Krieger's view, then, Frye's fixation upon poetic forms of ascent and redemption leaves open the question of how criticism is to cope with the problems of the relation between poetry and life that the traditional bounds of theory were established to address (Krieger, 1966, 6). To solve this problem, Frye has created a schemata dedicated to the world, but a "world so transformed aesthetically, so commodious, so fit for human habitation that he can abjure the magic that was the agent of this transformation" (26). In spite of his obvious sympathy for Frye's vision, Krieger is unable to follow him. Having rejected the limitations of modern criticism, Frye has, for Krieger, left unanswered the question of how the poem both "reflects," and yet is more than a "transcriber" (24) of, the world. Thus Frye constructs a schemata to solve this problem, but does so by fiat. For Krieger sees Frye's schemata as assuming a world already transcended, so that poetic reflection itself becomes a transcendent condition — and Frye's criticism an expression of liberal idealism and ideology.

Frye answers Krieger with the following rejoinder: if Frye seems to be consigning irony to the "wintry cellar" of critical analysis, he is really ensuring that criticism be built upon a solid foundation. Frye might appear to be more concerned with the ascent of literary symbolism through
comedy to romance and myth than with the descent to irony, but only if irony is understood as a literary operation at odds with those of comedy, romance and myth. And Frye does not understand irony in that way. Rather, for Frye, it is irony that makes the ascent, modulating through comedy to romance and myth in a manner that makes them all accessible to contemporary criticism as imaginative forms of the reality that modern society has the potential to realize.

From Frye's perspective, then, Krieger's embrace and concentration upon the ironic — and to a lesser extent tragedy — as poetic expressions alternative to modern ideology, leads Krieger, with much of the critical mainstream, to dismiss comedy and romance from critical consciousness. But it is this dismissal of romance and comedy from critical consciousness that allows modern mass culture to recycle comedy and romance as formal affirmations of ideology designed to appeal to the passive unconscious. For Frye, the only resistance criticism can muster against attempts by mass culture to bludgeon expressions of romance and comedy into passivity is that produced by acquainting the imagination with their authentic forms in literature. And, in our age, such an acquaintance involves the recuperation of comedy and romance by irony.

Frye writes, "for the last century or so literature has been permeated by an ironic perspective, which looks at its subjects, themes, characters and settings with a detachment analogous to that of the descriptive writer" (1990v, 87). Irony's difference from realism resides in the tendency of irony to strive for extremes of objectivity which find portent and mysterious significance in "the dullest and most neglected details of daily living" (Frye, 1957, 46). Such objectivity soon turns its attention to the expressions of alienation, angst and despair with which such details are associated and which give those details their dramatic form.

The concern with the form of alienation draws ironic literature — and the criticism capable of appreciating it — in the direction of romance. For romance is that concern with the mythic forms that are implicit in literature associated with realist conventions. But because the formal interest of irony is alienation — defined in terms of myth as the expulsion from paradise and the thwarting of the heart's desire — the romantic and mythic stories into which irony ascends tend to be demonic (Frye, 1957, 140). Thus, modern irony and criticism achieve what Frye calls a "demonic modulation" (156) or ascent through the whole of literature. After all, irony must pass through comedy to reach romance, and ironic comedy is always tinged with suggestions of tragedy and disaster. As such, the ironic ascent to utopia is simultaneously a demonic descent into dystopia. And "every image of revelation, whether in the Bible or not, has its demonic parody or contrast" (Frye, 1990, 87).
Demonic modulation involves "the deliberate reversal of the customary moral associations of archetype" (Frye, 1957, 156), so that, for instance, the archetype of the "dragon may be sinister in a medieval romance or friendly in a Chinese one; an island may be Prospero's island or Circes" (157). The point of this modulation is to reveal the potential for alienation in every myth: every tale of the gods can from another perspective be that of devils, and one reader's utopia can seem like dystopia to another. Frye illustrates this point with "Huckleberry Finn ... [who] wins our sympathy and admiration by preferring hell with his hunted friend to the heaven of the slave-owners' God" (157).

There is always, in demonic modulation, the sense that the achievement of what appears on the surface to be the attainment of the heart's desire is in fact a catastrophe of one's own making, and that, conversely, the ostensive heaven from which villainy is barred will turn out to have been taken over and turned into hell by demons who are in fact persecuting hapless victims. We see this sense permeating the ironic ascent through comedy to romance.

In ironic comedy ... the sense of absurdity arises as a kind of backfire or recall after the work has seen or read. Once we are finished with it, deserts of futility open up on all sides, and we have, in spite of the humour, a sense of nightmare and close proximity to something demonic. Even in very light-hearted comedy we may get a trace of this feeling: if the main theme of Pride and Prejudice had been the married life of Collins and Charlotte Lucas ... how long would Collins continue to be funny? (Frye, 1957, 226)

As irony passes through comedy and into romance the associations between characters and their demonic attributes becomes more explicit -- a tendency accompanied by the ascension of demonic characters from the status of comic underlings held in check by social authority to menacing peers openly antagonistic to social authority. With the approach of irony through romance to myth, an approach marked by the romantic hero's acquisition of supernatural powers and divine attributes, the demonic antagonist also becomes divested of human attributes and, at least in the psychological sense, takes on an explicitly inhuman appearance.

At a certain point in this approach to myth, irony effects a gestalt in which the heroic protagonist and its demonic opponents merge into the satyr play -- an "obscene" spectacle of "gibbering demons" (Frye, 1957, 291). Frye cites Titus Andronicus (291) as an example of this merging of all characters into the demonic play, a play in which the unspeakable outcome is as much a result of the main protagonist's inhuman devotion to stoic codes of duty as to his antagonists' devotion to the satisfaction of the basest desires.

Accompanying the merging of heroic and demonic characters is the ironic double-take that apprehends as demonic perpetrator of evil with the victim of that evil. In the new comedy of
Aristophanes, the *pharmakos* is simply a scoundrel (Frye, 1957, 45) — an upstart whose demonic influence is kept in check by his lowly station and the triumph of social order which "revenge" itself on him for attempting to rise above his place (45). But the influence of irony on comedy starts to highlight the nature of the *pharmakos* as victim (45-6) — as we saw in Chapter Four, casting emphasis on the fact that there is an imbalance between his wrongdoing and the fate that his wrongdoing precipitates (41). With the modulation of irony through romance and myth, not only the demonic attributes, but also the attributes of the hapless victim become more explicit in the *pharmakos*.

I would argue that John Gardner's twentieth century novel, *Grendel* (1984), is an example of the ironic identification of *pharmakos* and dramatic victim. In the novel, *Grendel*, which takes on the perspective of the denizens in Grendel's world from which Grendel's conflict with Beowulf can be seen only to be that of the intrusion upon an easy-going ne'er-do-well by a band of violent men and their insane leader. Gardner's ironic take on Grendel transforms the demonic ogre from the Beowulf legend into a victim of the dehumanizing aspects of the heroic society. As such, Grendel becomes the symbol of the heteronomous forces in our nature that are trampled by the reifying and mechanical character of modern human society.

The identification of dramatic victim and *pharmakos* is also evidenced, it seems to me, in *Titus Andronicus*, which explicitly states that Andronicus, being father to and thus of one flesh with Lavinia, shares her suffering, dishonour, and thus her victimization by the sons of Tamara. In this sense, Andronicus shares the role of *pharmakos* with his daughter. But Andronicus also accepts without hesitation the stoic imperative that the only remedy for their shared dishonour is Lavinia's death. Acting on this imperative, Andronicus, in effect, becomes a willing instrument of the evil designs of his antagonists, designs he occasions at the beginning of the play when, as the voice of social authority, he mercilessly metes out to Tamara's family the harsh penalties demanded by the stoic code. Thus Andronicus's participation in demonic imagery brings the play full circle, foregrounding the imbalance at the beginning of the play between Tamara's offence of resistance to Rome and her punishment at the hands of an inhumanly rigid social code and its embodiment in Andronicus. Foregrounding the cruelty that rendered Tamara a *pharmakos* — a cruelty forgotten in the ensuing mayhem — introduces a new sense of perspective to the story. This new sense is that of "how catastrophe might have been averted," of what might have been had Rome had exercised its prerogative for mercy.

The double role of both Andronicus and Tamara as hapless victims and demonic tyrants is illustrative of the myth to which irony returns, not the myth of a "commodious world" — as Krieger
charges — but one "addressed to people who can realize that murderous violence is less an attack on a virtuous society by a malignant individual than a symptom of that society's own viciousness" (Frye, 1957, 48). It is a myth which relates literature to life not by reflecting life but by swallowing it whole — even the parts that all societies to a greater or lesser degree conceal as demonic. For, it is through the use of demonic imagery that poetry is able to forefigure the potential of society to give voice to those who have none. As Frye points out, The Tempest illustrates that if there is anything commodious about the world described by the return of irony to — and its misrecognition of — myth, it is the unrealized capacity of that world to make things as they should be.

At the end of the action [in The Tempest] Miranda, reacting to her first sight of a human society, calls it a "brave new world." We say, and Prospero says too, that this is merely one more illusion, a product of her inexperience. So it is, except for the word new. It will become an illusion soon enough — she is, after all, looking at some very shoddy and silly people — but, for an instant there has been an epiphany, when how things should be has appeared in the middle of how things are. (1990, 86)

Frye's concern with literature as an ascent to myth is neither, as Krieger charges, a rejection of the priority of irony in favour of comedy and romance, nor does it attempt, by fiat, to solve the problem of how literature can be more than a transcriber of the world. Rather, Frye seeks to show how modern criticism can recuperate comedy, romance, and — for that matter — tragedy into an ironic vision of literary experience alternative to that of modern ideology. For, without this vision of recuperation by irony, criticism will not be able to distinguish between the liberating influence of irony in literature and the implication of irony in mass culture. It is, rather, by way of the misuse of irony that ideology is able to create the illusion of rejecting certain romantic and comedic forms as reactionary and old-fashioned while at the same time recycling others as the dominant forms of mass entertainment. Thus, Frye states that the only thing that can drive out the influence of bad literature is good literature (1982, 114). That is, the only thing that can counteract the misuse of irony by mass culture is its recuperation along with all other genres in literature.

Frye illustrates the misuse of irony by the romantic and comic formulas of mass culture on his analysis of melodrama. Modern melodrama is characterized by its association with the detective story — "the formula of how a manhunter locates a pharmakos and gets rid of him" (Frye, 1957, 46) — and the ever escalating brutality of the thriller (47).

In melodrama two themes are important: the triumph of moral virtue over villainy, and the consequent idealizing of the moral views assumed to be held by the audience. In the melodrama of the brutal thriller we come as close as it is normally possible for art to come to the pure self-righteousness of the lynching mob. (Frye, 1957, 47)
For Frye the point of combining the detective story and the thriller is two-fold. The detective story imports the *pharmakos* as the scoundrel whose suffering the audience can enjoy with impunity. By continually upping the ante in terms of its depictions of unprovoked violence perpetrated by the *pharmakos*, the thriller formula seems intent on ensuring that the audience will always be shocked into sympathy with the hero. Its apparent aim is to force the audience to seek refuge in the assurance offered by thriller’s outcome that the *pharmakos* suffers a fate identical in brutality to his crimes, that the avenging hero is the embodiment of a goodness native to audience, and that the *pharmakos* is an alien embodiment of pure evil.

The role of irony in melodrama, according to Frye, is that, in spite of their apparent aspirations to the status of serious drama, no audience could possibly take such absurd morality plays seriously (Frye, 1957, 47).

Serious melodrama soon gets entangled with its own pity and fear: the more serious it is, the more likely it is to be looked upon ironically by the reader, its pity and fear seen as sentimental drivel and owlish solemnity, respectively. ... Cultivated people go to a melodrama to hiss the villain with an air of condescension: they are making a point that they cannot take his villainy seriously. We have here the type of irony which exactly corresponds to that of two other major arts of the ironic age, advertising and propaganda. These arts pretend to address themselves seriously to a subliminal audience of cretins, an audience that may not even exist, but which is assumed to be simple-minded enough to accept at their face value the statements made about the purity of soap or a government’s motives. (Frye, 1957, 47)

And, of course, at the level of conscious scrutiny, no such audience does exist. But, in the last section of this chapter, we saw Frye concur with Adorno that, by bludgeoning the imagination into a passive acceptance of its formulas, mass culture has ensured that, at the level of the unconscious, entire populations, acting as mass audiences, will take these images very seriously indeed. Under such conditions, though the ironic response that refuses to take melodrama seriously persists, the cultivated audience — capable of distinguishing between the absurdity of melodrama and the seriousness of a dramatic form that can survive and contain the ironic response — does not. In place of the cultivated audience, mass culture has conditioned a mass audience. By what standard of seriousness, then, does the mass audience find melodrama absurd?

For mass audiences, the seriousness of the newest thriller is measured both in terms of its superficial difference from those most recently rejected as old hat or "fake," and by its similarity to those thousands of clones whose formulas have settled in the unconscious as the familiar ground of lived experience. Absurdity, then, is measured in terms of the anxiety that what is presented as new is not so terribly different from what went before. But, as both Frye and Adorno argue, mass
audiences cannot remember any forms that are profoundly different, and they could not remember how to apprehend them if they did; they are ever forced to seek seriousness in "newer" recyclings of the same absurdity. Without the ability to appreciate the kind of irony that is capable of recuperating the memory of imaginative play in literary romance, tragedy, comedy and myth, a memory that distinguishes them from melodrama, audiences are left with a sense of irony that drives them into the arms of romantic and comic expressions that are nothing more than affirmations of mass culture.

For Frye, Krieger's insistence on the priority of irony that rejects the concern with romance, comedy and myth must fail to provide modern criticism with the necessary foundation to withstand the rough shocks of contemporary mass culture. For such a foundation, criticism needs the type of irony capable of exposing mass culture's illusions of difference, novelty, and division as counterfeits in an all-too-smooth facade, an irony capable of recuperating the role of comedy, romance and myth in expressions of dramatic seriousness against which the seriousness of mass culture itself seems absurd. Otherwise, while it may not be commodious, the world that criticism finds reflected in literature is sure to be a commodity.

2. Wimsatt and Individualism.

William Wimsatt, a major proponent of New Criticism, criticizes what he sees as Frye's imposition of an overwhelming manifold of archetypal categories upon the experience of the text, a manifold to be apprehended from a mythic distance appropriate to a primitive or unmediated response to literature. And he does so on the ground that Frye's criticism is a flight from the disciplines imposed by reality, a false conjuring of an experience unmediated by ideological categories. For Wimsatt, such an experience can be achieved only through close attention to the facts about the unique textural overlay in each work. In effect, Wimsatt is accusing Frye of an idealism which sees literature creating a unique and emancipatory perspective out of the dross of commonplace clichés which, unfortunately, do find their way into literature. In contrast to Frye, Wimsatt argues that criticism should concentrate on those unique features which allow the work to illuminate for dull minds the progressive terrain of the reality they inhabit. For Wimsatt, it is the latter course that enables criticism to combat the clichéd existence projected by the social status quo, not that of Frye's vision, which simply dresses cliché in the sequined garb of archetype.

But Frye responds that the archetypal categories are neither impositions upon nor do they distract critical attention from the details of the literary work. Quite the opposite. It is only through attention to archetype that criticism can save the expression of detail in the literary work from that
association with the very clichés of every day language — in contemporary conditions the clichés of mass culture — which turns those details into an affirmation of the status quo. When Wimsatt writes, "to whom can the mythic distance from literature [which perceives literature in terms of its archetypal structure] be of any possible interest?" Frye's reply — one made somewhat oblique by its brevity — is roughly that it is of interest to anyone interested in the modern arts (1966, 139). But his reply refers to the role played by the study of archetype in countering the stereotyping of literary experience by mass culture, without which New Criticism’s "detailing" of literary experience is reduced to so much advertising.

Both Frye and Wimsatt agree that New Criticism rightly advocates that the reader should grapple with the text to determine what is special about it, that they should refrain from reference to external interpretations of the text's meaning. To this end, says Frye, New Criticism gives priority to the literary expression of irony — characterized by "complete objectivity, suspension of moral judgement, pure craftsmanship and similar virtues" (1957, 55). For New Criticism such virtues manifest themselves in works of a unique organization that is evidenced in special care given to their textural overlay and the detail. Thus Wimsatt argues that the critical search for "the tough and abstruse essence and identification of literature" should find its object in "a centrally structured image, a dramatized theme, or a persistent verbal technique" (1966, 88).

But, according to Frye, even the search by New Criticism for the unique ordering of detail and overlay of texture is bound to develop into one guided by general categories and "techniques of talking about the work, and providing a critical counterpart of the work to read instead" (Frye, 1970, 77). For, "no method of criticism can avoid doing this" (77). "What criticism can do, to point beyond itself, is to try to undermine the reader’s sense of the ultimate objectivity of the work" (77). Frye argues that this undermining is not achieved by appeal to the text’s embodiment of some special meaning or essence, different from that of ordinary life, but by the appreciation of the work’s capacity to transform the forms and the meaning of the life with which the reader is already familiar, a capacity that readers can possess for themselves.

For Frye, the true difference between literature and life turns out to be the difference between the rhetorical uses that literary language and everyday language make of the formal similarities between the archetypes of literary mythology and the stereotypes of a social mythology which, Frye and Adorno would agree, are conditioned by mass culture. Whereas literary archetypes draw the attention of the reader to an ever-widening range of associations and meaning, the stereotypes of social mythology tend to promote the reader’s unconscious acquiescence to the shape of things as they
are. And it is the draw of literary archetype that allows the reader to overcome stock response to both literature and life, exposing stereotype and the present shape of things as but part of "the real form of society."

By contrast, Wimsatt and New Criticism reject both archetype and stereotype for those special and precise expressions of meaning in the detail of literary works that are at odds with those of mythology and ideology. But, as Frye’s analysis of mass culture has already illustrated, the rejection of stereotype by conscious scrutiny only allows it to split into and inhabit the reader’s unconscious assumptions about the meaning of experience. By setting literary works up as statements of special meaning, a meaning so unlike the meaning which informs the reader’s unconscious assumptions about life that it leaves such assumptions unexamined, New Criticism inadvertently makes literary meaning into something that the reader can never possess. Under the treatment of New Criticism, literary works become the idolatrous forms of an authentic experience to be possessed and admired but never participated in — the advertisements for an intensity of experience that can never be the reader’s own. And literary experience comes to "detail" a private preserve of meaning that operates above the hurly burley of everyday life, with no effect on it.

Frye’s attention to archetype, on the other hand, sees literature remedy the reification of experience under mass culture by deploying its formal similarities with stereotype in a way that honours the details of possible experience that stereotype oppresses. I would contend that, for Frye, the critical distance capable of discerning literary archetype is like that of automobile drivers who train their attention to the horizon, with the paradoxical effect that they become aware of all the details involving the traffic up to that point — in fact, aware of more details than the driver who, like the New Critic, concentrates upon the those immediately in front of them to the exclusion of all others. Frye writes that, "if we ‘stand back’ from the beginning of the fifth act of Hamlet, we see a grave opening on the stage, the hero, his enemy, and the heroine descending into it, followed by a fatal struggle in the upper world" (Frye, 1957, 140). What strikes Frye about the archetypal struggle in Hamlet is its overwhelming imagery. The grave scene in Act V of Hamlet is an image of the fall so resounding and consuming that it suggests and contains every image of the fall ever to have been produced in literature. Thus, Frye argues that the archetypal nature of the grave scene in Hamlet forces the reader to regard it as nothing more or less than an image of great verbal power, and the play it inhabits as primarily that procession of imagery necessary to occasion such an image.

But if the archetypal perspective is that which apprehends the work as primarily a procession of images, then it must listen to all the associations with which those images are connected,
associations which take the reader well beyond the conventional attachments contemporary to the play's production or to its encounter with the audience of today.

As we saw in Chapter Two, Frye, describing *Henry V*, relates how archetypal criticism, by regarding the work as a progression of images, apprehends the inherent tendency of literary form to confound all attempts by the conventions with which the work is commonly associated to articulate the work's meaning in all its detail, and apprehends the full meaning of the work in its nature as a monad capable of containing simultaneously the influence of all literary conventions. For Frye, *Henry V* shows us that the poem, like [a] new baby, is born into an existing order of words, and is typical of the structure of the poetry to which it is attached. The new baby is his own society appearing once again as a unit of individuality, and the new poem has a similar relation to its poetic society. (Frye, 1957, 97)

As we have seen in our comparison of Adorno and Frye, archetypal criticism reveals the capacity of form in the literary work to expose the stereotyping of the work by popular conventions, and the tendency of those conventions to subordinate and silence details that make the work unique. But archetypal criticism also sees form redeem those conventions: transformed by archetype into elements in the progression of imagery, the expression of contemporary concerns associated with popular convention provides the unique textural context or organization of detail for the instantiation of literary form in the literary work.

