

**OBJECTIVE**

**IDEALISM**

**IS**

**FASCISM**

**A DENUNCIATION of**

**NORTHROP FRYE'S**

**"LITERARY CRITICISM"**



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Understanding requires an act of conscious participation by the individual, an act of finding out.

IDEOLOGICAL FORUM

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Objective Idealism is Fascism:

A Denunciation of Northrop Frye's "Literary Criticism"

Knowledge is a matter of science,  
and no dishonesty or conceit whatsoever  
is permissible. What is required is  
definitely the reverse - honesty and  
modesty. ---- Mao Tse-tung.

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## IDEOLOGICAL FORUM

There are two most general, wide-spread, and universal lines prevalent in the world about the role of the intellectual in society. One line treats intellectuals as experts in society and bribes them in accordance with their merit. This policy is supported by the imperialists, modern Soviet Revisionists, various liberal bourgeois, and the counter-revolutionary Trotskyites. In opposition to this, the second line considers intellectuals an essential part of society without divorcing them from the masses; they are one with the masses, and are fully integrated with the struggle for production, class struggle, and scientific experimentation. Here they are not a privileged class and work wholly for the masses. This line is called mass-line. According to mass-line, ideas originate with the masses, are crystallized in the struggle and are given back to the masses. From the masses to the masses is the mass-line. From the experts to the experts is the expert-line according to which the masses are only menial workers to follow orders. While the expert-line encourages elitism, contempt for the masses, and service of the imperialists and modern Soviet Revisionists, the mass-line encourages participation of the masses in the solution of their problems, has contempt for the elitists, and serves the vast majority of the masses. Under imperialism and modern Soviet Revisionism, people are kept ignorant and educational and other institutions are used against them; on the other hand, under the mass-line, people are mobilized, their knowledge is developed from a lower to a higher level, and experts are not allowed to oppress people. The mass - line is followed in the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Albania. The vast masses are conducting the Great Cultural Revolution to make sure that the expert-line does not rise again. The mass-line builds initiative of the masses and liberates them from the bureaucracy of the experts; the expert-line deprives people of their initiative and puts their destiny in the hands of experts who cannot be held responsible for their crimes against the masses.

The role of scholarship in the moulding of history has become an acute issue. The counter-revolutionary activities of the Cultural Congress held in Havana at the beginning of 1968 and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of China represent the expert-line and the mass-line. The mass-line provides a guideline to an honest and sincere intellectual in North America who recognizes the Necessity for Change and who is looking for an alternative. The two lines answer the frequently asked question: How can an intellectual participate in the revolution?

The expert-line, coming from Havana, the counter-revolutionary line, advocates what in essence is the old, moribund, bankrupt and bourgeois line, and is supported by intellectuals like Noam Chomsky. According to this line, the masses of Africa, Asia, and Latin America need technical know-how in the successful execution of various struggles for national liberation; intellectuals, born and bred in imperialist countries, should offer their skills to the oppressed people instead of selling it to the imperialists. Strangely enough, a large majority of the participants in the Cultural Congress were in the service of imperialism and dependent on it for their very existence. This line goes against the development of people's war and advocates war of the experts. The experts, those openly supporting the revolution, and those supporting imperialism, would fight it out while the people

## INTRODUCTION

Man's social practice is not confined to activity in production, but takes many other forms -- class struggle, political life, scientific and artistic pursuits; in short, as a social being, man participates in all spheres of the practical life of society. Thus man, in varying degrees, comes to know the different relations between man and man, not only through his material life but also through his political and cultural life (both of which are intimately bound up with material life). Of these other types of social practice, class struggle in particular, in all its various forms, exerts a profound influence on the development of man's knowledge. In class society everyone lives as a member of a particular class, and every kind of thinking without exception, is stamped with the brand of a class.

(Mao Tse-tung, "On Practice," Selected Works, Vol. I, p. 296)

The question of the relevance of knowledge to society is first of all the question of "knowledge for whom?" Does a particular theory serve the interests of the bourgeois ruling class or the interests of the oppressed working class? Scholarship in North American universities serves the bourgeoisie which awards research grants to mercenary scholars through the federal government, monopoly corporations, private foundations, and the CIA; both undergraduate and graduate study programs are frequently tailored to the needs of the capitalist employers. Knowledge in the service of the bourgeoisie operates in various ways against the interests of the working class, and this happens especially through the bourgeois scholars' espousal of the reactionary ideology of idealism. Does a scholar follow the epistemology of idealism and clerical obscurantism or does he follow the epistemology of dialectical materialism? Does he write to say something new and to serve the proletariat or does he publish like a hack to serve the bourgeoisie? Anyone interested in a revolution must expose the idealistic and bourgeois character of scholarship. This essay is a contribution to this discussion in relation to literary studies.

Professor Northrop Frye of the University of Toronto is a well-known reactionary and idealist, the fascist aspect of whose scholarship needs to be laid bare. Who is a fascist intellectual? Fascism springs from a person's social and intellectual attitudes and it is essential to go into its genesis. When idealists talk of fascism they usually refer to the murderous crusades carried out as a result of social, political or religious dogmas; they picture dismembered bodies and recall all kinds of physical killing and persecution. Idealist historians suggest that all of a sudden somebody, some class of people, or some society went berserk and started killing people. This is a simplistic definition of fascism, a comfortable rationalization which ignores the reality of the human situation.

Do people become murderers all of a sudden? No. The moment people believe

something without undertaking the act-of-finding-out they are manifesting a fascist tendency; to accept without questioning the premises involved in a statement, an analysis or a concept is to create the basis of fascism. Cold war slogans operate precisely in this manner. Beliefs devoid of experiential validity and made up of the accumulated prejudices of the society give rise to overt fascism. Northrop Frye is a fascist for he bases his literary criticism on the Bible and the Great Chain of Being, on idealist philosophy, and clerical obscurantism without undertaking the act-of-finding out.

Scholarship is not a matter of mental deductions arrived at in the privacy of one's room. Scholars must serve the people and participate in mass struggles against imperialism. Their expertise is worthless if it does not serve the people and if it is not related to mass movements. To seek truth is to serve people, and one cannot serve imperialists and still claim that he is serving people. One must find the people to serve. People will not come to a scholar and demand a charitable gesture from him. Instead, a scholar must develop himself in such a way that all his actions become one with the aspirations of the oppressed and the working people of the world. For a progressive intellectual it is not enough to sit by passively after exposing the true character of fascist idealists like Frye; a genuine intellectual must serve the people and organize a movement actively against the bourgeois oppressors of the world. To understand the world one must want to change it, not mentally but through mass struggles.