Thanks to the presence of archetype in literature, then, we see that literary language is an exploration of the many verbal contexts in which myth can be realized — contexts of irony, "playful" and "savage," as well as ones of solemn reverence (Frye, 1966, 139-40). Thus, it is myth and archetype that allow readers to recognize literary works as primarily those explorations of texture and irony that New Criticism seeks in literary composition as proof of its difference from ordinary language practice. As Frye writes, "it is not the wisdom behind [a myth such as] the story of Endymion [that gives it literary value] but the art revealed, explicitly in Drayton and Lyle and Keats, implicitly in hundreds of other stories and poems that are based on the Endymion theme" (Frye, 1966, 140-41).

Thus, archetypal criticism shows us that literary convention is not a matter of borrowing or duplicating archetypal forms as they have been realized in other poems. In that case, questions of differences in verbal texture would indeed be irrelevant. It is more like stealing (Frye, 1957, 98) or, as we saw in the comparing Frye with Adorno, of recreating of archetypes in new circumstances. These new circumstances show themselves in the textural and material explorations by which
archetype and myth modulate with the creation of each new work of art. So it is that Frye, the archetypal critic *par excellence*, who takes the Chicago School to task for emphasising narrative categories at the expense of the analysis of verbal texture and insight into the literary representation of emotion (Frye, 1990b, 126-131).

For Frye, the critical perspective of archetype and myth is the only one capable, in contemporary conditions of mass culture, of that primitive response which grapples with the literary text in a manner which appreciates its individuality. Thus Frye’s call for a primitive response is not - as Wimsatt charges — an appeal for the return to supposedly idyllic conditions of cultural receptivity located in a bogus past, but an uninhibited response to the verbal structures of any age, "one that neither confuses those structures with real life nor builds emotional barricades against them" (Frye, 1966, 141).

Frye’s "primitive" or "unmediated" response is one that recognizes certain verbal structures to contain imagery of enduring interest, where all the associations in that pattern are recognition scenes: scenes to which we cannot be merely indifferent or hostile (Frye, 1966, 141; Bogdan, 1980, 307). For instance, I would argue that the recreation in American mass culture of the ante-Bellum south tends to evoke a primitive response in modern American audiences just as the recreation of the epoch surrounding the fifteenth century struggles for the English succession captured the imaginations of Elizabethan audiences. Such structures become self-justifying: audiences value them not simply as representations of truth but because they have become the audience’s story.

Frye argues that the "contemporary student’s unmediated responses are to his comic books and television programmes" (1966, 141) — that is, to mass culture. And he notes that the ironic perspective, the sense that the verbal structures pretend to address themselves seriously to a subliminal audience of cretins (1957, 47) to whom the real audience must feel superior, has become a pervasive element of contemporary sub-literature and mass culture — a fact evidenced by the popularity of detective stories and thrillers (Frye, 1957, 47-49). Thus the literature that constitutes the story of the contemporary audience tends to be knowing and eschews the conventions designed to appeal the consciousness of earlier generations, as a consciousness more naive than our own.

For Frye, the ability of conventions to evoke a primitive response does not last so that the conventions to which an audience responds as primitive situate that audience historically. Thus, while contemporary audiences tend to approach conventions of irony in mass culture with an uninhibited response, audiences and readers of yesterday saved their more uninhibited responses for difference types of story or structure: in the nineteenth century for the "realism" of fictional melodrama, in the
sixteenth to eighteenth for the golden patterns represented in the decorum of stage drama, in feudal
times to ballads and the historic examples of heroes, finally to myth and the ritual tales of the gods.

It is the objective of Frye’s criticism to win for our entire literary heritage the same primitive
or unmediated response that is "generally given to" (1966, 143) the ironic return to myth in
contemporary "popular literature" (1957, 48-9). To do this he must break down the critical
assumption engendered by the stereotypes of mass culture that the primitive response is appropriate
only to self-consciously ironic forms of literature; that is, the popular and market oriented literature
"calls attention" (Frye, 1957, 41) to its ironic expression of craftsmanship and objectivity.

Frye achieves this breaking down of critical assumptions about irony by reversing what the
New Critics understand as the role of criticism. That is, for Frye, criticism is not to search through
literary artifacts for literary works that correspond to the expectations of modern schools such as that
of the New Critics, but to recognize how the expectations of modern criticism are, in fact, realized —
if only in emergent form — in all literary works, even as they appeal to the expectations of
contemporary audiences.

The critic has to establish a pattern of continuity linking present culture with its
heritage, and therefore with its inheritors, for a culture that is careless of its past has
no defences against the future. As a historical critic he continues the humanist
tradition, which owed so much of its liberal quality to the fact that it studied a
vanished culture with detachment, uncommitted to its religious and political concern.
As a contemporary he is a student of our own concern, and has to see how the past
bears on it. (Frye, 1957, 100)

For Frye, archetypal criticism redeployes irony in a manner that allows readers to apprehend
the capacity of literature to get free of ideologies from both the past and present. In so doing, his
criticism remedies mass culture’s misuse of irony, which rejects the past only to recycle it as the
definitive shape of things to come. And criticism can honour the individuality of the literary work
only by recognizing its involvement in the search for an imaginative alternative to the future that mass
culture has in store for us. Otherwise, as we saw in the comparison of Frye and Adorno, irony will
be neutralized, rendered by the culture industry into something that recognizes in its latest products
the story of our times and that responds to literature as something beyond the reach of the popular
imagination.
3. Hartman’s View on Criticism and the Honouring of Orality in Contemporary Culture.

Geoffrey Hartman is more receptive than Wimsatt to Frye’s injunction that modern criticism should seek to win for literature the same primitive response that is normally reserved for mass culture. He is also sympathetic to Frye’s emphasis on archetypal and romantic categories, about which he says, "Frye has a system that is teachable. It works" (Hartman, 1966, 126). But, his approval aside, Hartman is really arguing for a different notion of the primitive response than is Frye.

Hartman describes criticism as confronted with the dehumanizing effects of modern life, characterized in literary production and interpretation by the triumph of écriture over orality in literary experience. For Hartman, écriture effects a spatialization of literary experience under the esoteric categories of modern reason that obscures the temporal and oral expression by literature of the values that persist in popular tradition and consciousness — a consciousness that has been neutralized according to Frye. It is this crisis of "values" and the threat that it poses for literature that Hartman cites as the identifying characteristic of modernity. His solution to the dehumanizing of literature, "an institution easily infected by [the] ratio" of technological society, is an ironic scrutiny of the minutia of oratio: "the great work of criticism achieves" a misrecognition of the written word that "recalls the origin of civilization in dialogic acts of naming, cursing, blessing, consoling, laughing, lamenting, and beseeching" (Hartman, 1966,129).

To the extent that Frye’s appeal to categories of romance and the imagination are at odds with the reifying categories of modern reason, Hartman argues that they open the way for the reader to apprehend the oral minutiae out of which the popular myths of each historic epoch are created. But he also contends that Frye errs in his conclusion that myths are transhistorical and that Frye’s transhistorical model of myth demands the conformity of literary details to the categories of romance and their forced coalescence into romance as a totalizing structure that reproduces the very spatiality and ratio it promised to counter. Thus, Hartman charges Frye with the reiteration of écriture (and with it a host of esoteric categories necessitating a new critical priesthood) that militates against the very democratization at which modern criticism should aim.

But, as Frye points out, in Words with Power, the particulars of experience are only ever intelligible in terms of a conventional structure. "There are no words for the direct experience of literature, only unformed and unexamined feelings that have no focus until an entity forms out of the process" (Frye, 1990v, 74). And any assertion that modern criticism can or should return to an oral and thus unmediated experience of particulars is a pretence masking the mediating structure that is there all the same. First of all, Frye would point out that, even on premodern conditions of oral
culture, the details of oral poetry were informed by the tendency of that poetry to grow into and participate in an encyclopedic structure with which, it was unconsciously assumed, everyone in any premodern community would be familiar. Secondly, Frye would argue, if modernity and the advent of written culture have shattered assumptions of unity around a tribal encyclopedia, still, new unconscious assumptions of totality will continue to attach themselves to the oral aspects that persist within modern writing. In contemporary society these assumptions have all been gathered into that totality projected by mass culture. Writes Frye: "a writer who does not know he is being conventional becomes a mass culture."

For Frye, Hartman’s proposed return of critical attention to the flow of oral minutiae within the vestiges of oral culture must be like the attempt by criticism and literature to find recourse in "the shock of the new." This supposed return to the oral culture rejects literary convention and écriture, only to embrace those oral elements of the past that have been irredeemably associated with, what we have seen in our comparison of Frye and Adorno on the culture industry, to be the unreflective linearity of the mass media (Frye, 1971, 150-1). And, as Hartman’s proposal militates against situating the minutiae of the oral tradition in a context that might render them intelligible, such minutiae are, in Frye’s words, rendered "of no sensible use to the reader or criticism, forcing both – as do the presentations of the mass media – back upon the continuous ego" (1990u, 75) and its unconscious tendency to respond to experience and the images of consumer culture as if they were the same thing. As in his analysis of Harold Innis (1993b), Frye’s response to Hartman must be that Hartman seeks an alternative to the reification of modern literary experience in an original form of oral experience. And "[o]roral communication in its original form belongs to an ancient world that can never come back" (1993b, 165).

Frye, on the other hand, calls not for a "misrecognition" of modern écriture, one that sees beyond the written word to past expressions of orality, so much as he does the recognition that, in literature, écriture is transformed into an expression of the same imaginative structure which also existed within the oral tradition. To him, the privileging of romance in literature is not simply a sign of its absorption into the categories of écriture to be resisted. It is also a sign that the centripetal structure, what Frye would call a "grammar" of storytelling (1957, 133), which characterized the oral tradition, persists as a transformative aspect of écriture, not simply as a form of past life but also as that expression of imaginative experience into which contemporary lyricism transforms, that is, condenses, all modern experience so that it might be intelligible as something other than an expression of the way television says things are.
Contrary to Hartman’s assertion, then, Frye’s critical attachment to romance does not motivate his distanced approach to literature. Quite the reverse. The central place of romance in Frye’s criticism arises as the formal — the apocryphal — corollary to the objectifying — the distancing — effects we saw in Chapter Three that he recognizes in contemporary irony and lyricism, to their corrosion of the mediations of modern stock response which acts as a precondition for the primitive response to the text by the contemporary reader. It is by discovering the irony in all literary creation that Frye recognizes tales of romance as the popular structures of literature, as those story types that are present (albeit in displaced form) whenever literature or popular culture evokes a primitive response. For the story typical of romance is the folktale, which irony apprehends as a pattern that acts as a basic grammatical unit of all story-telling, and so, appears in many cultures throughout the history of human expression. While mythic structures are those of enduring interest, they tend to have something of the esoteric about them, which requires an audience of initiates (Frye, 1957, 282). It is only by being displaced as romance, by taking on some of the characteristics of the folk tale, that myth can break free from its religious and esoteric associations and become part of the disinterested use of words. Thus, as we see in the Book of Revelations which recreates a “fairytale atmosphere of gallant angels fighting dragons, a wicked witch, and a wonderful gingerbread city glittering with gold and jewels,” do romantic narrative devices permeate Biblical mythology (1976a, 30).

Frye’s reputed emphasis upon romance, then, is not what motivates his view from a mythic, middle, or synoptic distance. Rather, Frye’s emphasis on the synoptic is motivated by what we saw in our treatment of Wimsatt to be — his desire to win for literature a primitive response in an ironic age, that is, to put the ironic perspective of modern criticism to work in a manner that recognizes its implication in present day views of social reality and that reveals its potential identity with the criticism of other days. Having employed criticism in this manner, Frye has discovered that, since the inception of modern history, literature has developed a method for exporting tribal myths, not only to other cultures, but from the realm of belief to that of imaginative creation.

4. Fletcher’s View — and the Resistance by History of A Priori Structures of Interpretation.

In Angus Fletcher’s view, Frye is right when he says that criticism can both honour the role of historic details in literature — employing the historic induction capable of apprehending them — and give priority to the function of these details as specific contexts for universal or deductive categories. Fletcher argues that all historic induction must take place with reference to such categories and so characterize the practice of all historians. The only difference between historical practice and that of
Frye's criticism is that, whereas the employment of deductive categories by most historians is unconscious and inadvertent, Frye's employment of universals is self-conscious and deliberate.

Fletcher concludes from this that, because Frye deploys deductive categories specifically as the organizing hypotheses necessary for the induction of literary detail, he avoids implication in idealism in the manner of the futurists. Their empty categories are born of a vision of modern society untouched by any encounter with the facts of modern life, and thus impose an imaginary form on the past and present, leading to predictions of an equally fanciful future. By contrast, Frye's mythic romantic categories introduce elements of "sacred time" or circular time, into the experience of readers, which, "by meeting the box-office halfway" (Fletcher, 1966, 39), do not so much impose a circular view of history upon the details of that experience as challenge the hegemony of the linear categories under which modern experience has come to be ordered. The critical priority Frye gives to the sacred temporality of romantic categories liberates the "facts" of experience from the reifying categories of modernity — categories that the futurists merely affirm — opening them to an inductive analysis free of the stock assumptions of contemporary ideology and allowing criticism to make predictions tested against the details of modern life.

In "Reflections in a Mirror," Frye congratulates Fletcher on his understanding of his work. But, as we shall see, the limits of Fletcher's understanding denote what he has in common with Frye's other critics: an adherence to the idea that the rejection of convention by criticism and its employment of unconditioned irony can apprehend the truth about actual modern conditions unmediated by interpretive categories.

Fletcher tips his hand about his affinities with the other critics when he says that Frye's critical system is capable of operating in literature as the hypothetical preconditions for the induction of historical fact (1966, 53). But Frye does not think that the categories of literature operate as the hypothetical preconditions for inductions about the facts of actual experience. This is because the details of literary experience which those categories organize — condense — into literary contexts are also hypothetical. They are not the "facts" — the empirical grounds — upon which to plan for the future, so much as the hypothetical images which, taken together, give expression to the capacity of humans to construct alternative presents.

Likewise, Frye's conception of literature does not meet the "box-office" halfway (Fletcher, 1966, 39). Nor does it simply subject the reifying categories of modern life to an ironic scrutiny that rejects their hegemony in favour of romantic categories. In line with Frye's conception of anagogy, literature tends to swallow the box-office whole. And it does not reject the reifying of modern
categories so much as transform their linearity into metaphor — that formal expression of their full reality in its potential to be more than merely linear, to be the unity of space and time, narrative and theme, progression and recurrence.

Frye sees romantic and mythic categories as informing a literary or hypothetical experience more real than that of actual conditions, an experience based not upon the ironic rejection of the categories of linear time but upon their recuperation within literature. The real difference between the categories of literature and those of modern life rests not on the formal differences between them — as in the difference between circularity and linearity — but on their respective involvement as formally similar categories in two different formal structures, one imaginative and the other imaginary.

As hypothetical structures, categories of literature contain those of modern life as a part of their total form. As statements of tangible possibility, they constitute an imaginative truth about the human condition. Outside of literature, on the other hand, Frye holds, as does Adorno, that the categories governing modern life, especially as they are presented by the culture industry, operate on the pretext that they give expression to the unmediated form of actual experience, and so describe an imaginary world, one that simply does not exist. The imaginary nature of the categories governing modern life — their conflation with unmediated reality — tends to make them transparent, so that their role in the formation of experience is often hidden. But the influence of those categories is there nonetheless.

The limitations on Fletcher’s understanding of Frye, then, cause him to miss how Frye’s reliance on the deductive categories of romance differentiate his criticism not only from the futurists but also from contemporary historical practice. Frye is at odds with the inductive practices of modern historians precisely because his use of categories is self-conscious and because he understands the reality to which literature is related to be imaginative. Because the historical reference to deductive categories is largely unconscious, and because the imaginary nature of the experience these categories inform renders them invisible, their informative influence tends to be denied by historians, and the totality which they constitute conflated with that experience of history resulting from the unmediated induction of details — a history, in which, as we have seen, Frye does not believe.

From the perspective of Frye’s practice, then, historians must be guilty of deduction in denial. Following the path through historic detail laid out for them by deductive categories, categories whose influence they discount as irrelevant to inductive research, historians simulate the accelerating effect that mass culture has upon the presentation of narrative on its passive mass audience. In other words, for Frye, like Adorno, mainstream historians and critics are like the culture industry in their refusal
to acknowledge the informing role of linear progression in the understanding of empirical detail. As a result, these same historians and critics render those details inaccessible, so that they are forced back upon unconscious assumptions (the result of conditioning by mass culture and market ideology) about the linearity and totality of form which they project upon their subject matter.

That is, Frye maintains that because they deny that their assumptions are assumptions, historians and critics attribute the insights these assumptions inform to a process of induction from the details under examination. And, in so doing, they impose the same reifying categories upon the study of past and present, as do the futurists. The upshot of this monumental act of misrecognition by historians and critics alike is that they develop fond notions such as the Marxist critical dictum that the discontinuity represented by historic detail elicits a master narrative capable of exposing the false continuity characteristic of all other master narratives, or the deconstructionist assertion that criticism can produce a supplement that apprehends the corrosive effect the essentially nonlinear essence of language has upon all forms of narrative.

Frye argues that contemporary historic practice which maintains that it is purely inductive -- deploying only those categories that subvert the deductive categories of modern ideology -- is guilty of deduction in denial. That is, for Frye the adherence of historians to the militant induction of "historicity" (Frye, 1990, 60) leads them to think that "any dehistoricizing tendency ... will corrupt the critical process into some kind of state idealism" (60), and into a form of deduction in denial that is "really looking for the redemption of man [sic] within history" (Frye, 1991, 48). It is in that search for redemption that modern historical practice unwittingly replicates redemption in its ideological forms, thereby validating Frye's charge that history is "the continuous record of what dominant ideologies do" (Frye, 1990, 61). The perspective of Frye's criticism on historical practice extends to scholarship in general, to his insight into the refusal of scholarship to acknowledge that its supposed autonomy is grounded increasingly on the illusion of cultural pluralism and toleration projected by market society and mass culture. It is this illusory grounding, for Frye, that has turned much scholarship into a spent social force characterized by the concerned indifference with which it preserves the pretence that choice is exercised and free inquiry pursued.

"Concerned indifference" (Frye, 1970, 28) comes into play when the anxiety over the need for extreme specialization in scholarship becomes so intense that it ignores the connection of scholarship with wider human concerns, or worse, assumes that those concerns are represented by the social status quo in such a manner that scholarship need not bother about them. The effect of
concerned indifference is what Frye calls irresponsible science (Frye, 1990t, 53) in which scholars pursue their research without facing the social consequences of what they do.

Scholarship is intensely pluralistic, continually forming pockets of research which are sealed off even from their nearest neighbours. ... while [scholarship] begins by being impersonal in a good sense, depending on an intellectual honesty that refuses to manipulate evidence, it seems to be easy for it to lose its sense of social perspective, and so become impersonal in the bad sense of being indifferent to human values. (Frye, 1971, 155)

And,

[t]he lethal dangers of our time indicate that the conflict of science and social concern is a two-way street, that concern still has its own case, and that there can be such a thing as socially irresponsible science. (Frye, 1990t, 53)

The anxiety of scholarship over specialization is motivated by the tacit realization on the part of scholars (a realization almost invariably denied) that their autonomy is an illusion. It arises from the unadmitted fear that the imperative to specialize is driven not by "the sense that there are no limits to what the human imagination can conceive or be concerned with" (Frye, 1967a, 120), or by the sense that "whatever you are learning is the centre of all knowledge, so that it doesn’t so much matter what you learn as that you should keep doing it" (Cayley, 1992, 155), but by societal pressures that there be no limitations on the demands it may make upon scholars.

We see then that under the pressures exerted by consumer society, scholarship suffers the same fate that Frye is seen in comparison with Adorno to ascribe to members of mass audiences. That is, scholarship’s power of objectivity — its capacity for irony — is neutralized by its unwillingness to confront forms of social concern, and its sense of powerlessness at the prospect that it is nothing beyond the servant of commodity form. The result of this neutralization of irony is that scholarship rushes to embrace the illusion of autonomy that consumer society has prepared for it.

Under conditions of consumer society, then, scholarship becomes not so much the freedom to know as the requirement to keep up with the limitless demands of society for the development of new commodities. These are the conditions under which scholarly specialization develops a markedly competitive character, an indication that it is motivated less by the demands of free enquiry than by the need to compete for funding. Thus the implication of scholarship in consumer society, and its disassociation from wider social concern, renders it a "selfish parasite on a power structure" (Frye, 1971, 55) and neutralizes its capacity for social critique and renders it into a technology available for employment by aggressive ideologies.
For Frye, the scholarship of concerned indifference is, like much contemporary historical practice, a deduction in denial that presents its public with an account of experience isolated from any imaginative context that might counter those assumptions about the history and nature of modern experience upon which contemporary society is based. By default, the details of history and society become contained within the imaginary construct of contemporary ideology, a calamity resulting in both the hysterical affirmation and rejection of this construct, each of which act as reaffirmations of the violence to human dignity and freedom which occasioned them.

Section C.
Frye's Left-Wing and Social Critics Revisited.


In Chapter One we saw that, from the late 60s on, criticism has more and more tended to become divided between those social critics who view the study of literature as an essentially an adjunct study (a casualty of the modern specialization of knowledge), and more reactionary literary critics, such as F. R. Leavis and Harold Bloom, who accept as unproblematic the proposition that there is a fixed canon of literary works (statements about the human condition of timeless value) measured against which all others must be found wanting.

Gone from these later literary critics is the notion articulated equally in Krieger, Fletcher, Wimsatt, and Hartman, that criticism has a responsibility to confront problems special to modernity. For critics such as F. R. Leavis and Harold Bloom, then, the critical reiteration of Enlightenment and humanist values, and the identification of these values in literature, are all that is required of the study of literature in conditions of modernity. What these critics hold in common with Krieger et alia is an attachment to the idea of the difference between literary and everyday language and to the notion that literary language is capable of a special or unmediated relationship with life. I bring up this tendency of more recent literary criticism to take the canon – and the "literary values" contained therein – in a more or less uncritical embrace to point out that the concern of criticism with the problems of modernity have tended to be taken over by left-wing and social critics who dismiss the distinction between literary and discursive language as an empty one.

The tendency of social critics towards treating literary works as social documents, the subjects of the various specialties among the social sciences, rejects, as ideology, the notion that there is a meaningful difference between literary and discursive documents. But, as the examples of Eagleton,
Graff, Fekete, Jameson, and Woodman illustrate, these social critics share with Krieger and the other 1965 respondents to the English Institute a dedication to the idea that modernity presents criticism with special responsibilities that cannot be discharged by reproducing the world through the eyes of eighteenth-century Enlightenment. And, like Krieger et alia, the social critics also attack Frye on the ground that his criticism is implicated in liberal ideology and abets the rationalizations of modern market ideology and the patriarchy with which it is connected.

For the social critics, the difference between language whose relationship to experience is mediated by ideology and language whose relationship to experience is unmediated is apprehended in the critical reading of all texts — not in the difference between poetic and discursive language. But the method employed by the social critics, in apprehending this difference, is much the same as that employed by Krieger et alia. That is, their apprehension of the unmediated relationship between language and experience rejects some conventions as irredeemably implicated in ideology while embracing others in an ironic employ that exposes the negativity — the subversive expression — in all positive statements of ideology.

For instance, Eagleton, Graff and Fekete all maintain that criticism must embrace the role that both the reality principle and ironic realism play in a subversion of "formalist" readings; and Graff and Fekete argue that the ironic subversion of textual convention apprehends the expression of progressive consciousness by proletarian and minority communities. Corresponding to their ironic embrace of realism, then, is the rejection of formalism — lumped together with structuralism, the mythic criticism of Cassirer, and the poetics of Frye — as an irredeemable affirmation of liberal ideology and the illusion of substance that allows literary criticism to persist even after it has been exposed as what Eagleton calls a "nonsubject" (1983, 197).

Say both Graff and Fekete, Frye’s preoccupation with myth as formalist construct leads his criticism to seek out problems that have nothing to do with those confronting modernity, and so leaves the problems of modernity unsolved. Graff criticizes Frye on the ground that his Cassirer-like preoccupation with ritual and desire shows little faith in the emancipatory forces inherent within modern reality. Asserts Graff (1992), Frye is on about imaginative syntheses in vogue at the turn of the century. Contemporary criticism, on the other hand, should be teaching the differences inherent in modern life, because, "this — the emancipatory truth expressed in difference — is as good as it gets."

Fekete goes on to criticize Frye’s implication of romance in formalist poetics as resulting in the neutralization of romance as a critical reaction to modernity and its incorporation into modernity’s rationalization by market ideology. Fekete argues that, if the apprehension of romantic structures in
literature becomes the *raison d'être* of modern criticism so that the recovery of romance under conditions of modernity becomes the problem that criticism must solve over that of relating literature to the details of modern life - then, in effect, romance has been made to facilitate the persistence of modern ideology. Underlying Fekete's criticism is his belief that Frye's romantic structuralism operates as the link between the critical rationalization of modern reification initiated by the New Critics and completed by Marshall McLuhan. Whereas the New Critics neutralized the connection of irony with social critique (opening the way for its integration into mass culture), Frye did the same with romance. All that was left, according to Fekete, was for McLuhan to proclaim that the inclusion of irony and romance in mass culture represented its emancipatory content, proof that mass culture achieves the return to the immediacy of oral traditions hitherto obscured by textual mediations (Fekete, 1976, 40-41). Concludes Fekete, the only alternative to the co-optation of irony and romance within the formalism of mass culture is an ironic return to realism, which - in the spirit of Lukács - aggressively probes the details of modern experience. For it is in these details that we find the most advanced expressions of proletarian consciousness, and actual resistance to formalist culture as an essentially bourgeois rationalization of modern oppression.

From what we saw in our comparison of Adorno and Frye, Frye's response to Eagleton, Graff, and Fekete must be that it is through formalism "loosely" defined (Frye, 1967a, 63)\(^1\) (that is, through literature's concern with the recuperation of form for the reading consciousness) that irony effects the recuperation of realism from ideology. For Frye, without formalism, irony is fated to become just as implicated in ideology and mass culture as realism, which, in his parlance, "is now the weapon of the enemy" (Frye, 1967a, 62), preserving only the pretence that it is a democratizing — a progressive — force.

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\(^1\)In his association with formalism, Frye is not giving his allegiance to any particular school, or artistic movement, only the general tendency in literature and the arts to concentrate, not on the image projected, but on the power of projection. Neither is Frye's formalism identical with New Criticism, the myth criticism of Cassirer, or the Structuralism of Saussure.

Unlike the myth criticism of Cassirer, Frye's recourse to myth and ritual in literature is designed primarily to cast the reality of contemporary society into question. That is, his criticism shows the literary expression of myth in contemporary society to reveal that "illusion, something created by human imagination, is what becomes real: reality, most of which is a fossilized former human creation from the past, becomes illusion" (Frye, 1990, 85). Frye's myth criticism, then, reveals the implication of modern reality in myth, and its suppression of contemporary society's "real potential" - a potential which only literary myth can express. Unlike the structuralism of Saussure, Frye's literary structure is not that of a system of verbal differences whose development parallels but is largely indifferent to nonverbal forms of community life. Whereas Saussurean *langue* allows a community to express meaning because it has developed alongside and contemporaneously with forms of community life (with community life adopting what it finds useful), Frye sees literary language as condensing the verbal form of different community practices into its very structure, practices with which literature then gives expression to a social reality possible under contemporary conditions.
We have seen that the ironic perspective is that of alienation, which has its positive expression in the objectivity of scientific and scholarly distance. Frye holds that, while irony is unable to maintain this objectivity in literature, it is, nonetheless, something that literary irony tries to do. From the ironic purview, then, realism must entail an attention to all the details of literary content unhindered by considerations about the their relative importance to the representation of truth, beauty and morality — an attention which treats literary details as purely formal elements in the construction of the literary work. In the end, this ironic attention to detail overthrows all established conventions of realism and their tendency to conflate the accurate representation of truth, morality and beauty with the reflection of epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic standards made familiar by contemporary ideology.

But such an overthrow is also a liberation of realist conventions from concerns with the representation of experience as ideology would have it. It is a liberation that allows realism to participate in concerns about the possible form of representation — "the power of the projected image" (Frye, 1967a, 62) — out of which the real form of society is constructed. And, for Frye, this real form of society, containing all of social forms (even that of actual social conditions) as forms of possibility is what is expressed in our contemporary cultural heritage.

When Frye says that criticism must win for the contemporary individual a primitive or popular response to literature, he is referring to that response in which literature — freed from the centrifugal (external) associations with established conventions of ideology — confronts individuals with the total form of society which their contemporary cultural heritage contains by virtue of its being a centripetal (purely formal) structure. But such a response is possible only because formalism, as he conceives of it, achieves an ironic recuperation of realism. That is, formalism harnesses the objectivity of irony, both to turn the reader’s attention towards the literary concern with centripetality, and towards the real form of society resonating throughout the centripetality of all cultural forms (see diagram in Bogdan, 1980, 487).

As we have seen in our analysis of Hartman, formalism recognizes in romance a redemptive counterpoint to the iconoclasy of ironic realism. If the ironic deployment of realism overthrows established conventions of realism and turns the attention of the reader towards literary form, it is a conception of romance in which realism is recast as depicting a broader reality than that of actual social conditions. Operating as the grammar of literature, romance gives the literary myths the formal fluidity that allows realism to recreate them as typical of — plausible under — contemporary
conditions. In turn, myth becomes an original context for the details of contemporary experience—one at odds with that of ideologies of their era.

Frye’s formalism shows how literature, by coupling the iconoclasty of ironic realism with the redemptive power of romance and myth, allows irony not only to overthrow established conventions of realism, but to confront the reader with a literary context for the details of modern experience at odds with that of contemporary ideology. And Frye would argue that, by itself, ironic realism, can offer no such context (see diagram in Bogdan, 1980, 487). For, in a society where all consciousness has been reified by mass culture, there is no progressive consciousness outside of literature to act as such a context. Also, by itself, iconoclasty is unlikely to create one. As we saw in the last chapter, mass culture thrives on simulating the destruction of established conventions only to recycle them as the form of progressive consciousness. To a populace deprived by mass culture of its memory, the difference between authentic and artificial forms of resistance is unintelligible. What is needed is not yet new ways of rejecting the past so much as a vehicle that allows individuals to remember a past at odds with the version offered by mass culture. If Frye’s criticism errs in the direction of formalism, it does so to confront the reader with that cultural memory that the culture industry suppresses.

The ironic realism of Graff, Eagleton, and Fekete operates as a reaction against formalism on the assumption that formalism detracts from criticism’s recognition of the details of modern experience ignored by modern ideology, and, thus, from the proletarian or progressive consciousness that operates as a context for those details. But, as Frye and Adorno have shown, the assumption that ironic realism is by itself an expression of progressive consciousness in society (an assumption on which Graff et alia base their understanding of ironic realism and their reaction against formalism) has been rendered invalid by a culture industry. That is, the culture industry now encourages the ironic rejection of its older forms for “gritty realism” in order that viewers will not notice that it has conflated “gritty realism” with ever more shocking versions of those same forms.

Likewise, ironic realism, which was meant to overthrow established conventions, has itself been recycled within the dead conventions of mass culture as a kind of spice—one not too strong to offend unadventurous palates, but strong enough to cover the stench of decay. Be it in the form of surrealism, hyperrealism, or virtual reality, ironic realism becomes part of the manner in which mass culture simulates the shock of the new—acting as a sort of increase in volume which prolongs the shock value of conventions that otherwise would be all too familiar.

For Frye, ironic realism by itself ends up reinforcing the dehumanization of individuals in consumer societies. That is, it becomes part of the illusion that allows whole populations to accept the
steady delivery of diluted or ersatz pleasures as evidence of progress towards the satisfaction of primary concerns of humanity. A form of shock, ironic realism only ups the ante, turning its concern with the unsavoury details of modern reality into a further dilution of the goods offered by mass culture. In so doing, ironic realism serves only to turn the alienation entailed in, and the anger engendered by, such details into something which individuals buy as the consumers of mass culture. In other words, ironic realism ends up working against the progressive causes and politics it was meant to support, snuffing out the very class consciousness it was supposed to express. Thus does persistence in the very ersatz pleasures that caused the dehumanization of individuals (their reduction to mere consumers) become confused with resistance against the administration of their lives by consumer society. This confusion manifests itself most clearly when political administrations — having either stood by or abetted the development of mass consumer society — then demand that individuals give up certain of their ersatz pleasures on the grounds that they dehumanize the environment in some respect.

Be it a prohibition on alcohol, or, as it was more recently in Toronto, on the smoking of cigarettes in bars and restaurants, the tendency of individuals to resist outright bans on ersatz pleasures is, I believe, their understandable response to a society that has left them nothing else. Any attempt by the state to rein in market forces and so slow their diminution of individual freedom has the appearance of revoking even its illusory remnant — consumer choice — so that nothing is left to the individual. When there seems to be nothing but the illusion of freedom and humanity left to consumers, they cling to that, and in so doing, further the demand that the whole of a society’s activity should be market-driven.

This scenario, in which implication in consumer society is conflated with resistance to consumer society’s diminution of individual freedom was also played out during the term of the recent NDP government in Ontario (1990 to 1995). Having failed to wrest the economic agenda from corporate interests, Bob Rae’s government sought to rein in market forces by legislating — or attempting to legislate — a form of job and thus income-sharing by public employees “known as Rae days,” worker takeovers of financially troubled concerns in one industry Northern communities, all of which involved wage concessions, the protection of women and same sex couples from discrimination in the work place, and the right of aboriginal peoples to exclusive access to certain natural resources.

From the perspective of many workers, this attempt to stem the injustices of unregulated market forces seemed to be nothing more than an attack on their rights as workers and their earnings, all for the benefit of other social groups (unfairly described as special interests). Even union members
felt that the Rae government was subjecting them to a hypocritical injunction. It called on them to be more generous and tolerant — better — people, while at the same time it made them do with less. In response, workers voted in 1995 for a government dedicated to making "someone else" do with less, and so free up more income for private consumption. That the present Harris government was also dedicated to stripping workers of many of the protections from market forces they had previously enjoyed seemed of little consequence. Given the limited success the Rae government seemed to have had in maintaining these protections, the prospect of the increased "consumer choice" offered by the tax cut seemed like a blow for freedom against the constricting of opportunities that characterizes life in the 90s.

The above serves to show that, so long as ironic realism concentrates solely on the alienation inherent and anger engendered in modern society, it must conflate individual resistance to society with their persistence in the ersatz pleasure that consumer society has on offer. The anger engendered by the concentration of ironic realism on the unsavoury details of modern life may result in resistance or demonstrations by individuals against the social order, but by themselves resistance and demonstration amount to nothing more than a change in allegiance from one community, set of ideas, or plans, to another. And, according to Frye, isolated from any memory of tradition, individuals are fated to embrace social forms that are reproductions of those they rejected. What makes the new seem different is its connection with undiluted irony, which simply intensifies the dehumanizing effect already inherent in older forms of ersatz goods. More dehumanized, and therefore shocking to conservative tastes, the new seems to be an expression of rebellion against what may well be an imaginary "establishment" audience, which still maintains its allegiance to the older formulas of mass culture.

We have seen that Gerald Graff says literature education has come to the point where we can only teach the differences and the cultural conflicts (1990, 51-67; 1992). But if we do, then, the essential difference between the reality of which society is capable and the pretence that actual social conditions constitute all there is to know about reality must escape us. What also is needed is the study of the potential for reconciliation between differences, but this potential resides in the centripetality of literary form and its recuperation of romance as a context for the details of modern experience alternative to that offered by the status quo.
2. Jameson’s Views on the Negativity of Ideology.

In Chapter One we saw that, to an extent, Fredric Jameson shares the same view of negativity held by Graff, Eagleton and Fekete. That is, he sees every statement of ideology as containing its own contradiction, and every contradiction as an expression of the progressive forces that are in actual competition with the forces of ideology in modern society. Likewise, Jameson sees the role of criticism as primarily ironic: as is evidenced in his insistence on reading Walter Benjamin’s great dictum that "there is no document of civilization which is not at one and the same time a document of barbarism" as one that seeks "to argue the proposition that the effectively ideological is also, at the same time, necessarily Utopian" (Jameson, 1981, 286).

But Jameson’s attachment to the supremacy of irony and his assurances about its capacity to expose the inherent negativity of ideology are not connected with the embrace of realism or the outright rejection of formalism. If Jameson accuses Frye’s criticism of failing to apprehend the negativity of modern ideology, it is on grounds different from those of Eagleton, Graff, and Fekete. For Jameson, Frye’s criticism fails to combine the application of irony with its apprehension of any redemptive vision in history. While he sees Frye’s criticism as containing ironic and redemptive moments, he charges that, ultimately, Frye keeps these moments separate. That is, Jameson views Frye’s criticism as one that subordinates the ironic exposition of ideology’s inherently social essence to a vision of redemption that, in the manner of ideology, imposes a continuity of moral truth and individual insight upon the diverse particulars of history.

Jameson argues that, because Frye curtails the progression of his hermeneutic levels of criticism towards their apotheosis in society -- subordinating a primarily social and historical interpretation of texts by archetypal criticism to that of criticism at the level of anagogy, which affirms the priority of enduring and universal moral truth and individual insight -- he abandons the responsibility of criticism to apprehend assertions of moral truth and individual insight solely in terms of their negativity. As evidence of this abandonment, Jameson cites what he sees as the manner in which Frye’s criticism imposes romantic categories -- as the transhistorically valid constants of literary structure -- upon historic forms of drama to which romantic categories are clearly not applicable (Jameson, 1981, 71-74).

For Jameson, then, the negativity inherent in the association of texts with ideology is revealed in the ironic employ, not only of realism, as Eagleton, Graff, and Fekete would have it, but of all conventions of textual symbolism -- even those of the culture industry. As Jameson sees it, to the extent that Frye’s criticism entails an ironic element, his criticism is faithful to this insight. But,
in pulling back from its ironic scrutiny of the primarily social nature of symbolic associations, Frye’s criticism neglects its responsibilities to modernity and succumbs to ideology — as is evidenced in his sympathy with romance and his antipathy to mass culture.

Given what he has to say about the nature of metaphor, Frye would likely respond that he agrees that every statement of ideology contains its own negativity, and the literary expression of this negativity gives expression to the capacity of society for progress. But, as we have seen, he would add that this capacity for progress has been suppressed by actual social conditions. And irony has been coopted by ideology to ensure that it remains suppressed. Therefore, criticism’s insight into the literary expression of society’s capacity for progress requires more than an ironic disintegration of the associations between literary symbols and ideology. Critical insight also requires an imaginative recapitulation of associations between literary symbols and bygone ideologies into a potential vision of the present larger than that contained within actual social conditions. It requires the recuperation of irony as that critically corrosive influence that frees the past from its association with a present in which all expressions of difference have been constructed by the mass media to mean exactly the same thing.

Frye’s hermeneutic levels of interpretation reclaim irony as purveying literature’s imaginative vision of individual worth and moral insight, not to obscure the social details that do not seem to conform to that vision, but to create out of those very details the potential ground of a social condition capable of doing justice to both the individual and to what is right. Likewise, the priority which Frye gives to romance is aimed less at making all literature conform to one historic standard than at challenging the categories within which present day criticism disposes of past literature. By foregrounding figurative constants that have through most of history operated only as emergent properties of literature, Frye’s use of romance turns the reader’s attention from exclusionary associations between symbols and the ideologies of their day to the symbol’s transformation of ideologies into elements of a more inclusive cultural complex, one which recognizes that cultures touch and overlap in both time and space (Frye, 1993a, 153).

Frye’s critical recuperation of irony and romance cannot make readers better people, but it gives them the capacity, as irony or romance by themselves cannot, to become spiritual beings. For, spiritual beings possess a vision of society that allows them to transform it into what it already had the potential to become — to bring out the real form of society. Thus, Frye attributes to readers made spiritual beings by literature the power to resist the slide of society into a barbarism incapable of appreciating or tolerating the only stable realities in any society — those being the progress of
disinterested science and scholarship, the enduring value of the arts. And as we have seen from Frye's comparison with Adorno, Frye maintains that without the recuperation of irony and romance by a critical hermeneutic like his own, criticism must become ultimately the consolation for a contemporary experience in which everything is fated to decline and decay — and all in the name of progress. In opposition to Jameson, Frye concurs with Adorno that, if there is any expression of negativity for criticism to discover in modern life, it is not to be found in the ideological construction of actual history. For negativity, criticism much search the imaginative reliving of history against the grain that finds its expression in literary structure. As was shown in Chapter Two, Frye's hermeneutic levels of interpretation retrace the steps of this search.

Jameson argues that Frye's hermeneutic levels of interpretation change the order of the old medieval system of hermeneutics. That is, Jameson says that the medieval system conceived of the highest level, anagogy, as being that at which symbols were studied for their social or universal intelligibility: their capacity to become the focus for all the diverse conditions of society. But Jameson thinks that Frye's level of anagogy replaces the study of a symbol's social intelligibility with that of its association with individual insights into enduring moral and epistemological truths. For Jameson, Frye thus conflates anagogy with what under the medieval system had been the penultimate or moral level of interpretation, one seen correctly by the medieval to have a less universal application than that of anagogy because it is concerned with the insight of individuals into moral codes and systems of knowledge that must be limited to certain communities and ideologies (Jameson, 1981, 71-74).