## CHAPTER I

### OF THEORIES OF KNOWLEDGE

Professor Northrop Frye has based his theories of literary criticism on objective idealism and clerical obscurantism in opposition to theories based on scientific and historically tested facts. During the last four hundred years many scientists gave their lives in the service of scientific knowledge and courageously defeated objective idealism and clerical obscurantism which were the preserve of decaying and putrid feudal society. The validity of Frye's generalizations on literature depends on the validity of the facts he bases his ideas on: the Ptolemaic universe, the theory of divine creation, and four levels of life. It is sad indeed that many honest scholars, because of their ignorance of the role of consciousness in history, the basis of change, development and motion, and the relationship of the superstructure to the economic base, and the influence of the three theories of cognition in humanistic and scientific knowledge, have neglected or not understood Frye's theory of knowledge and have welcomed his literary criticism as something entirely original, thus missing its reactionary and retrogressive character. These scholars argue in an abstract and detached manner, by turning away from the material world around them, and fail to accept the responsibility for the spread of reactionary and backward ideas among students. They talk about the illuminating values of Frye's theories and criticise him only in matters of detail, a procedure which cannot produce fruitful results; this can be seen in the collection of papers on Frye edited by Murray Krieger for the English Institute. Literary critics do not seem to be contemptuous of a man whose main contribution to scholarship has been one of reviving objective idealism and clerical obscurantism in the guise of literary criticism.

What is a theory of knowledge? A theory of knowledge involves the methods and grounds of knowledge, the forms and methods of cognition, and the different ways of attaining truth. The fundamental question in the theory of knowledge is that of the relationship of consciousness to being and of thinking to matter, a question on which literary scholars silently take an idealistic position and postulate that consciousness and thinking are primary and matter and being secondary in human history and that consciousness develops independent of the qualitatively and quantitatively developing material world. A bourgeois, idealistic literary critic, one whose primary duty is not to the service of the existing material world and human society but to the service of the imperialist ruling classes, refuses to unite with the progressive forces to bring about change and thus to develop human knowledge based on the existing material world by which truth can be discovered and pretends that he is engaged in the search for truth by upholding the autonomy (as against inter-dependence), infinity (as against finite historical tasks), and self-centredness of the human mind (as opposed to the fact that human mind develops because of man's struggle: struggle for production, class struggle and scientific investigation). An idealist's quest for truth is geared toward negating all truths about science and life and bent upon proving that mind

and not social practice is the source of ideas. He will suggest that history is guided by universal ideas which are eternal and immutable and innate in the mind, and that idealistic and detached theories are the best guide to the future (his 'future' is going back to the original, the starting point, the age of ignorance and superstition under feudal-religious aristocracy). He supports abstract principles of democracy and freedom (as opposed to the real, historical principles of democracy and freedom). Following this idealist logic, a student finds himself busily engaged in the 'discovery' of symbolic and imagistic patterns in literature while he understands nothing about the world in which he lives or about the imperialist culture which oppresses him. The best way idealistic and bourgeois scholars have found of emasculating literature is to detach literature from life and history and to make one believe that there is something worthwhile and significant in the hunt for archetypes and symbols. From the point of view of the decadent bourgeois ruling classes of the West there is, of course, something significant and worthwhile in this enterprise: these theories confuse students and others, hinder one's understanding of the world, and thus go a long way in prolonging the life of the monopoly capitalist system. In the last forty years or so, these theories have been quite effective; critics like Northrop Frye have given a reactionary direction to humane studies so cleverly that many "progressive" students and scholars also get misled.

Does the human mind exist independent of social being, is consciousness the result of a long process of the development of man in the material world? Is man's knowledge merely a knowledge of self-consciousness itself, a knowledge of the absolute idea and universal will and "knowledge industry" (including literary criticism), therefore, just a form of spending one's leisure and making some money during the course of it? Or, do human beings need knowledge in order to understand and change the world? To know the world one must respond to change, join the progressive current, and show the Necessity for Change as the essential feature of the real world. To know the world means to find out what is dying and passing away and what is developing and coming into being. Idealistic critics like Frye present their theories to preserve the status quo and not to change it. This is their political and social function and they can perform this function best if they reduce knowledge to an exercise in mental deductions about literature. By arguing that consciousness and mind precede and condition man's social labour and cultural life, Frye makes sure that his followers get bogged down forever in idealistic speculations about literature. Historically in the Anglo-American universities the rise of literary studies as a university subject coincides with the decline of patently Christian education; the concepts of abstract, universal moral values which were no longer maintainable through direct Christian teaching began to be spread by literary critics from the universities. They became the servants of a new, "secular" clericalism. How do literary critics justify this activity? By assuming that mind precedes matter and that literature is the product of an autonomous mind. Literary critics have carried on this tradition of idealism in various forms like Matthew Arnold's view of culture against anarchy, F. R. Leavis's moral fervour, the "New Criticism" of the thirties and forties, and Northrop Frye's resurrection of literary symbolism and biblical typology.



The political and reactionary character of Frye's writings becomes clear when one uncovers his position on the origins of mind, civilization, and literature. Frye's theory on these subjects can be gleaned from statements like this:

The archetypal critic studies the poem as part of poetry, and poetry as part of the total human imitation of nature that we call civilization. Civilization is not merely an imitation of nature, but the process of making a total human form out of nature, and it is impelled by the force that we have just called desire. The desire for food and shelter is not content with roots and caves: it produces the human forms of nature that we call farming and architecture. Desire is thus not a simple response to need, for an animal may need food without planting a garden to get it, nor is it a simple response to want, or desire for something in particular. It is neither limited to nor satisfied by objects, but is the energy that leads human society to develop its own form. Desire in this sense is the social aspect of what we met on the literal level as emotion, an impulse toward expression which would have remained amorphous if the poem had not liberated it by providing the form of its expression. The form of desire, similarly, is liberated and made apparent by civilization. The efficient cause of civilization is work, and poetry in its social aspect has the function of expressing, as a verbal hypothesis, a goal of work and the forms of desire. (AC, pp. 105-106)

This is a fairly clear passage, and reading it one is reminded of the theories of spontaneous generation, vital force, and the divine right of kings put forward by various feudalists to protect the feudal-religious aristocracy of the Middle Ages. So far as its logic goes, Frye's argument is tautological, as can be seen in these sentences: Civilization is "the process of making a total form out of nature, and it is impelled by the force that we have just called desire;" "The form of desire, similarly, is liberated and made apparent by civilization." The key terms are desire and civilization, and each is assumed to be impossible without the other. Desire is the energy that leads human society to develop its own form, but the expression of desire would be "amorphous" without being liberated by poetry and civilization. "The efficient cause of civilization is work," but poetry expresses "a goal of work and the forms of desire." So work cannot be an efficient cause of civilization unless it is guided by poetry. The sequence of relationships is: poetry--work=civilization, and their reverse. This becomes no less tautological by being gracefully put.