Jameson continues that, just as Frye has really replaced the anagogical level with the moral one, so too has he reduced what for the medieval would have been the level of anagogy to the penultimate level (1981, 74). Argues Jameson, Frye's penultimate, or archetypal level, apprehends the capacity of the symbol to survive through history by reflecting the ideological standards of truth, morality, and beauty, special to each and every historic epoch. At the level of archetype, the continuity of the symbol as part of a narrative structure — mythos — familiar to all historic epochs, is taken simultaneously to be a statement of its displacement. A displacement of myth, the symbol reflects the historic discontinuity between the diverse ideological standards with which it is associated, revealing the historical partiality and class interest of these standards — and thereby exposing as pretence their claim to represent timeless and universal truth. But because the symbol as archetype endures, for Jameson, as that sign of community familiar to all conditions of community, it also acts as that expression of solidarity that makes all the formulations of class interest with which it is
associated intelligible as an expression of community (72). That is, in associating itself with archetypal symbols, any expression of class interest lays claim to class solidarity against the oppression that divides citizens from each other. And since, as an essentially ironic figure, the archetype exposes the untruth of ideology’s claim to represent solidarity against oppression, the solidarity expressed by the archetype must be represented elsewhere than in its association with ideology. Thus, archetype turns the attention of the reader to the solidarity between the victims of ideology—"that of the oppressed classes" (289).

From Jameson’s perspective, Frye’s level of archetype studies the social intelligibility of the symbol necessary to expose ideology’s negativity—the continuity indicated by an ironic exposure of ideology’s inherent discontinuity. It is the level at which the symbol is shown to be an expression of a social dialectic which must end in the triumph of progressive forces over the illusions of ideology, and at which the reader is "decentred" as part of an historic moment in the development of this dialectic (1981, 283). In reversing the medieval order in hermeneutic levels, then, Frye recentres at the level of anagogy what he decentres at the level of archetype (74). For, Frye’s level of anagogy is that at which his theoretical imitation of the "positive" but "social hermeneutic" (286) articulated by medieval theology is transformed into an object of individual insight, and the individual into the container of that insight capable of swallowing and so remaking the world on the basis of it (74).

Jameson regards this recentring of the individual as a return to the triumph "privatization" and of liberal idealism—to the view that the enlightened individual is privy to timeless categories of moral and epistemological judgement that allow him to discern, predict, even to change the course of history (1981, 74). Frye’s anagogy must seem to Jameson to simply rewrite "a body of varied texts into the form of a master narrative" (122). And Frye’s concern with the social hermeneutic must seem to be the sign of liberalism’s reluctant hermeneutic. That is, liberalism cannot ignore the fact of the social hermeneutic, but, equally, is unwilling to face up to the consequences that the acknowledgement of the social hermeneutic holds for its commitment to the priority of individual experience and Enlightenment conceptions of the good and the true.

As we will see, however, Jameson has misconstrued the nature of Frye’s archetypal and anagogical levels on two counts. First, the level of anagogy, not archetype is that which, for Frye, most closely approaches the social hermeneutic. Second, Frye’s levels are not hierarchical in the sense that interpretation at the level of anagogy would simply supersede interpretation at the other levels, but cyclical. Just as archetypal criticism is completed by criticism at the level of anagogy—the ironic word play apprehended by archetypal criticism derives its seriousness from the participation of
criticism in what is supposed to be Frye's highest, his anagogic, level of interpretation — anagogy brings Frye's system of hermeneutic levels full circle to literalism, the insights of anagogical seriousness being impossible without those insights at his supposedly lowest, literal level, into the corrosive effects that the play of irony has on ideological associations with extraliterary meaning.

That Jameson should so mistake Frye's hermeneutic system is due to his misunderstanding of Frye's description of anagogy as that level at which all creation is viewed as being contained in the individual imagination. Jameson assumes that the priority afforded to individual experience in literary interpretation must be given at the expense of a more social hermeneutic which interprets the text as an expression of a class solidarity in the pursuit of utopia. But, as we have seen in Frye's comparison with Adorno, it is only by interpreting the text as a radically individual expression of the individual's concerns that criticism in the age of the culture industry can hope to apprehend a vision of society in which individuals are not isolated and interchangeable but part of a community dedicated to the satisfaction of human concerns broadly defined. While Jameson thinks of the archetypal level of interpretation as that which apprehends the expression of a social hermeneutic in literature, Frye sees that by itself the archetypal level is that at which the critic becomes isolated from literature's capacity to articulate a social vision that is different from that articulated by the culture industry.

Frye describes archetypal symbols, like the myths of which they are a part, as capable of changes in format which allow them to inhabit what — by any standard of morality, truth, and beauty — would be a plausible account of human experience. And Frye describes the responsibility of archetypal criticism as that of following the archetypes throughout their "total mythological context in literature" (Frye, 1971, 99). He requires of archetypal critics an objectivity allowing them to recognize the archetype — not just in literature conforming to the moral, epistemological, and aesthetic standards of their own day — but in the literature of every other era, and by the standards of every condition of ideology as well. In turn, critics must see those various standards reflected in the literary archetype. Thus, Frye argues that the critic of archetype must see the rose in Dante's Paradiso and in Yeats's early lyrics as the same symbol — one capable of reflecting two very different social realities (1957, 124). Also they must recognize the symbolic constants that allow the plays of Shakespeare to communicate in terms of the standards of his own day and ours as well.

But, for Frye, the objectivity required of archetypal criticism, the one capable of following the literary archetypes through the works and conventions of every historic epoch, leads not to the decentring of the reader or critic, as Jameson would have it. Quite the contrary. The attention of the critic passes over the different associations between symbol and ideology "with a sense that [they are]
above and the action of the text below" (Frye, 1990v, 83). That is, the archetypal critic has the sense that they "possess" (83) none of these associations as special or more significant than the others. For, from the purview of archetype, all the associations appear to be of equal import as forms of verbal power. The archetypal critic's perspective, then, becomes that of the absolute standard, levelling the differences in importance between the "analogies supplied by convention and genre" into "an endless series of free associations, perhaps suggestive, perhaps even tantalizing, but never creating a real structure" (Frye, 1957, 118). Thus does archetypal criticism centre the critic as that ideal reader for whom all literary associations are interchangeable because no association is judged in terms of its having a social significance that might differentiate it from other associations.

I take it that, for Frye, the danger in this radical centring at the level of archetype is that the critic is so distanced from ordinary and literary experience that they cannot discern the difference (to which we have seen Frye allude in his response to Wimsatt) between stereotype and archetype, between literary structure and the ersatz form of that structure that operates in mass culture. Lacking the capacity to distinguish between stereotype and archetype, the archetypal critic's responsibility to apprehend archetype is in danger of becoming conflated with affirmation of the primacy of the moral, aesthetic, and epistemological standards assumed by mass culture with which stereotypes are associated. For Frye, this inability to distinguish between archetype and stereotype is made dangerous by the priority given by archetypal criticism to popular literature. Archetypal criticism takes popular literature as its starting point because it is there that the archetypes are most starkly drawn. "In fact," writes Frye "we could almost define popular literature, admittedly in a rather circular way, as literature that affords an unobstructed view of archetypes" (Frye, 1957, 116). "Archetypes [then] are most easily studied in highly conventionalized literature: that is for the most part, naive, primitive, and popular literature" (104).

Because the expression of stark or explicit archetype in literature acts as the starting point for archetypal criticism, and because, in contemporary society, the starkest forms of archetype appear in that "vast amount of rubbish" (Frye, 1957, 116) with which mass culture fills our waking hours, there is in archetypal criticism "a danger of reduction, of assuming that literature is essentially primitive and popular," and thus of dismissing as esoteric or incomprehensible any deviation in literature from familiar presentations of archetype. The inability of archetypal criticism to distinguish between literary archetype and its appropriation by the producers of rubbish leaves it open to the tendency to judge all literature by the standards governing that rubbish. And, for Frye, even if archetypal criticism itself departs from the standards governing rubbish, embracing more the implicit archetypes
of more esoteric literary forms, still it leaves those standards free, as ones associated with the explicit expression of archetype, to work their purpose on the unconscious minds of modern audiences.

Frye, then, sees archetypal criticism, by itself, as suffering from the same inadequacies that he attributes to deconstruction. That is, he sees them both as a consolation for experience. Without the level of analogoy to redeem it, archetypal criticism is a wedding of criticism to irony that apprehends the formal similarities but not the functional differences between literature and mass culture. By itself, archetypal criticism assumes that McLuhan's adage "The medium is the message" applies in the same manner to literature and the mass media, not realizing that, for mass culture, McLuhan's aphorism means that all media have been reduced to meaning much the same thing (Frye, 1971, 152). Like Frye's understanding of deconstruction, the archetypal disintegration of literary symbols into an endless manifold of ideological associations has the appearance of imaginative free play. But, because it does not distinguish the irony in each association, and the unique articulation of social significance entailed by that irony, archetypal criticism cannot distinguish between literary conventions and their recycled forms in the mass culture. That is, archetypal criticism notices only what is the same about mass culture and literature, not what differentiates them. As we learned from our comparison of Adorno's and Frye's analysis of mass culture, the differentiation of literature and mass culture entails literature in a recuperation of form. For Frye, criticism apprehends this recuperation of form at the level of analogoy.

Thus Frye argues that the centering tendency of archetypal criticism which allows the critic to ignore the attack that stereotype launches on the literary imagination finds its antidote at the level of analogoy, which establishes the true social context of both literature and critic alike at the periphery of contemporary experience. At the level of analogoy, the critic/reader finds their social context within each literary work which analogoy interprets as an expression of total human society (Frye, 1957, 367) at odds with, and at some critical distance from, their own ideological conditioning. With analogoy, literature ceases to be regarded as a formal (and, thus, hypothetical imitation) of actual experience, and comes to be seen as an "order of words" imitating an "order of nature — a formal ideal experience — which is itself hypothetical" (118). From that order of words, no verbal images — nor any of the different ideological assumptions with which they are associated — can be excluded in advance. For, because the formal ideal of human life imitated by the order of words is hypothetical, it must suggest all such images and assumptions as possible elements of its expression. Thus, analogoy apprehends in literature a formal ideal of experience which renders all literature and criticism intelligible as a complex of historically unique but potentially tributary elements of the ideal's
expression. And, from the perspective of anagogy, the social context of literature and criticism becomes that element of production from every social condition which seeks to give expression to a human ideal, rendering all literary differences intelligible as potential expressions of the same human condition.

As we saw in Chapter Four, Frye argues that the constants of this humane ideal, which render all literary images intelligible as potential elements in its expression, must be primary concerns of humanity, concerns with the satisfaction of desires so broadly based that they would be recognizable as such by any condition of society — that is, concerns for life, food, sex, freedom, dignity and decent living conditions. And the ideal of experience must be one of human life where all of these desires are satisfied, not just for some, but for all. For the satisfaction of these desires is so essential to a fully human existence that it cannot be said to have been achieved until all are satisfied.

Frye says in his discussions with David Cayely that primary concerns are about those things whose enjoyment is of such importance, that you could not enjoy them if your possession of them meant that others would be deprived of their enjoyment.2 That primary concerns cannot be enjoyed,

2 Primary concern entails the difference between self-denial and self-sacrifice. Self denial is essentially what we have already seen to have been asked of workers by the Rae government during and after the social contract. The Rae government required that they give up what they saw as their own self interests in the effort to be better people. Self-sacrifice is made to what one recognizes as a wider notion of the self and self-interest. It is the recognition that the wider community is part of the individual’s identity, and that benefits to the community as a whole entail a benefit to the individual that are additional to their private portion of that benefit. For example, beyond the private benefit each individual accrues from supporting a public and universally accessible health care system, they also share in having changed their society for the better, in having made it a healthier and thus a wealthier place. Self-sacrifice, then, recognizes the stake of the individual in the improvement of the commonwealth. By making a difference to others they share in the difference they have made to society.

Of the connection between the disinterestedness of self sacrifice and that of primary concern, Frye writes:

Let us suppose that some intelligent man has been chasing status symbols all his life, until suddenly the bottom falls out of his world and he sees no reason for going on. ... What has happened is that he’s so far only recognized one society, the society he has to live in. ... That is, the society he does live in is identical with the one he wants to live in. So all he has to do is adjust to that society, to see how it works and find opportunities for getting ahead in it. Nothing wrong with that: it’s what we all do. But it’s not all of what we all do. He’s beginning to realize that if he recognizes no other society except the one around him, he can never be anything more than a parasite on society. And no mentally healthy man wants to be a parasite: he wants to feel he has some function, something to contribute to the world, something that would make the world poorer if he weren’t in it. But as soon as that notion dawns in the mind, the world we live in and the world we want to live in become two different worlds. ... Th[e] second world is the world we want to live in, but the word “want” is now appealing to something impersonal and unselish in us. Nobody can enter a profession unless he makes at least a gesture recognizing the ideal existence of a world beyond his own interests." (Frye, 1963, 65)

Profession of citizenship in a community is no different.
and thus properly satisfied, unless they are enjoyed by all, distinguishes them from what Frye calls the secondary concerns of ideology, which, while they are directed at the same objects of desire — food, sex, freedom, etc. — are always satisfied at the expense of somebody else. Frye avers that we see how ideology makes appeals, however disingenuous, to primary concern in times of war. Then, when called to sacrifice themselves for their country, many citizens recognize the benefit of being able to make a difference to the society into which they were born. That is, they recognize that their participation is part of their human identity, worth and happiness. We also see the demonic form of an appeal to primary concern in the behaviour of a generation of fathers who vowed that their children would not have to suffer what they suffered, later to gripe that "these kids today" do not know about the sacrifices required to become a "real man."

If analogoy is that level of interpretation of literature as an imitation of life where the primary concerns of humanity are addressed, then it must treat ideological associations with literary imagery — all of which are expressions of secondary concern — as ironic. For instance, Frye cites the blinding of Gloucester in King Lear: ostensibly an image in which the protagonists exercise their freedom of action at so terrible a cost to their victim that it is "as powerful a rendering as we can ever get of life as we don’t want it" (Frye, 1963, 41). But, because Shakespeare’s "blinding of Gloucester" scene, is "a dramatic scene of cruelty and horror ... from the point of view of the imagination," it suggests "not the paralysing sickening horror of a real blinding scene ... but an exuberant horror, full of the energy of repudiation" (1963, 41 [emphasis mine]). That the image of Gloucester’s blinding also resonates with exuberant repudiation is an expression of its "upper level of authority" (Frye, 1990u, 71) — an authority that transforms "things as they are" into the negative image of "things as they should be." This changes the scene into one where the protagonists, by trying to secure their hopes at Gloucester’s expense, set in motion those events that will ultimately destroy them. Thus does Frye echo Adorno’s concern in Chapter Three that art should give positive expression to the sickness of contemporary society, and so protest the ideology that withholds the cure. It is Frye’s concern with the recuperation of society’s decay as a formal expression of identity in terms of primary concern that resists the simple rejection of decadent form by the culture industry, a form which the culture industry then recycles in even more dehumanized packaging.

In foregrounding the potential humanity in the most alien — the most decadent — of literary images, however, analogoy’s apprehension of literature as an expression of primary concern also foregrounds how even the most familiar and beloved literary images are merely potential forms — not actual embodiments of — the humane ideal. For it is this same authority that allows us to see the
potential triumph of primary over secondary concern in the blinding of Gloucester scene. It is this that allows us to

return again and again, with the same shuddering of delight, to the opening of Macbeth: 'Thunder and lightning, enter three witches,' even though we know that these witches were contemporary with the most hideous and pointless tormenting of harmless old women. (Frye, 1990u, 71)

That is, while "we find the metaphorical imagination [within which primary concern is expressed] expanding into the worlds of dream, belief, vision, fantasy, ideas, as well as human society and nature, and annexing them all to the enlarging consciousness" (Frye, 1990j, 23), we also become aware that

every society [including those social forms into which we have been conditioned (Frye, 1971, 103)] is structured, and there is always another or secondary tendency to attach what is imagined to the ideals of some ascendent group or class. ... We never get a work of imagination that is wholly primary or secondary: it is invariably both at once. Yet the two aspects are still two ... Much of the critical process revolves around the effort of distinguishing them. (Frye, 1990j, 23)

In other words, even the works whose expression of primary concern we take for granted have come to be associated with expressions of ideology. Much of criticism should be about exposing the extent to which the expression of ideology subordinates and becomes conflated with that of primary concern.

But the method by which criticism at the level of anagogy exposes this distinction can result in a decentring of readers from their own unconscious ideological conditioning. Apprehending literature as an hypothetical structure exposes the reader to the purely formal role played by ideologies as part of the potential expression of primary concern. This critical exposure of the reader to the form of ideology defamiliarizes previously familiar conventional forms, dispelling the unconscious assumption by readers that these conventions constitute the shape of real experience and concerned truth, and confronting readers with their operation within the social environment as demonic counterpoints to primary concern. That is, the critic comes to see familiar conventions and images as demonic — not because they are formally different from those of primary concern in literature — but because they maintain the pretence that they are the embodiments of actual standards of truth, morality, and beauty external to the literary imagination (Frye, 1957, 115). Also demonic is their pretence to be, not a possible form of truth among many, but its definitive expression — to be, as we saw in Chapter 4, "What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed" (Frye, 1990q, 126).

In opposition to Jameson's argument, Frye contends that criticism at the level of anagogy has the capacity to decentre readers from preconceptions about individual and objective experience that
are informed by that conditioning by rendering that conditioning unfamiliar — that is, demonic — and, therefore, available to critical discernment. For defamiliarization results from the apprehension of literary imagery as a vision of community in which all expressions of concern belong to the reader equally. This is not to say that readers embrace all expressions of concern as valid. Rather, they accept even those expressions that seem demonic as belonging to the society which they inhabit because it also inhabits them. Writes Frye,

To participate in anything in human society means entering into a common bond of guilt and of inevitable compromise. I am saying that whatever we join contains evil, and that what we accept is the guilt of belonging to it. (Frye, 1982c, 161)

At the same time, the literary vision of community is one in which the reader recognizes the demonic elements in those expressions of concern with which they are most familiar, so the genuine literary experience of community must also be that of belonging to society yet striving to become aware of its conditioning, trying to throw off whatever is illegitimate about that conditioning, and therefore [one] ethically bound to carry out a long-term transformation of society. (Frye, 1982c, 164)

The lesson of anagogy, then, is that, if readers are to inhabit the potential community of concern expressed in literature and to allow it to inhabit them, they must take responsibility for the failure of ideology to create this community in actual conditions of society. That is, they must recognize that the literary community to which they have given their allegiance can never be an actual one until the illusions of ideology have been exposed and a real form of society has been allowed into the light.

The recognition of ideological illusion, lent to the reader by literature and criticism at the level of anagogy, can restore what we saw in Chapter Five to be that second sense of irony capable of resisting the reifying effects of everyday language and its conditioning by mass culture. That is, even in the language of mass culture, which maintains the pretense of ironic free play — that it is frivolous and so not to be taken seriously (1957, 45: 1971, 136) — the "ironic seriousness" of primary concern exposes a "rhetorical analogue to concerned truth" (1971, 66) thinly concealed within the productions of mass culture (1970, 87). In the light of literature's expression of primary concern, the employ by mass culture of ostensibly fictional — fake — forms is shown to be at the service of market interests, designed primarily to induce a particular expression of concern (of conviction or action) of the part of its audience. Mass culture, and the ordinary language it conditions are seen to demand the uniform response to specific expressions of concern in their prescriptions for the achievement of the social ideal. And its appeals are intended to be only as wide than that of the target audience — all other
parties are excluded. Literature, on the other hand, would include all expressions of concern as well as the individuals and interests with which they are associated are excluded.

When compared with literary imagery, the impatience of mass culture with literary form is revealed in the stereotyped versions it passes off as authentic instances of archetype. That is, the stereotyping of archetype by mass culture, and the texts with which it is associated, betrays what we saw in Chapter Five to be a lack of concern with literary integrity, which results in versions of archetype that are no more than ornaments designed to make a political point or sales pitch more palatable. For instance Frye cites the case of the author of II Esdras, who introduces an allegorical version of an eagle, and then says, "Behold, on the right side there arose one feather, which reigned over all the earth." It is clear that he is not sufficiently interested in his eagle as a poetic image to remain within the normal boundaries of literary expression. The basis of poetic expression is the metaphor, and the basis of naive allegory is the mixed metaphor. (Frye, 1957, 91)

In contrast with Jameson's analysis, then, it seems that the interpretative level at which Frye's criticism apprehends the decentring of the reader as part of a wider social dialectic and the textual expression of negativity in ideological difference is indeed that of anagogy. We saw in Chapter One that Jameson fails to see this because he assumes that the negativity of ideology is the expression of actual social forces and that these forces are capable of subversive expression in mass culture. For Frye, however, the only social forces expressed by the negativity of ideology are the imaginative social capacities whose unrealized potential finds expression in literature and the arts. The negativity of mass culture has its expression in literature and the arts, not in its own artifacts.

Earlier we said there is a second way in which Jameson misinterprets Frye's hermeneutic levels, inasmuch as he assumes Frye's interpretive levels, like those in the medieval system of hermeneutics, are ordered hierarchically. This is an assumption that fits nicely with Jameson's view that each hermeneutic level should get closer to the unmediated truth about historic and society expressed at the level that apprehends all texts as part of a social hermeneutic. But, contrary to what Jameson assumes, Frye's levels do not represent a hierarchical procession so much as a cyclical completion. That is, each level of interpretation is completed by the next and, in turn completes the one before it.

For instance, the insight of anagogy — supposedly Frye's highest level of interpretation — into literature as an order of words brings his system full circle (Bogdan 1980). And anagogy meets its completion in the first or literal level of interpretation. At the literal level, criticism is concerned with literary works as statements of irony in the broadest sense of the word. There, literary works are
regarded at the literal level as statements that are not what they mean, only what they say — statements concerned not with their association to nonverbal meaning but with the syntactic ordering of words. The concern of the literal level with works as an ordering of words entails that no word or order can be altered in any work without detracting from its meaning. It is this entailment that requires the anagogic conception of literature as an "order of words" (Frye, 1957, 96) to include every image of experience in its imitation of an ideal order of nature — even those that are demonic — and thus prevents it from succumbing to the anxieties of ideology and secondary concern that such images be expurgated. In turn, anagogy exposes this very anxiety in ideology and secondary concern as evidence of their own demonic nature.

It is also the irreplacibility of the literary image and the ordering of imagery, apprehended at the literal level, that allows anagogy to distinguish archetype from stereotype. Because anagogy must apprehend meaning of the archetypal image as being identical with its form, it must discern the difference between archetype and stereotype, which can only be taken to mean whatever the bromides of mass culture require. If the literal level completes that of anagogy, anagogy also completes that of archetype. We heard Frye say that there is a danger inherent in archetypal criticism that literature will be taken as an essentially primitive or popular form, and the starkest presentations of archetype, especially as they appear in popular culture, as the most basic. But anagogy's insight into the delineation between primary and secondary expressions of myth, one that we have seen distinguishes between archetype in literature and stereotype in mass culture, shows that esoteric forms of archetype and myth are also primary forms.

Owing to the transhistoric perspective of anagogy, we see that the priority given to popular literature has nothing to do with the relative importance of its associations with ideology, only with the fact that, in any age, it will be more easily recognizable than more implicit forms of archetype. Nor does the acknowledgement that some forms of archetype are more explicit than others imply a standard of explication common to all historical conditions and ideologies. For the literature of every era has its own special version of the explicit form of archetype. "We can find this quality on every [historic] level of literature: in fairy tales and folk tales, in Shakespeare (in most of the comedies), in the Bible ... in Bunyan, in Richardson, in Dickens, in Poe" (Frye, 1957,116). Thus, anagogy shows that while popular literature should be the starting point of archetypal criticism, this in no way implies the existence of a primitive or popular form of myth hidden within more complex "difficult" versions of the different historic displacements of archetype. "The complexities [entailed by the more implicit expressions of myth in literature] are designed to reveal and not to disguise myth. ... The inference
seems to be that the learned and the subtle, like the primitive and the popular, tend towards a centre of imaginative experience” (117).

If popular, primitive or stark expressions of archetype are only the starting point of archetypal criticism, it follows that romantic forms, with which Frye identifies the popular expression of archetype, serve the same function in his criticism. That is, Frye, is not, as Jameson avers, intent, in the manner of liberal idealism, on imposing romantic categories as an unironic statement of timeless literary continuity upon premodern literature to which such categories could not possibly apply. As we saw in our analysis of Krieger, Frye’s deployment of romantic categories is by way of irony — its design is to expose the artfulness in all ages and conditions of culture — even if it exists only in emergent form. Again, the purpose of Frye’s romantic categories is not to discover an essential meaning in premodern art, buried under layers of archaic ritual, but to foreground the literary concern with verbal figuration — a concern that transcends ideological concern — which, if in only emergent form, those very rituals show forth.

Frye’s concern, then, in treating romance as the container of literary form is with the transitive elements of romantic conventions — with those elements of romantic conventions that allowed myth to travel from one geographic or temporal condition to another. His concern is itself an ironic take on romance. It allows criticism to understand how the literary archetypes — first apprehended in the literature of historic conditions associated with conventions of romance — manage to get into the literature of cultural and ideological conditions where the conventions of romance did not yet hold sway. For Frye, there are no timeless categories of wisdom hidden behind cultural symbols of the past. Any wisdom which symbols occasion is "in the art revealed" by the diversity of literature and the arts throughout history. As we have already seen Frye argue, it is this heritage that makes up our buried present and from which we can find the only expression of negativity that modern ideology has to offer.

In his conversations with David Cayely, Frye charges Jameson with not knowing the difference between ideological and literary forms of myth (Cayely, 1992, 90). I have endeavoured to show how this failure to distinguish between the two leads Jameson to misunderstand Frye’s conceptions of archetype, anagogy, and romance. Frye would also conclude that Jameson’s inability to distinguish between literary and ideological expressions of myth leads him to seek a negativity of ideology that gives expression to actual social forces capable of resisting reification by ideology. Jameson’s concern for difference notwithstanding, his search for a savvy underside to the culture industry that is unconditioned by ideology shows him, along with the other critics in this chapter, to
have succumbed to the plot by mass culture to make them buy into the "illusion of our own time" (Frye, 1982c, 161). That is, they have succumbed to "the belief in the possibility of achieving a moral superiority to society by withdrawing from its ideological conditioning and its values, contemplating it from without as something alien, or, in the fashion of metaphor, 'sick'" (161). In the next section I will show that he would level the same charge against deconstruction, especially as explicated by Ross Woodman.

3. Woodman, Deconstruction and the Responsibilities of Contemporary Criticism.

As we saw in Chapter One, Ross Woodman, "Frye, Psychoanalysis, and Deconstruction" (1994), cites Kristeva, de Man and Derrida as proposing a deconstructionism that exposes the absent referent in every textual association an absence that occasions the unravelling of associations into their opposites — their deconstruction. Woodman argues that the Freudian element in this deconstruction is to see the origin of language as being in the flesh.

Thus, Woodman has it that, according to Kristeva and de Man, cognition and communication have their roots in the biological bonding at the breast of infant and mother (1994, 316); in the discrete and unregulated pulsions (320) that are expressed and transmitted within this relationship. It is this preOedipal (317) relationship, one that seeks to recreate all cognitive relationships and communication as a tactile connection with the beloved other that constitutes the essence of language. But Woodman holds that this essence has become subversive under conditions of patriarchy, where cognition is rooted in the Oedipal struggle for dominance between father and son, so that cognition is understood and language is practised as an imposition of foreclosure, hierarchy and order upon the disorganized data emanated from a world that is yet to be understood. Language as the tactile communion with the mother is in constant struggle with the logocentricism of patriarchy, which seeks to reduce the feminine character of language to what Kristeva (1982) terms "abjection" (5) — a vile chaos in need of ordering, definitive interpretation, resolution and foreclosure.

In accordance with the views of Kristeva and de Man, then, Woodman sees Derrida's deconstruction to be less an interpretive practice imposed upon the text than the actual subversive action of the feminine in the patriarchal text. Deconstructionism does not deconstruct the text in resolution so much as bear witness to the text in the act of deconstructing — in which the patriarchal ordering of the passive mater in language is revealed to be a facade hiding the "warring parents-in-coitus" (Woodman, 1994, 323). In its unravelling of every association through deconstruction,
language reveals the absent referent, the maternal impulse, upon which the patriarchal notions of concept, order, harmony and resolution impose a silencing foreclosure.

In Woodman's view, the Freudian grounding of deconstruction can make a valuable contribution to Frye's poetics by revealing an important element of patriarchal foreclosure in the critic who is "himself radically opposed to closure" (Woodman, 1994, 323). For, where Frye employs Beulah — the Blakean emblem for the feminine principle in literary creation — as a realm that precludes foreclosure upon any points of view or the verbal structures that contain them, Woodman views Beulah as a relegation of the feminine to resolving linguistic dissonance within a total form of literature, an order of words, or a verbal universe where the supremacy of patriarchal logocentrism is a given. Frye's Beulah may preside over that realm "where everything is equally an element of liberal education, where Bunyan and Rochester are met together and Jane Austen and the Marquis de Sade have kissed each other" (Woodman, 1994, 318 quoting Frye, 1966, 143) — in which all stories must be accepted as equally valid contributions to the totality of literary structure. But Woodman warns that their inclusion rests upon the proviso that they be taken as primarily verbal structures, patterns disembodied or abstracted from the historical and biological impulses that occasioned them. It is this biology, this historical specificity — something that informs the "introspective experience of the reader" (Woodman, 1994, 321) with which Woodman concerns himself and which he feels is subordinated through Frye's use of Beulah to the demands of logocentrism and patriarchy.

Woodman would hold, then, that, in his attempt to avoid foreclosure, Frye has unwittingly used Beulah to bleach language of its biological — its unregulated and discrete — essences and subordinated them to the abstract concept and the patriarchal ideal of an ahistorical totality. What, for Woodman, is missing in Frye's use of Beulah is the presence of the biological impulse that ever threatens to unravel language's organization into total form — an organization that renders language inorganic (Woodman, 1994, 319). Woodman, however, does not go so far as to declare an irreconcilable gulf between Frye's criticism and deconstruction (Woodman, 1994, 323-4). He points out that, while Frye's "system" precludes the biological impulse which occasions deconstruction, Frye the critic, always more concerned with recognition than rejection, accepts deconstruction as a contrary necessary to the progression of criticism — as a counter-structure that interpenetrates with Frye's own so that the insights of deconstruction might be incorporated into Frye's critical system even if deconstructionism is not (Woodman, 1994, 324).
I would argue that Frye's appeal to interpenetration notwithstanding, the thrust of Woodman's criticism is that Frye's system does not take up the insights of deconstruction any more than it takes up deconstruction. As we have seen, Woodman criticizes Frye's system for reducing the female principle to a passive receptacle or word horde out of which patriarchy constructs its verbal universe. We have seen Woodman maintain that Frye's system leaves no place for biology or the primacy of historic specificity in the text or reader experience (Woodman, 1994, 316).

As well, I contend that Woodman is wrong to see either the elimination of biology, historic specificity, or dissonance in Frye's verbal universe. This is because the distinction between logocentrism and the flesh would be a false one in Frye's system. The total form of literature includes a realm beyond the accommodating spirit of Beulah — that of fiery Eden — in which the word confronts and is made flesh, as the "union" of creator and creature" (Frye, 1947, 49-50). For Frye's criticism entails an acknowledgement that the essence of poetic language is indeed in the flesh. And readers cannot be said to have entered fully into the experience of literature unless that experience entails, as a part of their own — potential — warring identity, the confrontation with the otherness of the female. For Frye, Beulah and Eden represent a double disassociation of the reader's experience of literature from the sensibilities of contemporary patriarchy. And it is upon the literary power of dissociation that the reader's encounter with the word made flesh depends.

For Frye the reader's experience of literature under conditions of contemporary society is initially the precritical one of an uneducated imagination, for whom literature appears to be "an alien structure of the imagination, set over and against him [sic], strange in its conventions and often in its values" (Frye, 1970, 77). Precisely because the conventions of literature are strange to the precritical response, they seem conventional in the sense of artificial, contrived, affected — a barrier rather than a transparency through which the identification with literature can be made. We have seen that ordinary language and discourse are just as conventionalized as literature, just as liable to impose the mediation of rhetorical structures upon experience. And, as we learned earlier in this chapter, Frye acknowledges that individuals may even be conscious of their influence. But because of the accelerated manner in which these structures of ordinary language — now governed by mass culture — are presented, and because of their ubiquity, such conventions must appear to individuals as nothing other than unmediated reality — until they tire of them. Then individuals express their ennui at the conventions which govern ordinary experience by embracing the next set of rhetorical structures that mass culture brings to their attention. Thus does mass culture ensure that individuals will respond to convention in an unconscious, precritical, and uneducated manner.
Frye argues that if mass culture's reduction of literary experience to a form of stock response is to be resisted, then "[literature] must not remain [something that is against readers]: it must be become possessed and identified by [them]" (Frye, 1970, 77) But for this to occur, the next step in literary experience must involve a disassociation of the reader's sensibility (Bogdan, 1992, 109-110). Their unconscious, and so, passive response to the conventions of ordinary discourse must be replaced by an active response which sets itself over and against those conventions in the same manner that they initially set literature over and against the reader. Frye holds that such an active defamiliarization of individuals with the conventions governing ordinary speech is necessary to counter their passive response to those conventions because he does not think that the passive response is something into which individuals have simply fallen by default, or that they make because they are underdeveloped. Rather, Frye's point, like that of Adorno, is that contemporary individuals have been bludgeoned, confused, and panicked into passivity, that their native capacity for irony has been turned against them, and that they have been rendered by the culture industry into what Frye would call demonic versions of the true primitive — that is, one who cannot help but identify with the material that the culture industry sets before them as "true."

Given Frye's views on the militancy with which the culture industry reduces its audience to passivity, it is not surprising to see him argue that the passive and active response to convention cannot co-exist. For Frye, readers cannot recognize the conventions of literature without affront to their sensibilities. At some point, the passive response will win out. Also, as it always seeks to locate itself beyond conscious scrutiny, the passive response does not require "the considerable strain to keep up" (Frye, 1971, 136) demanded by the more "adult and individual attitude" (136) that treats conventions as the objects of critical reflection. Incompatibility of passive and active responses is evidenced in what Frye calls a "the law of diminishing returns" (1963, 36) that is encountered by attempts to make literature too life-like — too much the subject of a passive response. At a certain point such attempts kill the literary quality of the work, recalling the moral that literature can only be brought to life by becoming literature-like (37).

In order for criticism to set readers against their own sensibilities, it must change the way in which the reader responds to literature. And, for this, criticism must require that the reader respond to the conventions of literature as if they were part of the Blakean realm of Beulah, within whose realm all imaginative works are seen to be parts of a loving and beloved creation. In Beulah's realm, conventions must be apprehended as operating in a literary universe where all categories of value judgement are suspended. This suspension of judgement has the effect of exposing the reader to a
breadth of expression and value, one against which the reality represented in the values with which
everyday judgements are associated seems very constricted — less the definitive shape of experience
than that of the anxieties of narrow class prejudice and interest.

Beulah is not simply passive: her loving embrace of literary creation is what Adorno would
call a "tacit critique" (1984, 321) of the standards of foreclosure in ordinary discourse, and without
which deconstruction could never take place. The dramatic image of Beulah may be in the Christmas
story "of the quiet Virgin Mother who gathers to herself the processional masque of the kings and
shepherds" (Frye, 1957, 292) — the inhabitants of literary creation. Equally, though, she is "the
watching queen or peeress of the ideal masque" (292) — one of the voices of authority who keeps the
demonic forces that would assail literary creation at bay.

But if, contrary to what Woodman argues, Beulah’s attempt, as the female principle in literary
experience, to avoid foreclosure does not inadvertently foreclose on the differences within literature,
it is because the female principle effects a further dissociation of sensibility — one enacted beyond the
realm of Beulah. That is, as well as effecting in the reader a dissociation from the sensibilities of
everyday life in Beulah’s realm, the female principle effects their dissociation from the sensibilities of
literary conventions themselves. This, however, requires the transformation of female principle within
the Blakean image of fiery Eden, where the reader cannot be said to be in possession of their identity
until they see its potential represented in the face of their worst enemy (see Frye, 1990d, 94).

In the imaginative universe of Eden, where all literary postulates are hypothetically the
reader’s own, the reader both inhabits and contains all that they read as part of their own identity —
but only in purely metaphorical terms. That is, the assertion that any image is identical with any other
— or is recognizable as a part of the reader’s identity — is simultaneously an affirmation of actual
difference between images and of their estrangement from the reader.

By approaching literature as though it were Blake’s Eden, the reader inhabits a literary vision
of community dissociated from all actual societies, one made flesh by the inherent potential for it in
all the conflicting differences of corporeal existence. Such a vision of community is so consistent in

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3 Frye talks of the difference between the precritical and critical response as that of the difference between merely
having a body and actually being one (1991, 14). On the premise that your bodily existence is also that of the
instantiation of the whole society within a unit of individuality, Frye argues that merely having a body means the social
body to which you belong and which you contain has you, an unconscious a passive receptacle to do with as it pleases.
Being a body, on the other hand, entails becoming aware that you also contain and are part of a wider heritage, and the
possible society to which it gives expression. It is by virtue of our consciously entering into a wider cultural heritage
and allowing it to enter into us that we become bodies capable of living in the world without destroying it and each other.
For, our cultural heritage is a potential community capable of living right up against and even interpenetrating with other
its deconstruction of actual statements of identity that it swallows the whole of verbal expression — and with it all pretences that literature represents an association with actual reality — into one great insight. It is the insight that no logic can be free of its grammatical origins, and no grammar free of its origins in rhetoric and the ideological purposes for which that rhetoric was designed (1957, 331). But if all logic grows out of grammar, and all grammar out of rhetoric and ideology, it is also possible for logic and grammar to outgrow their origins — to give expression to knowledge and community that transcend them. For Frye, it is the potential of literature to give authentic expression to human reality and community that gives the ironic deconstruction of actual expressions of reality and community their ironic point (1990v, 83).

In order to effect the second dissociation from literary sensibility described above, the female principle is transformed from that of a loving creation in Beulah into metaphor for the ecstatic union of creator and creation in fiery Eden. In Blake's fiery Eden, which Frye identifies with literary experience at the level of anagogy (1947, 133), the female principle is "Beatrice" presiding over an imaginative "spiral" of symbolic identifications that culminate in the literary vision of divinity and paradisal bliss (1957, 323). For Frye, the paradisal bliss of literary Eden is expressed as sexual union: what Frye sees Blake refer to as a type of "spiritual sex ... closer to the polymorphous than the genitally centred" (Frye, 1990v, 217). And, as Joseph Adamson points out, Frye sees the anagogic vision of a reunion between creator and creature in literary Eden as that of "ecstatic reunion with the mother" (220; Frye, 1990v, 217), the archetypal figure of this reunion being that of "the infant Jesus in the arms of his mother" (Frye, 1990v, 218).

As a purely metaphorical object of perfect sexual union, however, the image of the Madonna and child is not what Woodman describes as that of "a bonding which in its undisturbed state renders the father imago a shadowy figure which has ... no obvious or explicit biological role to play" (Woodman, 1994, 317). Rather the Madonna imago's metaphorical nature includes the expression of demonic parody in which she functions as one of Woodman's "warring parents in coitus." That is, in literature, the Virgin Mother has a demonic counterpart in the "femme fatale" (Frye, 1990v, 220) ...
whom it is death to love" (Frye, 1967, 49), and of whom an archetypal image is Robert Graves's White Goddess (49). Like Penelope, the White Goddess always affirms but never forms her commitment to her lovers (Frye, 1957, 323), and so gives expression to the critical relationship between reader and literature — that of the creator who discovers in their creation a hoped for possession, that actual possession in ordinary circumstances cannot duplicate. That is, a "warring parent in coitus," the White Goddess acts as Penelope to unravel by stealth the hopes she openly encourages in lovers and readers alike.

To achieve the hoped for literary possession of their own imaginative creation, the reader would have to become an extraordinary — spiritual — being, with insight to see beyond what is desirable about literature — beyond the siren song of the White Goddess — and with the courage to embrace what seems repulsive about it as well. That is, as spiritual being, the reader would see the "White Goddess cycle ... represented by the ferocious mother of Coriolanus, Volumnia, whose supreme happiness as a mother consists not so much in giving her son life as in exposing him to death" (Frye, 1967, 49). And the reader would have to learn how to embrace the Madonna in her demonic shape as Rahab (Frye, 1947, 393), who is identified with the Great Whore of Babylon (139-40).

The Great Whore is characterized not by her promiscuity, but by her complete unwillingness to give anything away. That is, for Frye, as for Blake, the Great Whore is "ultimate fallen form of nature or the 'female will'" (Frye, 1947, 140). And her whoredom represents "the possessive love of jealous Selfhood" (140). From the Great Whore, any promise of happiness is as hollow as the bromides of mass advertising. For all her dealings she is the consummate bourgeois entrepreneur — completely calculating. And as the purpose of her calculations is the domination of patriarchal society, the Great Whore is identified by Frye and Blake alike with the Leviathan, the Behemoth, and the tyrannies of Babylon and Rome (Frye, 1947, 139-40). In her guises of ferocious mother and Great Whore, then, the female will operates in Frye's critical cosmology to effect what Woodman describes as "the aggressive overthrow of the Logos understood as patriarchal power" (Woodman, 1994, 319).