Frye suggests that emotion is the motive force of civilization and history because it is "an impulse toward expression" and desire is a social form of emotion. How did emotions come into being? If human beings have developed historically from ape to man, is emotion a characteristic of living matter? If so, all animals would have developed a civilization in Frye's sense. Since this is not so, when and how did emotion come into operation? Frye's theory would have to fall back upon a theory of divine creation. Frye's premise about emotion is non-historical, arbitrary, and idealistic. Why did Frye attach so much weight to emotion and desire? Because this is the non-scientific way idealists argue. They see civilization around them, arbitrarily hypothesize about its origins, and never undertake the act-of-finding-out.

Frye's definition of civilization as the total human imitation of nature is obscurantist. What is human form? Emotion and desire re-moulding nature in their own image:

The shape of this human form is revealed by civilization as it develops: its major components are the city, the garden, the farm, the sheepfold, and the like, as well as human society itself. (AC, pp. 112-113)

What does this view lead to? A denial of the whole of human history as scientists have reconstructed it. A denial of the role of social practice, class struggle, and scientific experimentation in the development of civilization. The world is what it is and an idealist can explain it anyway he wants to. Not for him the thousands and thousands of years of development. Frye must assert dogmatically that what he says is the truth because there is the archetype of the shepherd in the Bible, because Christ is a shepherd, and nobody need to investigate the origins of private property, family, and the state.

What are the political, social and intellectual consequences of accepting Frye's theory (that "desire" in the abstract and not man's social labour for production is the dynamic force of history)? Applied to the twentieth century, this theory implies that civilization is guided by abstract ideas and not by the socio-economic structure of which culture is a superstructure. In this theory political and cultural activities are not relevant to cultural change and poets express the goals of work and forms of desire. Looking at literature of all ages one seeks in vain for poets who would fit Frye's theory. Why do so many literary critics accept Frye's theory at its face value? Because they live in an isolated and visionary world of their own in which emotion, desire and mind in the abstract seem to be the only reality. That this position is subjective, non-historical, dogmatic, and idealistic does not worry Frye and his admirers; in fact, why should it, since their function is not to study literature in the real world, but to glorify the status quo as something eternal, ideal, and universal.

Frye's procedure in his books is usually to assert that something is true or obvious or tenable simply because he says so, a characteristic technique of reactionary literary critics. One example:

The chief attack on Locke in the eighteenth century came from the idealist Berkeley, and as idealism is a doctrine congenial to poets, we should expect Blake's attitude to have some points in common with Berkeley's, particularly on the subject of the mental nature of reality.... (FS, p. 14)

This sentence does not establish anything but assumes the truth of the statement dogmatically. Why is Berkeleyan idealism congenial to poets? Is that an adequate explanation of Blake's adoption of Berkeley's philosophy? Frye is not seriously interested in finding an answer to these questions; he just wants to assert a dogma and not to arrive at a valid generalization about Blake's idealism. If this is the level of Frye's argument, one must take him seriously as a propagandist for idealism and clerical obscurantism who has been given praise by the ruling classes of the imperialist countries solely on the ground that he has been successful in achieving a certain degree of notoriety in the minds of intellectuals as a man with "ideas", as a loyal agent who is obediently misleading students and others.

What is Frye's theory of literature? It can be anticipated from his theory of civilization:

The study of literature takes us toward seeing poetry as the imitation of infinite social action and infinite human thought, the mind of a man who is all men, the universal creative word which is all words. About this man and word we can, speaking as critics, say only one thing ontologically: we have no reason to suppose either that they exist or that they do not exist. We can call them divine if by divine we mean the unlimited or projected human. . (AC. p.125)

Human mind, in Frye's vision, exists, thinks, and creates like a god, independent of the material world and history. Is there the mind of a man who is all men? No. Is there the universal creative word which is all words? No. One must ask ontologically: Does Frye's man exist? No. Is man divine in any sense? No. Why do students of literature tend to believe in Frye's man? Because they are ignorant idealists who do not understand that man developed historically and that man's literature is historically conditioned and limited. Only those persons can buy Frye's notion of the universal creative word, etc., who like Frye have withdrawn into the Middle Ages.

How does Frye use "infinity"? In idealist philosophy man's mind is infinite because, if this is not so, an idealist would have to recognize the historical character of man's consciousness. In materialist philosophy the infinite and finite are categories denoting the two inseparably connected aspects of the objective world. For example, an unlimitedly increasing (or decreasing) variable quantity, capable of becoming, and in fact becoming, more (or less) than any pre-given quantity, however large (or small), is called an infinite quantity; a definite quantity, in relation to which another definite quantity may be indicated as larger (or smaller), is known as a finite quantity. The contradictory unity of the infinite and the finite make it possible to know the infinite, although at every step in his practical activity man comes into contact with only finite objects and processes. Applied to the human mind, the materialist outlook considers the mind to be infinite in its capacity to reflect historically in the future a knowledge of the world and considers it finite in its present and historically conditioned state. Thus man's mind is both finite and infinite in history. Frye's infinity is idealistic and non-historical where it is an attribute of mind (and not of matter) and where mind is capable of creating a structure of words infinitely and regardless of history. This is equating mind with Logos in the biblical sense.

What is Frye's point about speaking "ontologically"? Ontology is the doctrine of being in general, independent of its particular forms, and deals with the existence or non-existence of something. Since Frye postulates the existence of "man which is all men" he must argue for the irrelevance of ontology to his man. Is it possible to suppose that Frye's man does not "exist or not exist"? No. Is it the man who developed in history and lives in the material world? Or, is it the man whom God placed in the garden of Eden? The last is the case. Frye's invocation of ontology is dishonest and deceptive. If there is no ontology of Logos anyway, why should one speak ontolog-

ically? It is true that words do not "exist or not exist." What does exist is the whole diversity of mutable things in their action and interaction.

A cardinal premise of Frye's theory of literature is that there is a structure or order of words in literature analogous to the structure or order of atoms in the universe. By attributing autonomy and infinity to the human mind Frye eliminates the very possibility of a historical investigation of a complex problem; by hypothesizing a structure of words in literature he clears the ground for the static and archetypal system of literary criticism. Frye's arguments are profoundly superficial. A scientist studies the structure of atoms in nature; a literary critic should study the structure of words in literature. This is Frye's trick to legitimize his idealistic literary criticism. The trick is to "plant" dogmatically a structure in literature and then to "discover" it with the help of literary criticism. Frye tries to give some respectability to his theory by citing Aristotle and the study of motion in physics:

The conception of total Word is the postulate that there is such a thing as an order of words, and that the criticism which studies it makes, or could make, complete sense. Aristotle's Physics leads to the conception of an unmoved first mover at the circumference of the physical universe. This, in itself, means that physics has a universe. The systematic study of motion would be impossible unless all phenomena of motion could be related to unifying principles, and those in their return to a total unifying principle of movement which is not itself merely another phenomenon of motion. (AC, p. 126)

This passage is typical of Frye's deceitful rhetoric. Does he introduce Aristotle for ornamentation or as an authority on motion in the twentieth century? Here is his argument by analogy: The systematic study of literature would be impossible unless... the systematic study of literature would be impossible unless... But the unifying principles of motion depend not on the unmoved first mover but on the uniform behaviour of matter; if matter did not obey certain physical laws there would not be any systematic study of motion. And there is no comparable unifying principle underlying the behaviour of words. The conception of the total Word is idealistic nonsense. It is also wrong to say that physics has a universe; physics has a universe only because the universe has a universe which physics unveils. And literature does not have any universe of this sort because human beings produce literature as an ideological form of their social experience which is constantly changing with history.