Frye's argument does not entail that simply because the literary image of the Great Whore is really the demonic form of Beulah (who is also a literary incarnation of the Virgin Mary as bride in the Song of Songs [1980, 142]), readers need not take that image to be necessarily degrading of women. As we saw Frye argue in The Secular Scripture (1976a), obscene content is not made less so by being couched in serious literary intent; rather its obscenity demands a greater social awareness on the part of its readers. In the context of his views on obscenity in literature, Frye's argument that
anagogy requires readers to identify with what literature makes strange entails that they should take literature's representation of the Great Whore — the very symbol of female degradation — as a statement of protest against a society that would so degrade women. This is to say that, for Frye, literature treats the Great Whore as metaphor for the Virgin Mary in order that it may mirror and protest against a society in which no woman is safe: against a society so willing to degrade all women, that it would slander even the Virgin Mother.

Frye points out that, like this slander, all ideological demonizings of the other are at the same time projections of the evil that inheres with those who would describe others in demonic terms. And, at the level of anagogy, the literary image of the calculating and entrepreneurial Great Whore reflects the determination of men to purchase and so possess exclusively what exclusive possession could only mutilate and degrade. Thus, in literature, the image of the Great Whore becomes a site of protest against the patriarchs and starting point from which to construct society as it might be. At the same time, the image of the Great Whore becomes a source of shame for all "man"kind who encounters her, in whose name patriarchy has attributed it to womankind. Frye's interpretation of the Great Whore, then, would echo Adorno's argument that the artwork represents the degradation of its society's members to protest the ideology that caused their degradation.

If I am right about Frye's account of interpretation at the level of anagogy, I would maintain that what the reader as spiritual being must embrace in the image of the Great Whore is the inhuman part of their society's humanity, a part they share by virtue of being part of that society and so are obligated to change. But, if this is a correct interpretation of Frye, then we would have to say that he does not seem to recognize how it is asking more of women readers than men to require that they too should embrace the inhumanity of their society in the figure of the Great Whore. After all, Frye says that the literary protest against injustice is really the fight against "a state of mind," whose guilt all people must embrace in their literary experience because they belong to the society that occasions it.

Yet Frye also says that the fight of minorities is not simply against a state of mind but also against the individuals who have got themselves identified with that state. This observation seems to me to entail that literature requires not only a change in the hearts of each reader, but also that those whose interests are served by the social primacy of a certain state of mind must change their ways. That is, until patriarchal society has changed to the point that men can feel their own degradation in the literary image of the Great Whore, women will hardly be able to experience it as anything but degrading.
Thus far I have argued that Frye employs a Blakean cosmology to describe how the feminine principle operates in literature and criticism to achieve a double dissociation of sensibility. For Woodman’s criticism entails that this double dissociation is necessary if the reader and criticism are to witness what Woodman calls the inherent tendency in language to deconstruct all attempts at interpretative foreclosure by logocentric patriarchy. That Woodman misses this dissociative effect is due to his concentration only on the feminine principle as expressed in the realm of Beulah as a statement of structural identity between literary forms. He fails to look beyond Beulah’s realm to its relation with everyday experience and to her transformation in fiery Eden. Thus, Woodman misinterprets Frye’s criticism as one that treats its epistemological insights as the unproblematic result of literary education, when, as we have seen here, what Frye means by the critical experience of literature is, in truth, an experience of society and self that entails an ontological shift on the part of the male reader. The reader’s full attainment of critical insight — their critical response to the literary text — is predicated on their becoming spiritual beings, something the critical "study of literature" "can and should" give the reader the capacity to do, though "it would be nonsense to claim that it invariably does" (Frye, 1990u, 72). That is, with reference to the above discussion of Great Whore, if Frye’s theory of anagogy entails that the Great Whore has the capacity to act in literature as a site of protest against patriarchy, and as a source of shame for men, it does not contend that there is any guarantee that male readers will feel this shame when they read of her: in the event that they do not, it becomes all the more difficult for women readers to see her as anything but a symbol of their degradation.

Thus far, I have argued that, far from expressing Frye’s resistance to the deconstructionist tendencies inherent in language, as Woodman maintains, the deployment of Beulah by Frye’s criticism, especially her modulation into Eden, represents that interpretive influence through which his criticism recognizes the inherently deconstructive moments in literature. But I would also argue that if Frye’s theory of Beulah’s modulation into Eden entails a recognition of the deconstructionist activities in literature, his theory of Beulah as a dissociation from life serves as the ground for this recognition. That is, whereas Woodman sees in Beulah the image of passive submission to logocentrism and the archetypal word of the father (Woodman 1994, 320), Frye sees resistance to the misuse of words by social mythology and mass culture — the false logocentrism of "mannon" (Frye, 1991, 57) and ideology. For Frye, if criticism is to apprehend the fleshly language of deconstruction, it can only do so in fiery Eden as the word made flesh. But, to get there, criticism must first pass through Beulah, lest it enter the false logocentrism of mass culture and surrogate
versions of deconstruction within which its postmodern forms encase the experience of contemporary experience.

As we saw in Chapter Four, contemporary mass culture simulates deconstruction through what media critics Ian Angus (1989) and Todd Gitlin (1989) describe as its projection of multiple, commercial images of the good life, all of which are knowing in the ironic sense, and which select target audiences in a constant deconstruction of the older modern paradigm of the mass audience and its connection with a uniform image of the good life. The knowingness of each commercial image supposedly leaves the consumer free to choose whether or not it speaks to them, and conversely whether the consumer will buy into the lifestyle represented by the commercial as well as the products which will make that lifestyle a reality. Actually, the knowingness of postmodern commercial images is a form of shock, a recycling of consumer products, only this time in a form that rejects the old modernist packaging in which they last came. As United Colours of Bennington, and a host of Christian foundations interested in packaging charity to the developing world as a television commodity have shown, some of this rebellion takes on forms that marketers for the older mass audience would have dismissed as abject. In rebelling against packaging designed for the mass audience, postmodernist members of target audiences are free — to be consumers — and to define the whole of their lives as styles of consumption. What the new consumers are not free to do is remember that they are in fact buying the same garbage that older mass audiences consumed and that identifies them as yet another incarnation of what we saw both Frye and Adorno describe as the mass audience. Like the female actors in soft video pornography, they are free to accept the invitation to participate in any number of sexual contortions, but not to refuse. The absent referent of postmodernity's apparent deconstruction and decentralization of the modern audience is corporate concentration, rationalization — and their increase of control over the life of consumers. It is in the context of contemporary corporate concentration and its commercialization of life behind a facade of deconstruction created by the mass media, that Frye writes the following:

> On the level of lifestyle there are immense pressures towards uniformity, including uniformity of language. Economic forces in particular make for increasing centralization. One frequently sees statements that such trends are changing and becoming more decentralized, but applied to Canada the statement is nonsense (1992, 173).

And not just in Canada. For Frye also warns that "what faces us now is the homogenizing of the entire world, including the United States, through twentieth century technology" (Frye, 1992, 168).
It follows from our analysis of the place of Beulah in Frye's critical cosmology that, without the reader's dissociation from postmodern consumerism — a dissociation required by the hypothetical identification of reader and literary convention — the illusion of deconstruction created by mass culture becomes indistinguishable from the true absent referent that the deconstructionism apprehends in its corrosion of textual foreclosure. This is not to say that all deconstruction is a dupe of postmodernist consumerism. But where it is not, deconstructionism incurs an unacknowledged — perhaps unrecognized — debt to that dissociation of sensibility entailed in Frye's criticism. It is by incurring this debt that they are able in a postmodern age to discharge the responsibilities of contemporary criticism.

D. Conclusion.

Thus far, I have argued that Frye's criticism honours the expression of irony, of individuality, of orality in écriture, and of historic specificity inherent in literature. And I have argued that his criticism is like that of Adorno in apprehending the manner in which literature recuperates a vision of real society and the negativity of ideology from a society dominated by mass culture — all in a manner that discharges the responsibilities faced by criticism in contemporary conditions. I have endeavoured to show how, far from being the liberal idealist — the one who celebrates beauty over ugliness, order over chaos, totality over partiality, and identity over unresolved difference — Frye the critic works for an identification with and possession of literature which entails the lurking voice of our fiercest demons. For it is demonic imagery — its estrangement from that in literature which is familiar to our sensibilities — that indicates the extent to which we and the literature we read are inhabited by the structures of modern ideology, and forces us to confront a purely potential vision of human community into which we can grow out of our ideological conditioning.

In the next chapter, we see that while Deanne Bogdan may well agree that Frye reads literature as an ironic recuperation of form, and that while she may even agree that such a reading is a necessary remedy to the reification of experience by mass culture, she is not happy with Frye's apparent demand that everyone should read as he reads. That is, Bogdan sees Frye's notion that readers should always suspend judgement when reading literature, that any other reading constitutes a precritical — even a stock — response to the text, as requiring that women, reading from the purview of their bodily readerly experience must read for lessons they have already learned.

According to Bogdan, the experience of women in patriarchy can itself entail a dissociation from experience as represented by mass culture, a dissociation that drives the woman reader to
experience the literary text in terms of her self-alienation under conditions of patriarchy. As a result, demands by critical theories like that of Frye for readers not to take the content of the literary text personally entail reading experiences that can be "hurtful and exclusionary" for the woman reader (Bogdan, 1992, 133). And Frye’s notion that readers should embrace the text’s dissociation of sensibility as a healthy challenging of familiar assumptions about their identity simply rings false to the woman reader about whose own identity she can tell nothing for certain. For women, Bogdan argues, reading for the ironic recuperation of total form in literature may well entail reading to consolidate the identity that mass culture and patriarchal readings of literature have so thoroughly disrupted. It might also entail the right to refuse texts that simply reinforce this disruption (Bogdan, 1992, 143-4).

In Chapter Six, then, I will explore the question of whether Frye simply disagrees with Bogdan’s notion of her "poetics of refusal" (Bogdan, 1992, 144) or whether his critical theory entails Adorno’s claim that sometimes contemporary viewers and readers can only preserve the integrity of their cultural experience by boycotting contemporary culture. Finally, I will argue that if Frye’s critical system does entail some form of poetics of refusal, Frye the man betrays the insights of his system by refusing to recognize the poetics of refusal at work in the readings and writings of women, or to acknowledge the voice of gynocentric creation in his own critical system. I conclude that it is in the refusal of Frye "the man" to confront the lessons of his own system that constitutes the real problem with Frye and his failure to discharge the responsibilities of contemporary criticism.
CHAPTER SEVEN:
FRYE AND THE POETICS OF REFUSAL:
MEDITATIONS ON HOW FRYE BETRAYS THE INSIGHTS OF HIS OWN CRITICAL THEORY.

A. Introduction.

In this chapter we return to Deanne Bogdan’s interpretation of Frye’s criticism, cited in Chapter One. There we saw that Bogdan already knows that Frye’s criticism is concerned with the ironic recuperation of form from ideology. Still she argues that Frye’s criticism gives priority to the spatialization of literary experience and its scholarly study over the engagement with literature in time and the insights that arise from that engagement. Likewise, she thinks that he sets up a false dichotomy between active and passive response, one based on the premise that, without an education in literary convention, contemporary individuals are unable to bring any ironic discernment to their experience of mass culture. Finally, she argues that the emphasis of Frye’s criticism on the scholarly response and the following of literary convention leads him to require the suspension of judgement in literary reading.

As we have seen in the course of this dissertation, I have tried to show how Frye’s comparison with Adorno reveals that his reading concentrates on the spatialization of the text as prerequisite to a temporal experience of the text capable of dissolving its associations with ideology. This is to say that I argue that Frye strives for a reading that is, in effect, not incompatible with certain feminist readings. Likewise, I have tried to make the case that the comparison of Frye and Adorno shows Frye’s notion of the active — the educated — literary response to remedy not some inherently passive response on the part of viewers so much as the pacification of their response by the culture industry.

But Bogdan could rightly rejoin that I have yet to present an argument showing how, for Frye, the educated literary response could ever entail what Bogdan calls a "poetics of refusal" (1992, 144). That is, I think Bogdan may allow that the ironic recuperation of form is necessary to any poetics trying to apprehend a voice in literature that is different from that of patriarchy and mass culture. And she may allow that the apprehension of literature as an ironic recuperation of form requires an education in literary form. But she does not believe that Frye’s prescribed system of reading — the one entailing the suspension of judgement and the following of convention — will ensure even that educated readers will apprehend a voice in literature inimical to the voice of
patriarchy. Bogdan holds that, for women reading as feminists, such a reading will often constitute what Frye would call a stock response, which would regard any insights by women into literature as expressions of ideology. For Bogdan, educated reading might require that readers refuse certain readings, or to read in certain ways, not to reject literary form as such but to protect themselves from the constant reiteration of certain patriarchal formulas, a reiteration made on the assumption that these formulas embody the shape of human experience.

Thus, Bogdan seems to dismiss Frye's adherence to a critical system of reading which "may have done its work," buying criticism some distance from the conditioning effected by the modern culture industry, but which has no place among women pre-educated, so to speak, by patriarchy in the ways of literary irony (Bogdan, 1992, 138). Further, Bogdan's criticism of Frye's critical system may reveal an important difference between Adorno and Frye; that is, whereas Frye seems to require that readers suspend judgement about everything they read, at least until they have finished reading it, Adorno holds that if contemporary aesthetic experience is to maintain its integrity, it must boycott much of contemporary culture (1984, 346). Frye, then, seems to be at odds with both Bogdan and Adorno, who both believe that readers must refuse to entertain certain works for the sake of their cultural health.

I will argue, however, that while Frye seems unable to countenance the poetics of refusal, especially in feminist criticism, the logic of his critical system may, in effect, entail just such a poetics. That is, according to Frye's critical theory, every work and every reading is regarded as being both unique and essential to the expression of the total form of literature. Once readers have been educated to read literature at all, therefore, the demand that they should continue to read as teachers, or as critical authorities, or as great traditions of interpretation have already read must be resisted on the ground that it constitutes a denial of the unique contribution that readers, reading from the perspective of their own identity, make to the meaning of the work. Likewise, according to the logic of Frye's system, a text may be so closely related to demands that it be read in accordance with a particular interpretation that readers who wish to avoid reading the simple reiteration of that interpretation are better off reading something else: an idea Frye himself seems to endorse when he says that "for every hour of new knowledge we can get rid of at least another hour of wasted time" (1970, 104).

I will conduct my argument in this chapter by showing how Bogdan articulates the case for a poetics of refusal, as well as how and why Frye fails to acknowledge the operation of such a poetics in feminist readings. I will then show how the logic of Frye's system entails a poetics of refusal,
while supplying some thoughts on why, for the most part, Frye cannot acknowledge how his own work binds him to the poetics of refusal. Finally, I will discuss how Frye's failure to countenance the existence of a poetics of refusal in his own system has blinded him to his own system's insights into the operation of the feminine principle in literature as a creative voice, that is, the voice of what Foucault (in Gutting, 1991) refers to as "rationality misunderstood" (1991, 11).

Section B.

The Poetics of Refusal:

Bogdan, its Proponent: Frye, its Protagonist.

1. The Case for a Poetics of Refusal, as Articulated in Bogdan's Tale of "Judy and her Sisters."

In her article, "A Case Study of the Selection/Censorship Problem and the Educational Value of Literature" (1988) and then in Chapter 6 of her book, Re-Educating the Imagination, Bogdan recounts her experience of presenting John Updike's short story "A & P" to what she describes as the "highly combustible, critically enlightened graduate students" in her "Women, Literature, and Education" course (1992, 140).

In previous courses, Bogdan presented Updike's story, a male rite-of-passage piece replete with sexist imagery and commentary, in order to illustrate the stages of response in Frye's theory of the passage from pre-critical to critical reading. She found "A & P" particularly effective in this regard because the story's sexist imagery and commentary was sure to elicit stock and kinetic responses from students. At the same time, its combination of strong plot line and subtle gradations in narrative made "A & P" a clear illustration how the literary work could be responded to as having a formal organization suggesting a complexity of meaning and perspective beyond that of its content (1992, 113-29).

In past — "mainstream" — courses, Bogdan finished her illustration of how Frye's levels of response might approach the reading of "A & P" with an analysis of the dialectical response (1992, 120-22). That is, she showed how the experience of Updike's short story could be understood as an amalgam of the reader's scholarly and engaged encounters with the literary text, what Bogdan calls "the alternation between participation in literary experience and distance from it, a continuous modification and refinement of response that is to culminate in aesthetic pleasure, emotion, and intellection fusing in the perception of literary structure" (Bogdan, 1992, 122). And, on the night that Bogdan presented "A & P" to her feminist course, she "hoped to demonstrate just how the dialectical
working through of sexist biases in the story, by way of inducing the ‘right ‘quality’ of 
bewilderment,’ could ultimately neutralize the story’s offensiveness" (148).

Bogdan, however, was prevented from demonstrating the story’s "inoffensiveness" by her 
students, when

Judy, who in a mainstream course the previous year had written a paper cautioning 
against mere content analysis as a criterion for censorship, and had with this same 
story skilfully traced the protagonist’s development through the shifting subtleties of 
his sexist observations, charged that within our feminist inquiry the literary response I 
was hoping for was a stock response. .... When queried about what then, should be 
done with such a piece, she replied — and several of her colleagues concurred — “I 
am not a censor, but burn the damned thing!” (Bogdan, 1988, 41-42)

Clearly "Judy and her sisters" were not willing to refrain from taking Updike’s story 
personally. Neither were they willing to suspend judgement until the work’s deeper formal meaning 
became apparent. And yet Bogdan felt that their response was "more" than simply a stock response. 
Writes Bogdan,"the immolation of John Updike by Judy and her sisters was not resistance to 
knowing, not an inability to see alternatives, but rather a conscious suppression of them for their own 
good" (1992, 145). For Bogdan, Judy and her sisters were reacting against the patriarchal 
assumptions inherent in the poetics of total form. That is, according to Frye, participation in literature 
as a total form demands that the reader allow the text to render familiar assumptions about identity 
strange, and in so doing to expose the reader to aspects of their identity about which they were 
previously unaware. But, as Bogdan points out, Judy and her sisters recognized that the Updike story 
defamiliarizes only the familiar assumptions of men: the women characters act only 
as the "material ground" of the story’s dissociation of sensibility. For Judy and her sisters to suspend judgement 
and participate in the total form of the story would be simultaneously to identify themselves as men, to 
deny their experience and their identity as women. Thus Bogdan describes the response of Judy and 
her sisters as that of "defiance against the poetics of pluralism through the minds and voices of their 
own readerly bodies — the site of their literal and metaphorical appropriation (Meese, 1986, 120) as 
the ‘ground,’ the material cause, so to speak, of the mythos of the male hero’s individuation process” 
(Bogdan, 1992, 147).

I take Bogdan’s point to be that, in practising the poetics of refusal, Judy and her sisters were 
not effecting the resistance to literary knowing or the variety of human perspectives contained in 
literary form. Rather they were protesting the manner in which poetics like that of Frye, by issuing a 
blanket call for readings in which judgement is suspended, exclude the female voice from the
expression of literary variety. In effect, then, Judy was right when she said "I am not a censor." She saw that, paradoxically, the requirement that she and other women read "A & P" yet again was an obstacle to their widening appreciation of literary meaning — the very goal of the poetics of total form.

2. Frye's Misrecognition of the Poetics of Refusal as Ideology

In Chapter Three we explored how the influence of lyricism on Frye's criticism and resultant ability of his criticism to apprehend literature from the perspective of the social margins allow his critical system to honour and give priority to subaltern voices in literary expression. Thus, we would expect that Frye would be able to recognize a feminist poetics of refusal, articulated above, in the story of Judy and her sisters, as being one of the means by which criticism gives priority to subaltern perspectives in its apprehension of total form. And yet this is clearly not the case. As we shall see from the example below, Frye hears little in feminist protest except for the strident voice of ideology.

In "Levels of Cultural Identity" (1993c), Frye writes:

Great changes have come over American consciousness too in the last few decades, and I suspect that the more strident and readily politicized issues, such as feminism or racial prejudice, are not the really underlying ones. I spoke earlier of a certain sense, in American imagination up to about 1950, of outrunning history, of a linear progress that would still move in a straight line even if it were headed for disaster. I think American consciousness since then has acquired a new sensitivity to history, including its own history, and sees its recent ascendancy as part of a parabola that goes up and down. History has no record of any empire that did not, qua empire, decline and fall ... There is nothing to regret in this, because the phrase "decline and fall," in this context, means only the straightening out of priorities, throwing away phoney ones and, with luck, acquiring more genuine ones.