Why does Frye insist on the structure of words in literature? Because he is a clerical obscurantist who is arguing like a Thomist. The main principle of Thomism is the harmony of faith and reason; faith provides the conclusions which reason must prove. Neo-Thomists in the twentieth century regard "pure being," understood as the spiritual and divine prime element, as the highest reality and declare the material world to be secondary and derivative. The procedure here is to develop a metaphysic first and then to employ reason to invent premises which would justify the interpretation of the material world in terms of that metaphysic. Reason can prove

what faith has revealed. This procedure suits the decadent bourgeois classes of the twentieth century who prolong their life by establishing the bourgeois conception of freedom and democracy as eternally valid and by using reason to prove this: in politics this means that all radicals are "bigoted idiots" who are jeopardizing the continuity of bourgeois freedom and democracy. Like a Thomist, Frye first developed a theory of criticism "based on the principles of literary symbolism and Biblical typography" which he confesses to have learned from Blake. Frye can prove what Blake has revealed. Frye invents premises which would justify the interpretation of literature as something religious, non-historical, idealistic, and static; to do this he must disconnect his Word from the world and must imagine an order of words in literature because this is the order he has set out to "discover" through his literary criticism. Idealists like Frye propose a hypothesis not for verification and proof, but for dogmatically validating their own idealistic generalizations. One could overlook this dogmatic procedure as metaphysical indulgence, were it not a fact that this dogmatic attitude gives rise to fascism in the world. If one can believe arbitrarily in the structure of words in literature, one can also believe in the racial superiority of white or Aryan races, in the superiority of capitalist democracy over socialist democracy, and in the persecution of Jews or ethnic minorities.

Frye's system demands a non-historical and non-scientific theory of knowledge. In The Educated Imagination, Frye asks his reader to imagine "you are shipwrecked on an uninhabited island." This is not just a rhetorical device but a non-historical premise Frye uses to distinguish idealistically three levels of language; the language of self-awareness, practical activity (science), and imagination (art and literature). But the origins of science and art cannot be deduced by a gross distortion of history.

The more serious forms of this non-historical approach appear in these comments:

Science learns more and more about the world as it goes on; it evolves and improves. . . . But literature begins with the possible model of experience, and what it produces is the literary model we call the classic. Literature doesn't evolve or improve or progress. (EI, p. 7)

It is a commonplace of criticism that art does not evolve or improve: it produces the classic or model. One can still buy books narrating the "development" of painting from the Stone Age to Picasso, but they show no development, only a series of mutations in skill, Picasso being on much the same level as his Magdalenian ancestors. Every once in a while we experience in the arts a feeling of definitive revelation. (AC, p. 344)

The most outstanding quality of these sentences is their dogmatism, their anti-intellectual and anti-scientific tendency. Since an idealist does not see consciousness as the result of man's social experience, he cannot comprehend the change and de-

velopment of anything. Development in literary forms, to Frye, is a matter of mutations and does not deserve any attention. Development in the sciences, to him, is a fairly simple matter : scientists accumulate knowledge about the world and this knowledge keeps growing. A physicist in the twentieth century knows more than his predecessor in the eighteenth century. Frye confuses science and literature as forms of knowledge. If literature is different from science, it cannot possibly develop in the same way as science does; and this does not prove that literature does not develop because it does not develop like science. Frye's confusion about development in science, development of literature, and development of the universe is quite a serious one.

Science is a form of social consciousness representing a historically developed knowledge whose truth is verified and constantly made more precise in the course of a given society's practical experience. Literature too is a form of social consciousness which represents a historically developing struggle in society between the new and the old; literature develops in history as it reflects the contradiction between the old and the new. The law of development and change in literature is the same as that of society which it reflects, explained by Mao Tse-tung in these words:

Changes in society are due chiefly to the development of the internal contradictions in society, that is, the contradictions between the productive forces and the relations of production, the contradiction between classes and the contradiction between the old and the new; it is the development of these contradictions that pushes society forward and gives the impetus for the supersession of the old society by the new. Does materialist dialectics exclude external causes? Not at all. It holds that external causes are the condition of change and internal causes are the basis of change, and that external causes become operative through internal causes. In a suitable temperature an egg changes into a chicken, but no temperature can change a stone into a chicken, because each has a different basis.

This is the law of development in material and social things which an idealist must deny because under this law he will have to recognize that there are no universal models of experience, that there are no abstract or universal values in politics or ethics, that the old must surrender to the new, that capitalism must be replaced by socialism, that literature concretely reflects this phenomenon of contradiction between the new and the old, that literature develops along with society, and that literary forms also develop historically. Idealists like Frye have a metaphysical conception of evolution or development as against dialectical conception of development:

The two basic (or two possible? or two historically observable?) conceptions of development (evolution) are: development as decrease or increase, as repetition, and development as a unity of opposites (the division of a unity into mutually exclusive opposites and their reciprocal relation).

(V. I. Lenin, "Collected Works", Vol. 38, p. 360.)

Frye's concept of development in science is nothing more or less than a metaphysical conception of development as an increase, detached from man's social productive activities and historical needs.

Literature does not "increase" like science, but it develops as society develops. The sonnet form does not "develop", but it develops in that it reflects an ever-changing consciousness in, say, Petrarch, Sir Thomas Wyatt, William Shakespeare, John Milton, William Wordsworth, and John Berryman. One can observe a development in the technique of sonnet writing and a development in human consciousness reflected in the sonnet form. Literature and art do have a history in spite of Frye's commonplaces of literary criticism. Similarly, Frye is wrong when he proposes that poets from Homer to W. H. Auden produce only visionary, desire-oriented models independent of social experience. This theory is ludicrous in itself, it is harmful in its consequences; unaware readers of Frye might be misled into believing that what Frye calls a "commonplace of criticism" might be true.

Frye cannot explain where the dynamic force for changes in style or skill comes from. If literature is produced in history, changes in skill cannot be dismissed as only a series of mutations in skill. Neither can Frye account for changes in fictional modes which, he claims, go through five phases: myth, romance, the high mimetic, the low mimetic, and the ironic. Frye remarks about the historical prominence of these modes:

Looking over this table, we can see that European Fiction, during the last fifteen centuries, has moved its centre of gravity down the list.  
(AC, p. 34)

The chapter containing the history of fictional modes is titled "Historical Criticism: Theory of Modes." If it is true that literature does not develop, what then is knowledge of shifts in the centre of gravity in European fiction? If these changes are historical, would literature not appear to have a history? The issue here is that of the dynamics of change in fictional modes which Frye can neither deny nor account for; as an idealist the only thing he can do is to insist on the absence of any law of development in literature. What about the development of literary forms? Is there a development in epic form from Homer through Virgil to Milton? Critics like E. H. Curtius and E. M. W. Tillyard assume that literary forms travel through history unmodified by social experience; as a matter of scruples one would expect a critic either to discover some development in literary forms or to withhold judgment on the problem, and what one should not do is to canonize one's ignorance into a critical principle.

The principle of non-development of literary forms governs Frye's theory of genres. Frye takes for granted the existence of genres in a static, abstract, and absolute sense. But there are no such genres, which is why no critic (including Frye) can theorize when "confronted with a tragedy of Shakespeare and a tragedy of Sophocles, to be compared solely because they are both tragedies" (AC, p. 95). Observing this logic, would anybody compare Sophocles, Shakespeare and

Frye solely because all three are men? According to Frye, "The study of genres is based on analogies in form" (AC, p. 95). But there is no form in the abstract and no tragedy in the abstract. Therefore it is wrong to propose that it "is characteristic of documentary and historical criticism that it cannot deal with such analogies" (AC, p. 95). Being a good idealist, Frye formulates the problem in wrong terms; analogies in form are not a god-given or mystical fact even if "noticing such analogies forms a large part of our actual experience of literature, whatever its role so far in criticism." What is the concept of analogy? It is the establishment of similarity in certain aspects, properties and relations between dissimilar objects; conclusions by analogy are drawn on the basis of such similarities. But Frye's concept of analogy is not much more than noticing the occurrence of four in the four gospels, four legs of a table, and four legs of a horse. Frye imagines that it is possible to formulate an essentialist definition of tragedy which would comprehend all tragedies. The epistemological basis of the theory of genres is a belief in essentialist definitions. Objective idealism takes being, reality, and existence as dependent on the essence of things, and regards essence as something independent, immutable, and absolute; the essence of things is taken to constitute a specific ideal reality which produces all things and guides them (Plato and Hegel). It is not possible to have essentialist definitions of genres, because genres are not an abstract but a historically developed and changing phenomenon.

Another underlying premise of Frye's theory of literature is that life follows literature. This premise is a commonplace in idealist philosophy and takes many forms. History is guided by great ideas and men; mind makes man; knowledge comes from mental deductions; literature contains ideals which human beings try to imitate in life; ideas are innate in the mind; ideas drop from the skies in the form of the Bible. The central issue here is: where do ideas come from? From the mind, says an idealist; from somewhere else, says Mao Tse-tung:

They come from social practice, and from it alone; they come from three kinds of social practice, the struggle for production, the class struggle and scientific experiment. It is man's social being that determines his thinking. Once the correct ideas characteristic of the advanced class are grasped by the masses, these ideas turn into a material force which changes society and changes the world. In their social practice, men engage in various kinds of struggle and gain rich experience, both from their successes and from their failures. ("Four Essays on Philosophy", p. 134)

Idealists argue that man's thinking does not depend on his social practice, but that his social practice is conditioned by his thinking. In the social sciences an idealist could argue that ideas come out of man's mind, are not a reflection of objective reality and determine the type of society people live in. In the imperialist universities, literary critics consistently subscribe to these premisses in large numbers. To find out the ideas and beliefs of a person or a society is to predict the type of literature produced by that individual or in that society. What these critics will not do is to relate these ideas to man's social practice and to relate literature also to man's social practice Arthur O. Lovejoy's The Great



Chain of Being, C.S. Lewis's The Discarded Image, and Basil Willey's Background books are some of the recent outstanding examples of idealism. In an isolated, one-sided, detached manner these critics cull certain ideas from books, trace their influence of ideas on various writers, and consequently prove the formative influence of ideas on life. Northrop Frye's generalisation about life imitating literature is idealistic and he supports it with his theory of imagination.

What is imagination? It is the ability to create new sensual or conceptual images in the human consciousness on the basis of impressions gathered from reality but not encountered in the reality given at a particular moment. Frye does not approve of this social and historical view of imagination because it would destroy his theory of civilization; therefore he must deny it. He proposes that imagination is the "power of constructing possible models of human experience":

...the anagogic view of criticism thus leads to the conception of literature as existing in its own universe, no longer a commentary on life or reality, but containing life and reality in a system of verbal relationships. From this point of view the critic can no longer think of literature as a tiny palace of art looking out upon an inconceivably gigantic "life". "Life" for him has become the seed-plot of literature, a vast mass of potential literary forms, only a few of which will grow up into the greater world of the literary universe. (AC, p. 122)

Imagination creates a dream out of nowhere and life may imitate the dream; life and dream will never be identical. Imagination is the power to call into existence what does not exist and cannot be.

From where does a poet get the impulse to write? What gives him the desire to write? Frye says:

A writer's desire to write can only come from previous experience of literature, and he'll start by imitating whatever he's read, which usually means what the people around him are writing. (EI, p. 14)

This is like saying that a man's desire to speak can only come from previous experience of listening, and he will start by imitating whatever sounds he hears, which usually means what the people around him are speaking. Will this do as a historical investigation of the origins of literature? In order to show that he is aware of the problem of historical origins, Frye prefaces this sentence with a remark: "The moral of all this is that every form in literature has a pedigree, and we can trace its descent to the earliest times." Can he do this? Of course not, but he must pretend that he can for otherwise people might ask him to identify the starting point of literature, the point at which a writer's desire to write begins to come from previous experience of literature. Frye's argument has a tiny speck of truth in it. Milton's epic style can be traced back to Homer and other poets. But this is not an explanation of the genesis of the human desire to

write, just as the statement that Frye learnt to speak English by imitating others is not an explanation of the genesis of the human desire to speak. Can the pedigree of literary forms warrant Frye to generalize that a writer's desire to write can only come from previous experience of literature? Not at all, for there is the awkward question about the first writer whom others began to imitate. Could this first writer be Adam himself? It would have to be so.