Of course, it takes some effort to become more self-observant, to acquire historical sense and perspective, to understand the limitations that have been placed on human power by God, nature, fate, or whatever. It was part of President Reagan's appeal that he was entirely unaware of any change in consciousness, and talked in the old reassuring terms of unlimited progress. But the new response to the patterns of history seems to have made itself felt, along with the growing sense that we can no longer afford leaders who think that acid rain is something we get by eating grapefruit. (181-2)

Frye "wishes [he] could document this change from recent developments in American culture," saying "but I am running out of time and knowledge" (1993, 182).

If Frye had better understood the response indicated by his own theory to the reactionary tendencies that put Reagan in the presidency, he would have seen that whatever change might have occurred in American consciousness is best documented in the effect feminism and the solidarity of
minorities against racial prejudice have had on the reading and writing of culture in America. That is, if Frye had remembered what we saw his theory articulate in Chapter Three of this thesis, that literature protests against contemporary society by expressing the perspective of those degraded by that society, then he would have seen that it is from the contemporary perspective of race and gender that literature and the arts most clearly articulate how America's determination to follow an unremittingly straight path to its imperial destiny guarantees that whole segments of its society will fall by the wayside. It is from the perspective of race and gender that literature and the arts must give voice to an America of potential denied and potential suppressed—of a solidarity between needs so marginalized that even consumer society cannot pretend to meet them.

Of course, such a solidarity may not even be able to exist in an America so determined to go back to sleep that it would elect Ronald Reagan. The spectacle of their society's somnambulant procession to extinction might simply drive feminism and minority protest to fully embrace "the illusion of our own time" (Frye, 1982c, 161): that they are outside this procession, with no responsibility for it, unaffected by the consequences to follow from it, and, therefore, free to write it off as "sick." Notes Frye: "even this is not one society oppressing another, but a single society that cannot escape from its own bungling. Whatever we most condemn in our society is still a part of ourselves, and we cannot disclaim responsibility for it" (Frye, 1990a 115).

But the contemporary alienation of women and minorities, the alienation that has given rise to the perspective of feminism and minority protest, remains. And it is that alienation that Frye should call the demonic image of American society's potential to reverse its self-destruction. The expression of this potential in feminist and minority readings of and writings about culture demands an ontological shift of "androcentric" criticism (Schweickart, 1986, 40), one that would allow it to see both feminism and the rise of identity politics as part of the underlying change in American consciousness over the last half century. Feminism and minority protest, then, do not simply constitute a stock rejection of mainstream culture. Theirs is also an attempt to hear and give expression to voices which the cultural mainstream excludes. Like the poetics of refusal, feminist and minority protest act against the obstacles to a widening of human consciousness into one capable of hearing their voice. Thus, they act not out of resistance to knowing but in order that more may be hoped for in contemporary society.
3. Frye's Struggle against Literal-Descriptivism: and His Own Convenient "Poetics of Refusal."

But Frye does not call feminism the image of American society's potential to reverse its own self-destruction. He calls feminism's expressions those of ideology, pure and simple. I think that the main reason for Frye's failure to recognize any of the poetics of refusal in feminism is that the poetics of refusal insists on taking literary works personally. Frye interprets the refusal of feminists to do other than take certain works personally as a sign that they read these works as conveying actual offense and depicting actual obscenities, and that they refuse to allow that these works might be open to other readings. Thus Frye misrecognizes the feminist poetics of refusal: miscasting the poetics of refusal as yet another version of that literal descriptivism which allows such reactionary movements as those from the Fundamentalist Right to read texts in terms of its greatest anxieties. For Frye, the insistence on a literal descriptive interpretation of texts is one of the favourite weapons of groups who want to turn Western society into what he calls a closed mythology.

Frye describes literal descriptivism -- which he also calls "demonic literalism" (1991, 18) -- as an ideology demanding that all reading should interpret texts as nothing more than descriptions of the world outside literature, to be judged true or false, good or bad, in terms of its descriptive accuracy. And Frye sees literal descriptivism as the favourite tool of societies with a closed mythology, because, according to Frye, closed mythologies demand that all individuals passively accept what it deems important in literature and the arts as true and good; and forbids even the consideration of other alternatives. As Frye points out, in modern conditions, where the irony of every experience is constantly being foregrounded, such a demand is bound to occasion conflict and resistance (Frye, 1990e, 98), which in turn must be quelled through the use of force.

Frye's concern over the rise of the Fundamentalist Right and their demand that literature be read in terms of literal descriptivism has increased since he acknowledged, in The Critical Path (1971), the existence of "a right wing that would like to make the American way of life a closed myth" (140), noting, however, that "its prospects at the moment do not seem bright" (140). In the ensuing two decades, however, his concern increased to the point that goodly portions of certain articles (i.e., "The Double Mirror" [1981], "The Dialectic of Belief and Vision" [1985]) and his last two books, Words with Power (1990), and The Double Vision (1991) are dedicated to warnings about literal-descriptivism and its pacification of the more active literary response to texts as the embodiment of imaginative form. Thus, in The Double Vision, Frye responds to the question, "why can't there be a definitive literal-descriptive dimension along with a spiritual [a literal] vision of [the text]?") (72) with the warning that "apart from the contradictions and inconsistencies involved ...
former is a passive response and the latter an active one, and if they were both there the [exclusionary tendencies demanding a] passive one would [force it to] take over and eliminate the active one" (72).

Frye’s anxieties over the threat of "conservative violence" (1982c, 160) from the Right, the pressure for a closed mythology and literal-descriptivism also parallel his growing concern with the increasing power of mass culture to pacify the active response. Thus, as we saw in Chapter Five, Frye’s 1971 commentary on advertising, in The Critical Path, to the effect that mass advertising presents little danger as long as it is subjected to the rigours of "competition" (135) and "social control, [that is, regulation]," gives way to warnings about the power of mass culture acting as a monopoly to quell alternative interpretations to its own point of view. Says Frye, in "Harold Innis: The Strategy for Culture" (1982), "The technical achievements of the printed word today have made it an unchallenged medium of communications. This means a mass monopoly, the ‘propaganda’ that we decry so much in totalitarian countries, without much noticing the effectiveness of a slightly different kind of propaganda of our own" (Frye, 1993b, 164).

Frye, then, notes with alarm that the development of Western society entails two separate dangers to the active response: one coming from the political action of censors who would ban the active response by prescribing a literal-descriptive interpretation of culture, the other from mass cultural monopolies capable of rendering ironic disillusionment with society into the hysterical fear that there is nothing else. And his insistence that readers must make a choice between literal-descriptive interpretation and a more active response to the text as an expression of literary metaphor constitutes Frye’s own poetics of refusal to embrace what we have seen him describe above as hegemonic trends in cultural experience. In this poetics of refusal, Frye situates himself as a member of a society confronted by pressures peculiar to contemporary capitalism: pressures that threaten to reduce the consciousness of that society’s members to conditioning and their freedom to the right of assent, but not of refusal, to what mass culture offers.

One might note, however, that Frye’s is a very convenient poetics of refusal. For, it allows him to prescribe the very system of reading — one entailing a suspension of judgement — that he has advocated all along, and thus, to position himself as the ideal reader whose raised consciousness is safe from the reification awaiting the uneducated masses. For Frye says that the alternative to a literal-descriptive reading is the literal-metaphorical reading which is apprehended by following literary conventions of myth and metaphor through the form of the work. Contrasting literal-descriptive and literal-metaphorical readings of the Bible, Frye writes:
Demonic literalism seeks conquest by paralysing argument; imaginative [metaphorical] literalism seeks what might be called interpenetration, the free flowing of spiritual life into and out of one another that communicates but never violates. ... As the myths and metaphors gradually become, for us, myths and metaphors that we can live [and read] by and in, that not only work for us but constantly expand our horizons, we may enter the world of proclamation and pass on to others what we have found to be true for ourselves. When we encounter a quite different vision in, say, a Buddhist, a Jew, a Confucian, an atheist, or whatever, there can still be what is called dialogue, and mutual understanding, based on a sense that there is plenty of room in the mind of God for us both. All faith is good faith, and where there is good faith on both sides there is also the presence of God. (Frye, 1991, 18)

Because Frye's poetics of refusal demands that readers choose metaphorical-literalism over descriptive-literalism, therefore, and because he distinguishes between them in terms of their respective capacities to tolerate divergent texts and points of view, Frye is able to dismiss as ideology any subaltern poetics of refusal that insists on taking literature personally on the ground that it advocates intolerance and thus a literal-descriptive, a stock response to the text.

4. Frye's Own Implication in the Centripetal Fallacy.

In *Words with Power*, Frye writes:

The literary work ... [must] not stop with being an object of study confronting us: sooner or later we have to study as well our own experience in reading it, the results of the merging of the work with ourselves. We are not observers but participants, and have to guard against not only the illusion of detached objectivity but its opposite, the counsel of despair that suggests that all reading is narcissism, seeing every text as the reflection of our own psyches. (1990v, 75)

In the last part of the above quotation, Frye distinguishes what he means by participation in the text from what those who would take it personally would mean. For Frye, those feminists who insist on taking the text personally must be advocates of the "counsel of despair." That is, in their willingness to be offended by the text, they effect a stock response to the text which projects the anxieties of their own psyches upon it.

In the same passage, however, Frye counsels against an opposite extreme to what he sees as the stock response of those who take the text personally. This opposing extreme, which Frye terms the "centripetal fallacy" (1971, 33), is that of the critic or scholar who projects their taste onto a certain work, demanding that "readers have not read" until they have read the work in the same manner as that critic or scholar. Thus, the centripetal fallacy mistakes the critical standards of a certain critic or school for the objective form of a literary work. But, I would contend that, in
dismissing the poetics of refusal as a form of stock response, Frye commits the very centripetal fallacy he condemns by requiring that educated women readers read as he does. In effect, he confuses his reading with the objective form of the text.

a. Frye's Description of the Centripetal Fallacy.

Frye sees the centripetal fallacy as inhibiting the reader's apprehension of the work's form because it discounts the unique context that the reader's identity brings to the instantiation of literary form in reading experience, assuming that the reader's reading should just like other readings. For Frye argues that the reading of literature, like literature itself, must be part of a unity of various particulars if it is to be a reading of literature at all. Frye gives an example of the centripetal fallacy:

> When I began the study of literature as a student, it was generally assumed that the critic's duty was to work out an "interpretation" of the poem before him, and that when all the really expert critics compared their interpretations a consensus would emerge that would be, more or less, the right way to look at the poem. (1990f, 233)

Frye is arguing that the centripetal fallacy represents a critical tendency to identify the ideal experience of literature with that of expert interpretation, one leading to a conflation of interpretation and text. Rendered into a statement of objective truth that readers must simply accept — suppressing as nonliterary those impressions that seem to be at odds with it — interpretation becomes set "over and against" the reader. It becomes "the contemplation of a timeless body of truth in itself, with none of the limitations of a specific temporal and historical conditioning for oneself taken in account" (1990e, 100). Thus does the interpretive community fall into what Frye calls "critical narcissism, or assuming that a writer's 'real' meaning is the critic's own attitude (or opposite of it if the reaction is negative)" (1970, 83). For Frye, what is wanted as a remedy to the centripetal fallacy is that we take

> the text before us [not the interpretation] as something other than ourselves, that we have to struggle with it as Jacob did with the angel, but that there is nothing to come up behind, [no community of experts] like the Prussian army at Waterloo, to assist us. (1990f, 233)

But this involves treating literature as literally a metaphorical structure, one which absorbs all readings and readers as potential elements of its own expression (Frye, 1990e, 96). It is as a metaphorical structure that the text forces readers to confront their own experience of the text's imagery with all the other contexts in which that imagery has appeared. This, then, becomes the antidote, for Frye, to the centripetal fallacy.
For Frye, the Fundamentalist Right — and so much of literary and social criticism — expect, beyond a certain point, that all readers must accept their interpretive standards, even if those standards conflict with the impressions of individual experience. In this sense the centripetal fallacy's projection of interpretative standards onto the reader's experience of the text becomes a type of "stock response," — a replacement for thought.

There is only one thing that can "kill" literature, and that is the stock response. The attempt of genuine criticism is to bring literature to "life" by annihilating stock responses, which, of course, are always value judgements, and regularly confuse literature with life. (Frye, 1970, 72)

b. How the Feminist Poetics of Refusal Reacts against Frye's Commission of the Centripetal Fallacy.

As we saw in Bogdan's recounting of "Judy and her Sisters," however, Judy described the "literary" requirement that students in Bogdan's class should yet again suspend judgement about "A & P" as a form of stock response. In other words, Judy was identifying what Frye would seem to call the requirements of literary reading as the imposition of his reading upon theirs. Crucial to Judy's case, here, is the fact, noted by Bogdan, that Judy and her sisters where not refusing to read "A & P" — certainly Judy had done so in a previous course and in a very "literary" manner (Bogdan, 1992, 141). Rather, Judy and her sisters were refusing to read the story yet again, and not simply because they did not like the story's sexist content. That is, they were expressing their dissatisfaction with the manner in which the narrative form of "A & P" presents that content as the material ground of a male rite-of-passage story. In effect, the complaint voiced by Judy and her sisters was that, as educated readers, their reading of "A & P" should not be forever limited to a suspension of judgement about its narrative structure, and the apprehension of the male dissociation of sensibility which the work is supposed to effect. For, to do so, would be to read as someone else has already read, and thus, by Frye's own assessment of the centripetal fallacy, to fail to have read at all.

Frye could counter that Judy and her sisters were not trying to read differently so much as they were failing to continue to read. But neither is this really true. For, by Frye's own definition of literary irony, Judy and her sisters were responding to the demands made by the ironic content that is really in "A & P." As Frye, writing on literary irony, avers, "irony presents a human conflict which, unlike a comedy, a romance, or even a tragedy, is unsatisfactory and incomplete unless we see in it a significance beyond itself, something typical of the human situation as a whole" (1970, 169).
From the perspective of what Bogdan describes as their "readerly bodies" (Bogdan, 1992, 146), Judy and her sisters had already apprehended the presentation of that which was unsatisfactory and incomplete in "A & P" — a human rite-of-passage story that invites only half of humanity to participate in the right of passage. Their next move, in what Bogdan has called the dialectical response to the text, must be to seek out a feminist interpretative context capable of making distinctions between the expression of partial and total form in "A & P" that could never be discerned by the critical mainstream. This context is attained through the analysis of ideology, its effects on the formation of social conditions and cultural production, and by reading works in which the consolidation of women's identity is not apparent only as a notable absence — as is the case in "A & P."

Of course, Frye could again argue that while he admits that the ironic content of the literary text demands that the reader see it as typical of a broader human situation, this does not mean that the reader should abandon the text for studies designed to highlight the inadequacies of that text. Rather, the broader human situation should be apprehended within the literary structure of the work and its participation in literary form. But, as we saw in his analysis of obscenity from The Secular Scripture (see Chapter Four of this thesis), Frye himself says that literary intent does not neutralize the obscene nature of the social mythology it contains. At best, the truly obscene and offensive in literature serves to throw the reader's attention back onto the analysis of society's own mythological conditioning. For, as he attests, only by changing a society's social mythology — its ideology — can readers neutralize the offensive content of that mythology. Likewise, I would argue that Judy's first acquaintance with "A & P" taught her a great deal about the inability of literary analysis to neutralize the offensiveness of the shape that patriarchal social mythology gave to Updike's story. Certainly she conducted a masterful exploration of that very analysis. It was this lesson that she brought with her to Bogdan's "Women, Literature, and Education" course, and with which she and her sisters appropriated as the ground for their articulation of a poetics of refusal.


I have argued that Frye would probably see the poetics of refusal, and especially its determination to take literature personally, as a stock response to literature: a symptom of the anxieties that seek to impose the standards of literal descriptivism on the whole of literary experience. But I have also argued, in effect, that in so doing, Frye would fail to recognize how the poetics of
refusal is made intelligible as something other than a stock response by the insights of his own critical theory.

As we have seen, Judy and her sisters did not simply reject Updike's story. They simply refused to engage again in a particular type of reading as if that reading were part of the work's objective form. Thus, they followed the dictum of Frye's critical theory that each reader must bring a new reading to the literary text, not the reproduction of other readings if they are to read at all. Likewise, in their refusal to read again, Judy and her sisters were not rejecting the content of the story. Instead their refusal entailed part of a dialectical response, one that sought to distance itself from the narrative elements of the work's form in order to better respond to the submerged ironic elements that were already there. The refusal of Judy and her sisters to read again, therefore, constitutes part of what I described in Chapter Four as Frye's notion of the experience of the work as virtual time. It is the part of their experience that responds to the ironic content of the work and its tendency to undercut the ideological assumptions expressed in the more linear narrative aspects of the work.

Finally, Judy and her sisters chose to respond to the ironic elements of the work by seeking out new readings and with them a wider, feminist perspective from which to judge the limitations of patriarchal interpretation. In so doing, they were listening to the ironic voice of protest -- one submerged but audible within the work -- against the offensive nature of its social mythology. They were following the dictum of Frye's *The Secular Scripture* (1976a) that literary irony can only protest but never neutralize the effects of the offensive social mythology it contains. All it can do is throw the reader back onto an analysis of their own society's social mythology.


I have argued that, in "Judy and her sisters," Bogdan relates the tale of women readers following the insights of Frye's critical theory beyond what he would have considered their possible limits. But, I would also point out that the poetics of refusal which Bogdan describes in her story -- one that, as she rightly points out, transcends stock response -- was constructed by women possessed of educated imaginations, women whose reading experience was grounded in the type of enculturation -- education -- in literature, the arts, and the humanities described by Frye's critical theory. In the hands of women readers reacting against the bewildering contradictions of patriarchy, such an enculturation may well move beyond the bounds of patriarchy itself.
But Frye, like Adorno, has pointed out that without an education in the difference between aesthetic and ordinary experience, the irony that springs from the clash of personal experience an ideology has been neutralized by the culture industry. Frye's point seems to be that without an education in the different ways that literature and the arts read the world, it would be difficult for any individual, and this includes members of subaltern groups, to protest the fact that they are being made to read the same material in the same way -- someone else's way -- over and over again. For, mass culture ensures that they will never be allowed to read the world as promising anything but what the culture industry offers. Thus, individuals may see mass culture as making the same old promises, but beyond that they will see nothing at all. As I have noted in Chapter Five, the tendency of individuals caught in this predicament is to cling to the readings they know and to the benefits those readings promise out of a fear that there is nothing else for them.

Further, it is difficult for women and minorities to protest their bewilderment at the lies mass culture tells them about themselves when they have been convinced by mass culture and consumer society that they must overcome their disbelief and embrace the lies of mass culture or suffer. As I contended in Chapter One, consumer society knows that it is asking women to identify more thoroughly against themselves than men. That is why consumer society and mass culture make a special effort to let women know that there is nothing else for them. That is, mass culture conveys the message that women will be isolated and powerless unless they pay their subscription to the lifestyles it represents to them. At the same time, contemporary patriarchy is organized to arbitrarily throw women into conditions of poverty and isolation with the effect that the veiled and not-so-veiled threats by mass culture appear to be true. The result of this social organization is its capacity to convince many women that they should aggressively identify against themselves and their sisters, a capacity evidenced in the membership of organizations such as "Real Women" and "Promise Makers."

If bewilderment alone were sufficient to allow women under conditions of patriarchy to resist the embrace of the culture industry and the consumer society it represents, then, "Real Women" and "Promise Makers" would hold their meetings in empty rooms, and the poetics of refusal would probably become the norm of women's reading. As it is, mass culture's neutralization of bewilderment requires that the poetics of refusal depends on a literary supplement.

I am not arguing, then, that an education in literature, the arts, and the humanities creates the capacity for disillusionment in Judy and her sisters. Mass culture must contend with that as well. Rather, I am arguing that their enculturation in literature, the humanities, and the arts is only somewhat like mass culture. That is, while demanding that Judy and her sisters read against
themselves as a condition of literary reading, their enculteration in literature and the arts also allows them to see through its own demands to alternative readings of the world which they are capable of making. In such readings, women are able to encounter the consolidation of identity — not merely their own, but also their identity with other women in the expression of interests unarticulated by the cultural mainstream. On the other hand, individuals also see through mass culture’s illusions — but into nothing. As I think the capacity of Bogdan’s poetics of refusal to go beyond a mere stock response indicates, the difference between the experience of mass culture and the kind of enculteration in literature, the humanities, and the arts represented in Frye’s education of the imagination is one that makes a real difference.

Section C.

What Frye Fails to Hear in his Own Critical System:
The Voice of Suppressed Humanity in the Literary Female Voice.