On the basis of the premisses mentioned so far, what is Frye's general theory of literature? How does he account for its existence? His answer appears in these two passages:

Both literature and mathematics proceed from postulates, not facts; both can be applied to external reality and yet exist also in a "pure" or self-contained form. Both, furthermore, drive a wedge between the antithesis of being and non-being that is so important for discursive thought. The symbol neither is nor is not the reality which it manifests. (AC, p. 351)

Discursive verbal structures have two aspects, one descriptive, the other constructive, a content and a form. What is descriptive is sigmatic: that is, it establishes a verbal replica of external phenomena, and its verbal symbolism is to be understood as a set of representative signs. But whatever is constructive in any verbal structure seems to me to be invariably some kind of metaphor or hypothetical identification, whether it is established among different meanings of the same word or by the use of a diagram. The assumed metaphor or hypothetical identification, whether it is established among different meanings of the same word or by the use of a diagram. The assumed metaphors in their turn become the units of the myth or constructive principle of the argument. While we read, we are aware of a sequence of metaphorical identifications; when we have finished, we are aware of an organizing structural pattern or conceptualized myth. (AC, pp. 352-353)

Frye is here confusing people about the nature of both mathematics and literature.

Earlier it was seen that Frye talked about emotion, dream, desire, pedigree of literary forms, and about life imitating literature. Now he is saying that both literature and mathematics proceed from postulates, not facts. Is a postulate in mathematics the same thing as Frye's classic or model of experience in literature? No, it is not. What is a postulate? It is a proposition in a scientific theory which is taken as the initial proposition, incapable of proof within the framework of that theory. In modern logic and science postulates are tools of studying the world. Mathematics requires idealization, an act of thought associated with the formation of some abstract objects which cannot be created in practice experimentally. Idealized objects are cases of extremes of certain real objects, they serve as a means of the scientific analysis of real objects and a basis for constructing theories about them. The following concepts are examples of idealized objects in mathematics:

point, straight line, actual infinity. There is a great difference between the postulate of a straight line in mathematics and the creation of Hamlet in literature; one is a theoretical concept while the other a character in literature, is a concrete reflection of life. An even more serious illogicality underlies Frye's remark that both mathematics and literature can be applied to external reality. It is true of mathematics' application, but this cannot be true of literature as Frye has defined it. It is also wrong to say that both in mathematics and literature an airy nothing is confidently located and named. Why does Frye offer this similarity between the two which cannot be reconciled with his dream-sequence argument? This is his pretentious effort to appear knowledgeable, but this would not deceive anybody except idealistic literary critics. Similarly Frye's comment about the symbol which neither is nor is not is nonsensical. The question of the existence of symbols cannot be raised at all: one can only talk about the existence of reality reflected by a symbol. This reflection of reality in symbols Frye will not admit because this admission will lead to the collapse of his whole theory of literary criticism which is an attempt to interpret symbols arbitrarily and to detach them from reality. Criticism in his terms "would begin with, and largely consist of, the systematizing of literary symbolism" (AC, p 71)

Frye's distinction of "descriptive" and "constructive" verbal models is a misleading one. Literary scholars often try to distinguish science from literature on the ground that scientific language describes something out there, in nature or in the laboratory, "a verbal replica of external phenomena", and that literary language is not a verbal replica of external phenomena:

In literature, questions of fact or truth are subordinated to the primary literary aim of producing a structure of words for its own sake, and the sign-values of symbols are subordinated to their importance as a structure of interconnected motifs. Wherever we have an autonomous verbal structure of this kind, we have literature. Wherever this autonomous structure is lacking, we have language, words used instrumentally to help human consciousness to do or understand something else. Literature is a specialized form of language, as language is of communication. (AC, p. 74)

Here Frye seems to have forgotten his own comments about mathematics and mathematical use of language; maybe he will say that mathematics in fact is not a science, This approach is forced upon literary critics by their unwillingness to admit that literature reflects and is born out of man's social experience as much as physics, mathematics and philosophy. In order to justify poetry in idealistic terms, these critics misrepresent science (Murray Krieger's New Apologists for Poetry is a good example of this). Science is a constructive model in the same sense as poetry is supposed to be; Peter B. Medawar points this out:

Is there such a thing as a "scientific method"? I think not. Or the scientific method? Again, I think not. What exactly are the terms of a scientist's contract with truth? This is an important question, for according to the interpretation which I think myself the most plausible

a scientist, so far from being a man who never knowingly departs from the truth, is always telling stories in a sense not so very far removed from that of the nursery euphemism -- stories which might be about real life but which have to be tested very scrupulously to find out if indeed they are so. (The Art of the Soluble, p.12)

For everyone who uses imagination knows that it can be trained and guided and deliberately stocked with things to be imaginative about. Only the irremediably romantic can believe, as Coleridge did, that artistic creation is a microcosmic version, that Divine sort of creation which can make something out of nothing, or out of a homogeneous cloud of forms or notions--and how little right he had to think so has been made clear by The Road to Xanadu and other etiological studies of Coleridge's choice of images and words. To the sober minded the 'spontaneity' of an idea signifies nothing more than our awareness of what preceded its irruption into conscious thought. (Ibid., p.124)

Both science and poetry are imaginative and constructive structures of human consciousness materialized and concretized in language, and one cannot hypothesize about the differences between the two on the basis of the direction of their meaning.

Verbal structures are not "invariably some kind of metaphor or hypothetical identification" in any autonomous sense, because metaphor is a cognitive device in poetry and not the whole of poetry; a cognitive device cannot be assigned an independent and autonomous status. As a cognitive device a metaphor concretely represents or reflects something about reality. No system of literary criticism can be based on metaphor itself, because a critic must go beyond the metaphor to human consciousness embodied in literature. The inherent weakness of critiques of literature based on the patterns and tensions of imagery in a poem resides in the equation of a cognitive device with cognition itself. A poem is not made of images alone; there is the narrative movement also and the syntactic structure of sentences.

Frye supports his idealistic readings of literature by interpreting human existence idealistically. According to Frye, man experiences life at four levels:

First is the order revealed by Christianity, the order of grace and salvation and of eternal life. Second is the order of human nature, the order represented by the Garden of Eden in the Bible and the Golden Age in classical myth, and which man in his fallen state, up to a point, regains through education, obedience to law, and the habit of virtue. Third is the order of physical nature, the world of animals and plants which is morally neutral but theologically "fallen." Fourth is the disorder of the unnatural, the sin and death and corruption that entered the world with the Fall. (FI p.122)

This is Christianity at its fundamentalist best. Frye's man is not born into the bourgeois imperialist socio-economic system but in the theologically fallen world of animals and plants to which he does not belong but which he cannot escape, being born into it because of the original sin. How does Frye's scheme relate to the oppressed classes in North America? What is his message to these people? There is suffering and poverty in monopoly capitalist society, not because of the monopoly capitalist system but because of Adam's and Eve's disobedience; poverty and suffering are the permanent feature of human society and one cannot hold the bourgeois exploiters responsible for anything. An overthrow of the imperialist oppressors through a proletarian revolution will not change the situation, because the consequences of the original sin cannot be undone in this world. Man can improve his lot through education, by obedience to law, and by the habit of virtue; words like "education", "law", and "virtue" in Frye's books do not refer to the education, law, and virtue as they appear historically, but are abstract notions. They have no relevance to the problems of the poor and the oppressed in the real world. Can one say to the Afro-American that he should obey the law and develop the habit of virtue if he wants to solve his problems? The answer is No. What is the social function or class role of Frye's four levels of existence? To safeguard the position of the bourgeois exploiting classes, to negate revolution as a means of social change, to defend the status quo, and to perpetuate the oppression of the working classes and oppressed peoples by the imperialists.

Frey deduces four types of mythical movements of literature resembling or reflecting the four orders of existence:

The top half of the natural cycle is the world of romance and the analogy of innocence; the lower half is the world of "realism" and the analogy of experience. There are thus four main types of mythical movement; within romance, within experience, down, and up. The downward movement is the tragic movement, from threatening complications to a happy ending and a general assumption of post-dated innocence in which everyone lives happily ever after. In Dante the upward movement is through purgatory. (AC p. 162)

There is an intimate connection between the four levels of existence and the four levels of imagination:

The lowest is that of the isolated individual reflecting on his memories of perception and evolving generalizations and abstract ideas. This world is single, for the distinction of subject and object is lost and we have only a brooding subject left. Blake calls this world Ulro; it is his hell, and his symbols for it are symbols of sterility, chiefly rocks and sand. Above it is the ordinary world we live in, a double world of subject and object, of organism and environment, which Blake calls Generation. No living thing is completely adjusted to this world except the plants, hence Blake usually speaks of it as vegetable. Above it is the imaginative world, and Blake di-

vides this into an upper and a lower part, so that the three worlds expand into four. (FS pp. 48-49)

It is most illuminating to note here the way one premiss leads to the next conclusion. The fundamental premiss is that of a belief in divine creation and original sin; this becomes the basis of four levels of existence which in turn leads to the four types of literature which in turn leads to the four levels of imagination. This is clerical obscurantism in its most naked and blatant form.

Northrop Frye is detached, one-sided, non-scientific, non-historical, and anti-intellectual; he is an idealist and clerical obscurantist in his world outlook. The following remarks of V. I. Lenin expose the epistemological roots of Frye's ideology:

Human knowledge is not (or does not follow) a straight line, but a curve, which endlessly approximates a series of circles, a spiral. Any fragment, segment, section of this curve can be transformed (transformed one-sidedly) into an independent, complete, straight line, which then (if one does not see the wood for the trees) leads into quagmire, into clerical obscurantism (where it is anchored by the class interests of the ruling classes). Rectilinearity and one-sidedness, woodenness and petrification, subjectivism and subjective blindness--voila the epistemological roots of idealism. And clerical obscurantism (=philosophical idealism), of course has epistemological roots, it is not groundless; it is a sterile flower undoubtedly, but a sterile flower that grows on the living tree of living, fertile, genuine, powerful omnipotent, objective, absolute human knowledge. (Collected Works, Vol. 38, p. 363)

Frye is popularising idealism and clerical obscurantism in literary criticism because idealism and clerical obscurantism serve the class interests of the imperialist ruling classes of the world. The University of Toronto can claim the dubious distinction of having on its faculty two outstanding propagators of idealism and clerical obscurantism: Northrop Frye and Marshall McLuhan.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERARY THEORY AND LITERARY INTERPRETATION

Bourgeois critics often deny that their literary theory governs their interpretation of literature, just as bourgeois intellectuals deny the class character of their theories of knowledge. The dialectical materialist in the field of literature and criticism should show other students and scholars that in a class society all knowledge has a class character and that a class ideology determines the reactionary or progressive character of their intellectual pursuits. No scholar lives or operates in a vacuum; in a class society a scholar serves either the bourgeois ruling class or the oppressed and working classes. A literary critic has either a theory which serves the interests of the bourgeoisie or a theory which serves the interests of the proletariat. Idealist literary critics do not want to own the real character of their pursuit in order to confuse people. Bourgeois liberal scholars reject clarification of ideological issues and stand for unprincipled peace, thus giving rise to a decadent and philistine attitude in scholarship; dialectical materialists stand for active ideological struggle so that they can point out the connection between an academic, unprincipled peace and the interests of the bourgeoisie.

Why is it that the inductivist ideal of an objective, dispassionate and unprejudiced criticism is an impossibility? Because the monopoly capitalist society is a class society and one must belong to one or the other class, regardless of the bourgeois propoganda. Man learns to perceive through his social experience, and in a class society his perception is determined by his class. There is no such thing as a liberal and classless scholar committed to the quest for an abstract truth. On the question of perception and learning, Peter B. Medawar writes:

To good old British empiricists it has always seemed self-evident that the mind, uncorrupted by past experience, can passively accept the imprint of sensory information from the outside world and work it into complex notions; that the candid acceptance of sense-data is the elementary or generative act in the advancement of learning and the foundation of everything we are truly sure of. Alas, unprejudiced observation is mythical too. In all sensation we pick and choose, interpret, seek and impose order, and devise and test hypotheses about what we witness. Sense data are taken, not merely given; we learn to perceive. 'Why Can't you draw what you see?' is the immemorial cry of the teacher to the student looking down the microscope for the first time at some quite unfamiliar preparation he is called upon to draw. The teacher has forgotten, and the student himself will soon forget that what he sees conveys no information until he knows beforehand the kind of things he is expected to see.

(The Art of the Soluble, pp. 132-133)

Sir Peter Medawar identifies here one of the main reasons for the popularity of idealism which goes from one English teacher to another through the educational system. Instead of training students to see what is in the text, literary critics like Frye give students a totally useless job of examining literature through the Bible instead of their own experience of the material world in which they live. In the era of the Cold War not many scholars want to "see" the cold reality of class struggle because this will bring upon them the wrath of the capitalist state machine. It is much better to see symbolic meanings of universal import in literature than to see a reflection of social reality, because this does not offend the ruling classes and blurs people's comprehension of the real world.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels have pointed out the inseparable connection between man's productive activity and his culture,

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. -- real active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. (The German Ideology, p. 37)

If this is the way man produces his knowledge, a scholar cannot transcend or rise above the class character of knowledge. If whatever cognitive models of the world individuals make are "learnt" perceptions, one's study of literature also must be "learnt", and this learning should come from man's social practice and experience and not from the Bible or some other idealistic fallacy. An individual's relation to his society is organic, not contractual, and human beings develop theories on the ground of their social experience. Does it mean that human beings are slaves of theory? No, for man lives in a constantly changing world in which the principle of change and development is the contradiction between the new and the old, between consciousness and anti-consciousness, and between theory and practice. Theories must be revised and modified in the light of practice; otherwise a society would decay and pass away. As in the social and physical sciences, in literary criticism also theory mediates between reader and text, between a social class and a literary work, and theories of literary criticism reflect the ideology and interests of a class. The only way one can avoid being deterministically influenced by the ideology of the ruling classes is by seeing consciously the relationship between the ideology of a class and the literary criticism corresponding to that ideology. The most harmful result of the lack of awareness of the role of ideology in literary interpretation is the liberal delusion of "free" search for truth in a "free" society and the liberal's ignorance of the limits and scope of his intellectual output. There is invariably an ideology operating in one's study and the claim of objectivity in philosophy or



literary criticism in and outside the universities is bourgeois-liberal propaganda.