Thus far, I have argued that Bogdan’s poetics of refusal is intelligible as a literary response — that it is not simply a stock response — because it adheres to the insights of Frye’s critical theory into literary irony. I have also argued that an enculteration to literature, the humanities, and the arts like the one embodied in Frye’s education of the imagination may be prerequisite to the formulation of the poetics of refusal. Also, we have seen that Frye does not see his own principles at work in the feminist poetics of refusal is due to his anxieties about the rise of militant ideology and its adherence to literal-descriptivism. But still there remains the question of why Frye does not see the need for a feminist poetics of resistance in his own critical cosmology. After all, we have seen that Frye’s criticism apprehends literature as giving priority to irony and the perspective of the subaltern in its recuperation of form. And we have seen that Frye does so because of his sure knowledge that majority voices tend to drown out and to presume to speak for the voices of minorities. Thus does Frye ensure the apprehension of literary form at the level of anagogy where, because all voices are potentially identical, the presumption of an actual identity between voices cannot be permitted. One would think that Frye would see how the presumption of the male voice to speak for humanity would constitute a presumption of actual identity with that of the subaltern gender. He, however, does not.

As in section A, I will argue that we have already seen insights in Frye’s critical theory which should alert us to the need of poetics of resistance but that, for reasons to be explained below, Frye fails to incorporate all of his critical insights into his own reading and interpretation of literature.

In 1989, writes Bogdan, Marc Lapine shot and killed "fourteen female engineering students ... in their classrooms for being what they were -- female students in a male-dominated professional school. They were also killed because their murderer thought they were feminists" (Bogdan, 1992, 195). In *Re-Educating the Imagination*, Bogdan necessarily describes her experience of the Montreal massacre in personal terms as that of a woman theorist among woman theorists, all of whom "were asked to argue as we wept" (196). Writes Bogdan, "[i]n a quite literal sense, we had been 'revealed to' at the same time that we had been made to undergo individual and collective anguish that was all but unnameable -- the unspeakably nauseating vision of defilement at the core of being" (195).

At the same time, Bogdan and other feminist theorists were forced to make the case "for the connection between misogyny in word and world" (195) in a society, much of which was bent on seeing the Montreal massacre as "the random act of a 'psychopath'" (Bogdan, 195 quoting Sweet, 1989), a "gun control" (195) issue or one of "campus security" (195). For Bogdan, the task of making such connections was "like fighting for our lives" (195). As Bogdan recounts, the Montreal massacre caused her and her feminist colleagues to meet what Julia Kristeva calls the "powers of horror" (1982) face to face. That is, the Montreal massacre precipitated in Bogdan and her colleagues a "misrecognition scene" (196) that uncovered and laid bare for them the image of "a culture plagued by denial of its own terror of the feminine in its multifarious forms" (196). What was made clear to Bogdan from the Montreal massacre was the complete otherness of women in a society that, at the same time, denies they are other. It was this clarity of vision, argues Bogdan, that she and other feminists have to convey, lest the killing continue.

I would contend that what Bogdan is so urgently trying to convey is the need for a misrecognition of society capable of involving "those who were willing to look" (Bogdan, 1992, 195) in the kind of spiritual transformation that, as we saw in Chapter Six of this thesis, is supposed to occur in the dissociation of sensibility at the level of anagogy. That is, we saw, at the level of anagogy, that there are two stages of misrecognition. The first entails the reader in an embrace of the unfamiliar, the second in an embrace of familiar made unfamiliar. It is this second dissociation of sensibility that requires that readers be transformed into spiritual beings. For, as we learned in our analysis of the Great Whore, the second implicates readers -- particularly male readers -- in a confrontation with their own guilt. It is this second dissociation of sensibility that Frye, also commenting on the Montreal massacre, failed to achieve. Writes Bogdan,
As a woman deeply drawn to the spirituality of Frye’s double vision, I appreciate his interest in primary concern and the value he places on "the drive towards peace and freedom in our time [a]s an impulse towards love growing out of a new immediacy of contact" [Frye 1991, 34]. And I take as a mark of good faith his self-disclosure about the Montreal massacre: "It is difficult not to feel some involvement even with the fantasies of a psychotic murdering women who want to be engineers" [34]. But good faith, as we’ve already seen, is not enough. To be added to it is acknowledging our feeling, power, and location as problems. While I respect Frye’s authorial intention, which I take to be his effort to identify with the Other ("‘we must love one another or die,’ as Auden says” [34]), my feeling, power, and location problems prevent me from being an "imaginative literalist" [34] when I read these lines. (Bogdan, 1992, 282)

I think that, for Bogdan, what Frye has failed to acknowledge is that his dissociation at the level of anagogy extends no further than recognition of the familiar in what was unfamiliar. That is, he is able to entertain the fantasies of a psychopath like Marc Lapine, as conceivably a part of his own human experience, to see himself in the face of his worst enemy. But, as Bogdan rightly implies, even if it were embraced by every reader, such an identification with the unfamiliar other does not, by itself, lead to universal love and world peace. For that, as Bogdan sees from the perspective of and experience of her woman’s body, another reading would be required, one that entails Frye in a recognition scene where men see themselves reflected in the faces of their female victims.

Now Frye might have rejoined that he has no female victims. But if Frye’s reading embraced the fantasies of Marc Lapine as conceivably a part of his own identity, then, in a sense he most certainly did. To be truly transformative, Frye’s reading would have not only recognized and taken responsibility for a society which allows men to look at women as did Marc Lapine, but also for one which forces all women to look at all men as having the potential to see them as did Marc Lapine—as demonic threats. In such a reading, Frye would have finally acknowledged his position as a man in patriarchal society. This is to say that Frye would have recognized how his society imposes his image on the eyes of women as that of a potential berater, attacker, abuser and exterminator, and how such an image conditions the rationality of women in ways alien to male experience. Finally, Frye would have to read how his ability to entertain Lapine’s predatory gaze while not even considering how the countergaze of Lapine’s victims as conditioning his own rationality in ways alien to women. That is, Frye would have read himself as being a man living under the patriarchal illusion that, in this society, women are comfortably familiar, that they have no reason not to know the world in the same manner as men. For Bogdan, I think that it is this reading that, at least, delineates the obstacles that must be overcome if there is to be world peace.
Frye's preference for that anagogic dissociation of sensibility that renders the alien Other familiar seems to me to be indicative of his willingness to take only the anagogical perspective that allows the critic or reader an emotional distance from which they can be "bigger" than the perpetrators of the evil they encounter in their readings. That is, by embracing the unseemly Other as familiar, Frye the critic shows himself capable of "involvement" with and forgiveness of the whole person in a way that makes even their most criminally irrational fantasies understandable to him. Thus, Frye's preferred world of anagogy is "a world of relaxation, where even the most terrible tragedies are still called plays, and a world of far more intensity than ordinary life affords" (Frye, 1991, 16). What Frye does not want to confront is that anagogic intensity of experience that brings him face to face with his own responsibility for patriarchal injustice. That is, Frye is willing to embrace an anagogic experience which allows him to atone for the sins of others, and thereby increase his own understanding of an exotic world. He is not willing to atone for his own responsibility as a man living out the illusions of patriarchy, one in denial about the "linkages between mysogyny in word and world" (Bogdan, 1992, 196).

Frye would not take this further step into anagogy. To do so would, I think, require that he become a spiritual being capable of questioning the patriarchal privileges that act as the ground of his own insights. In light of his response to the Montreal Massacre, Frye's admonition that a society based on primary concern must "live and let live" (Frye, 1990m, 182), and his supposed compliance with this principle when he says, "I am what I am: let others be what they are" (Cayley, 1992, 215), sound more like a warning that he does not want his comfort disturbed (Bogdan, 1994, ff. 16, 94).

2. Frye's Refusal to Resolve the Dichotomy Between the Female and Male Principles.

Just as Frye does not confront the special conditions that life under patriarchy sets on the rationality of women, so does he fail to recognize the essentially creative principle at work in the female imagery of literature -- its expression of rationality misunderstood. In his Anatomy, Frye cites Blake's The Mental Traveller as an encyclopedic literary form containing a vision of the whole of human life and of the roles of the male and feminine principle. In the poem, says Frye, "the male figure represents humanity, and therefore includes women ... The female figure represents the natural environment which man partially but never wholly subdues" (Frye, 1957, 322).

The male represents the creative or rational principle in humanity, and the female, the creation which human rationality seeks to control. As we saw, in Frye's reference to the White Goddess and the Great Whore, the feminine principle of creation or nature sometimes reveals itself to
be part of our own human nature which we much embrace even if we cannot subdue it. What Frye does not show is how the feminine principle is always that of human rationality misunderstood; not simply that of an nonrational side to our human nature which rationality alienates, but that of the human intellect objectified from the thinking creative subject into subject matter. As the incarnation of rationality misunderstood, the feminine principle represents all struggles of individual wit pitted against overwhelming social authority — the consciousness appropriated by the bourgeois hero.

Typically it takes on the role of female trickster — or trickster with characteristic typically attributed to females. To evidence the fact of the feminine principle's persistence through literary history as the expression of "rationality misunderstood," I will present examples of literature corresponding to each of Frye's historic modes in which the feminine principle could be taken as manifesting itself as trickster.

In the literature of undisplaced mythology, the female trickster is the mother who forms an alliance against the father with the disinherit ed son, as is the case of the alliance between Gaea and Cronus, and between Rebecca and Esau. The trickery of Gaea and Rebecca is no mere ground for the success of their sons — both seek to satisfy desires for freedom and revenge at enslavement or the prospect of it. Gaea, the earth, seeks revenge against heaven, who presses down on her so that nothing may live on her surface. Her intrigue with Cronus succeeds so that heaven is driven into the sky freeing up a space between heaven and earth for creation (Moncrieff, 1994, 14-15). Rebecca seeks revenge against Esau, who married against both her wishes and those of his father Isaac (Genesis 26: 34-35, King James Version). By helping Jacob trick Isaac so that he is able to take Esau’s blessing (Genesis 27, King James Version), Rebecca ensures that Jacob will be head of the family, and that she will not spend her last days in the charge of Esau’s wives.

In romance, the most well known pair of tricksters in Western literature, Penelope and Odysseus, from The Odyssey (1946), form an uneasy alliance against the social threat represented by the suitors (290-340). In part, their goal is to secure their house, the kingdom, and, thus, the inheritance of their son. But Penelope and Odysseus also have conflicting goals. For they represent different sides of the human intellect as well.

Disguised as a beggar, Odysseus initially refuses to reveal himself to Penelope, who later refuses to recognize Odysseus, Odysseus’ refusal occurring just before he moves to destroy the suitors; Penelope’s, after they have joined forced and achieved the suitors’ destruction. Odysseus refuses to reveal himself because he trusts no one with his life, not even Penelope, who has waited for him for twenty years, and in the face of the brutal advances of the suitors (1946, 300-304). All
evidence of her loyalty notwithstanding, Odysseus heeds the advice of Agamemnon that "women are not to be trusted" (183). And he takes her into his confidence only to the extent necessary to attain her help in his plans for the suitors, postponing her attainment of long hoped for happiness, and subordinating it to his needs for survival (303).

The suitors destroyed, Penelope pretends that she does not believe Odysseus when he reveals himself to her (1946, 345) — evidence of her fury at the presumption by Odysseus that he acts alone, uses everyone and needs no one. Her message to him is that her famous constancy was not meant merely to preserve his house but also the hope that she and her "beloved husband" would again be together (303). For Penelope, guile was meant first and foremost to serve their happiness. Odysseus should have trusted in it, not presuming to subordinate their happiness to his own survival.

Alas, the instrumentality of Odysseus' reason wins out over the substantive reason of Penelope! He avers that they cannot live in peace until he has appeased Poseidon, journeying to a land so far away that the inhabitants have never heard of salt, and planting an oar in the soil there (1946, 347-8). Thus, reason, concerned with the means to survival, consumes the demands which happiness makes upon it. And the alliance between the ideological concerns for survival, represented in the male tricksters, and the more creative concerns with happiness, represented in the female tricksters, is betrayed.

In the literature of high mimesis, the female trickster becomes the invisible mother, the ironic underside of the comic hero in all of Shakespearean theatre who struggles to outsmart the father or father figure and then reconcile him to his elopement. If the mother is not there to connive with the hero, neither, as would be the case in tragedy, is she available to support the father. Also, the comic hero takes on goals of the female trickster — liberty and happiness — in opposition to the goals of the father — wealth, power and survival. This same dynamic is played out in the opera buffa of low mimesis, with the comic hero becoming the bourgeois servant and the father the noble overlord (as in Mozart's Le Nozze di Figaro, 1990).

With the triumph of bourgeois consciousness, the female trickster comes to the fore of a more ironic literature. But, like Penelope she is now the victim of betrayal by bourgeois consciousness, a role we see played out in Tess of the D'urbervilles (1993), and Madame Bovary (1980). In her struggle to preserve honour and even the hope for happiness, Tess deploys a courage, independence, and resourcefulness that contemporaries would have assumed to be characteristic only of a man. But it is precisely because she displays such qualities in a patriarchal society that she must be destroyed. Likewise, Madame Bovary brings a wit and guile — if also a delightful touch of the absurd — to her
quest for happiness, perfectly matching that displayed by Boswell in his London Diaries (1950). But whereas Boswell has a wonderful time and gets off scot free, Madame Bovary is a woman acting like a man, and so must be made completely ridiculous, then tragic, then, finally obscene. As Bogdan (1990b citing Elizabeth Ermarth, 1983) points out, patriarchal society "literally 'plot[s]'... [the] deaths [of Tess D'urberville and Emma Bovary] ... because [it] cannot contain them without dire consequences" (173). In both the case of Tess and of Bovary, then, the female trickster is identical with the pharmakos, and like the pharmakos, her victory is ironic. That is, through death she exposes the betrayal, then denial, of a human creativity and rationality that modern patriarchy simply cannot acknowledge without admitting that it is the betrayer.

But if, under modern conditions, the trickster takes on the form of the pharmakos, the modern pharmakos takes on the qualities of the female trickster in her ironic form, as we will see in the example of Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1862). Even in their own day, the anti-Uncle Tom rebuttals of the last century failed in their attempts to ridicule and discredit Uncle Tom's Cabin (1862). T. F. Gosset (1985) argues that this is because the authors of anti-Uncle Tom literature did not take into account how difficult it is to refute one literary work with another, or how much easier was the criticism slavery than its defence (212-239). But I would argue that the failure of anti-Uncle Tom authors was due, in part, to their inability to understand what they were criticizing. That is, unbeknownst to them, Tom did not simply represent slavery's victimization of Blacks. His was also an ironic depiction of the condition of oppressed womanhood, as he shows by exhibiting all the characteristics of what, in eighteenth and nineteenth century fiction and criticism was celebrated as the "strong woman": a woman with the strength to graciously endure injury at the hands of a morally weak husband.¹ Like the strong woman, writes Kenneth Lynn, "[Tom's] serene endurance at times taxes [contemporary] belief" (xxiv). But, whereas low mimetic fiction deployed the strong woman as an affirmation of its society's ideals of womanhood, ironic fiction identifies the strong woman with the slave, and contemporary ideals of womanhood with the standards of a slave holding society. Thus, the image of Tom "continues to challenge an anxious and insecure civilization" (xxiv).

¹An example of criticism in praise of the strong woman: Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical, and Historical, written by Mrs. Jameson (1846), celebrates the Shakespearean depiction of Octavia as "noble and chaste" over that of Dryden, "who studiously lowered the character of the injured Octavia" (254) by attributing expressions of jealousy to her. Jameson argues that unlike that of Dryden, Shakespeare's portrait of an Octavia as forbearing and generous in spite of the wrong done her by Anthony and Cleopatra "places Octavia before us in all the majesty of virtue ... [she is a woman] in whose mind there entered no particle of littleness." (255)
Like the contemporary pharmakos, Tom is an ironic embodiment of the female trickster in that he gains a spiritual victory over contemporary society, exposing the rot in its soul, and foregrounding the real nature of human intellect which modern patriarchy must suppress. The rebellion of the contemporary pharmakos is against a society that would reduce women to thing-hood — to slavery. It is through this same rebellion, Adorno claims, that art has evidenced the operation of substantive reason since the earliest times (Adorno, 1984, 161). And it is substantive reason that modern rationality has tried to deny and suppress as rationality misunderstood.

From the above argument, then, we see how "rationality misunderstood" takes on the guise of the feminine principle and modulates through literature of Frye’s historic modes as an interweaving relationship between trickster, pharmakos, and literary hero. Their interweaving, however, is one that Frye refuses to chart, as is noted by Fredric Jameson (1981) in his comment to the effect that Frye never equated the feminine principle with the hero, only with the pharmakos (113).

**D. Conclusion.**

The aim of my analysis of Frye and feminism is not to show Frye as pulling back from the responsibilities of modern criticism in the manner ascribed by Frye’s critics to liberal idealism. Quite the opposite. His criticism teaches us how to render those responsibilities intelligible in late and postmodern conditions of society and mass culture. Rather, I have tried to show that Frye the critic has betrayed what he taught us to save himself from the confrontation with his own false consciousness. In so doing, he has treated literature as though it contains an actual identity between the rationality of males and females: a treatment evidenced in his assertion that human rationality — including the rationality of women — speaks in literature through the voice of the masculine principle. But, as we have seen, according to Frye’s own principles, it is this assumption of actual identity that silences the potential expression of a richer vision of human reason, one that contains the differences between the ways in which the rationality of men and women is conditioned in patriarchal society. That is, according to Frye’s critical theory, the literary vision of rationality contains expressions of rationality that are unfamiliar to the social mainstream — which the social mainstream would simply dismiss as irrational, idiosyncratic and perverse. The real problem with Frye, then, is not that his critical theory is yet another proponent of bourgeois liberal idealism. The problem is rather, that Frye the critic sometimes reads, and sometimes demands that readers should read, in a manner that betrays the insights of his own critical theory.
It is in order to bring out those very insights that I have tried, in this dissertation, to show how Frye’s critical theory is concerned with apprehending the ironic recuperation of form in literature as an imaginative totality of experience. That is, by comparing Frye’s critical theory with that of Adorno, I have tried to demonstrate that we have also seen that Frye’s critical concern with the ironic recuperation of form in literature is necessary if his criticism is to apprehend literature’s resistance to the co-optation of its conventions by the culture industry and their transformation under the culture industry into mechanisms for preprogramming an unconscious response in its mass audience. Further, I did contend that the comparison of Frye with Adorno showed how an education in the literary operation of convention was prerequisite to the apprehension of literature’s ironic recuperation of form.

I have also shown that for Frye and Adorno both the ironic recuperation of form in literature and the arts represents their lyric shift to the perspective of the social margins, and their consequent rejection of mainstream convention. That is, both thinkers argue that, through their rejection of mainstream convention, contemporary literature and arts express the infinite diversity of perspective contained within their unity of form as a protest against uniformity of perspective in the social mainstream. And I argued that, in apprehending literature as speaking from the social margins, Frye’s criticism seems to give priority to the spatialization of literary experience. But, he does so only to recuperate the engagement of the text in time from its co-optation by ideology, to realize a kind of resistant engagement that would not be incompatible with feminist and minority calls to read against the grain.

I have also endeavoured to illustrate how Frye and Adorno view the ironic recuperation of form as the mechanism by which literature and the arts must resist not only the co-optation of form by the culture industry but also its neutralization of irony as well. For, in the view of both thinkers, the culture industry’s neutralization of irony pacifies the native capacity of its viewers for resistance, transforming their sense of bewilderment at the realization that "all is not as it seems" into resignation at the fear that "there may be nothing beyond what we see."

Finally, I conclude that if we have gained some insight into how Frye’s critical theory can act as the intelligible ground for a feminist poetics of resistance, that is due to the comparison of Frye’s criticism with that of Adorno. For it is in the comparison with Adorno that we learn how irony, anagogy, and the subaltern perspective operate with Frye’s criticism to resist the centripetal fallacy and its attempt to limit possible readings of the world by creating the illusion that there is only one
objective and unsituated way to read. Thus do we see that Frye's notions of irony, anagogy and the subaltern entail the same struggle as that represented by the feminist poetics of refusal.

The intention of my argument, then, has been to show how Frye's critical theory provides the intelligible ground for any criticism that seeks to discharge its contemporary responsibilities in the face of consumer society and mass culture. In the light of similarities between Frye's criticism and the aesthetic theory of Adorno, Frye's advocacy of an education in literary convention, reading from a critical difference, the spatialization of literary experience, and the priority of imaginative form can all be seen as counterweights to the conditioning of minds by the culture industry. That is, in a society under conditions of mass culture, Frye's critical advocacy can be seen as prerequisite to the experience of literature as a spontaneity of expression capable of disintegrating convention, of being engaged in time, and of giving expression to a vision of real society — one that honours subaltern points of view. As such, Frye's critical theory is shown to be an expression of real production, the part that gives expression to the potential for humanity which mass culture neutralizes. In this, Frye's critical theory extends beyond the admitted bourgeois liberal limitations of its author to articulate the intelligible ground of criticism in postmodern conditions.

The End
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