In a piece of literary criticism one can see the operations of an ideology or a cognitive theory. In the last few years Paul Alpers, Graham Hough, William Nelson, Kathleen Williams, Sister M. Parker, A.D. S. Fowler, A. C. Hamilton, Roger Sale, and C. S. Lewis have published studies of Spenser's Faerie Queene. How can one explain the differences of their approaches? An idealist like Frye would offer this explanation:

The principle of manifold or "polysemous" meaning, as Dante calls it, is not a theory any more, still less an exploded superstition, but an established fact. The thing that has established it is the simultaneous development of several different schools of modern criticism, each making a distinctive choice of symbols in its analysis. The modern student of critical theory is faced with a body of theoreticians who speak of texture and frontal assaults, with students of history who deal with traditions and sources, with critics using material from psychology and anthropology, with Aristotelians, Coleridgians, Thomists, Freudians, Jungians, Marxists, with students of myths, rituals, archetypes, metaphor, ambiguities, and significant forms. The student must either admit the principle of polysemous meaning, or choose one of those groups and then try to prove that all the others are less legitimate. The former is the way of scholarship, and leads to the advancement of learning; the latter is the way of pedantry, and gives us a wide choice of goals, the most conspicuous today being fantastical learning, or myth criticism, contentious learning, or historical criticism, and delicate learning, or "new criticism". (AC, p. 72)

Suppose one grants the principle of polysemous meaning; would it not create a situation of "contentious learning"? Or does Frye mean that one should simultaneously be an Aristotelian, Coleridgian, Thomist, Freudian, Jungian, Marxist? How can this, even if it were a possibility, lead to the advancement of learning? Is there no significance to the very existence of these ideologies? Frye's argument that "the simultaneous development of several different schools of modern criticism" makes the doctrine of polysemous meaning "an established fact" is absurd. If it proves anything, it is the existence of different ideologies which grew historically at various stages of human development, and all of the ideologies mentioned fall into two kinds- the idealist and the materialist, the reactionary and the progressive, the ideology of the dying class and that of the new developing class, and in the contemporary context the ideology of the bourgeois ruling class and that of the proletariat. Aristotelian and other schools of criticism are not a "simultaneous development", they have had a long history. Why is it that each critic makes "a distinctive choice of symbols"? Is it a divine commandment? Or is it due to a critic's ideology? Frye does not want to recognise his own and other critics' ideologies. Is there something in the language of the Faerie Queene that loads it with an infinity of meanings? Obviously not. The most important factor in a critic's distinctive choice of symbols is his ideology. Commentaries on a religious poet like George Herbert show the High Church prejudice of critics like C. S. Lewis and Douglas Bush. If a Thomist critic knows his

ideological biases, both he and his readers would understand the principle of his choice of symbols. And to argue with a Thomist critic like Etienne Gilson and J. Maritain one would have to start with his Thomism, not with the literary text. If Thomism is refutable, as it is, a Thomist critic's criticism also would become invalid. One's criticism is as good as one's ideology.

Why are so many literary critics so content with using bourgeois world outlook in their literary criticism and at the same time vehemently denying this fact? Why do they not argue about their ideology and contribute to the advancement of learning? Because a majority of them innocently believe that ideology is bad per se and attempt to conceal their bourgeois world outlook under the transparent cloak of an objective pursuit of knowledge. Then there are those who contend that if a critic denies the existence of ideology, the ideology ceases to exist; these are the most dangerous of the lot, for they try to distort reality. This unprincipled peace in scholarship enhances the chances of the survival of bourgeois world outlook. Were this concealment of theirs known generally, they would not be able to continue preaching propaganda, and bourgeois educators do their best to keep people ignorant. Because of their bourgeois or petty bourgeois background and education, a majority of the university and other intellectuals reflects the bourgeois outlook. A common tendency of the bourgeois thinkers is to deny the existence of classes and class ideologies (Daniel Bell goes even further and in his zeal for serving his master, announced "the end of ideology" itself). Frye never refers to classes and ideology; he never wonders about the implications of being an idealist or a materialist in literary criticism. The standard bourgeois argument would be that such and such a critic is interpreting The Faerie Queene (a good thing) and it is immaterial whether he is a Thomist or something else; if this is so, why should anyone worry about the validity of interpretation?

An ideology is a system of views and ideas; political, legal, ethical, aesthetic, religious, philosophical, scientific, a true or a false reflection of objective reality. If it is scientific and true it facilitates man's understanding and control of his material world; if it is unscientific and false it hinders man's understanding and control of his environment and brings about social and intellectual stagnation. In a class society ideologies reflect the interests of a class; materialism is an ideology of the proletariat and idealism is the ideology of the imperialist ruling circles. Why is this so? Because the bourgeoisie is a decadent and dying social class and only an ideology of the status-quo like idealism can help it prolong its life; the working class is a progressive and revolutionary one and only a scientific ideology like materialism can help it bring about a revolution. There cannot be an idealist revolutionary even though a large section of the petty bourgeoisie is attempting to win influence in the revolutionary ranks with their idealistic and metaphysical approach to life. Hence it matters whether one is a Thomist or something else. Hence it matters whether one is a materialist. Hence it is essential to know that Northrop Frye is an objective idealist, a clerical obscurantist and a biblical typologist. Hence it is necessary to wage an ideological struggle in the classroom and in literary criticism. All genuinely progressive and revolutionary intellectuals agree with what Mao Tse-tung points out: "Revolutionary culture is a powerful revolutionary weapon for the broad masses of the people. It prepares the ground ideologically before the revolution comes and is an important, indeed essential, fighting front in the general revolutionary front during the revolution." (On New Democracy, Selected Works, Vol II, p. 382)

Literary critics like Frye try to suppress literature as a living force in society by reducing it to a repetition of unchanging archetypal forms, make every writer a part of the same dead myth of the four levels of existence, four seasons, four types of mythical movement in literature, and detach literature and art from the societies and writers which create it under specific historical conditions. It is not in the very nature of literary criticism that its course is rigidly dictated by some inherent rules of idealism. In the struggle between the forces of revolution and those of reaction literary critics in large numbers, during the early periods of struggle, support the reactionary forces. Instead of working for social change they glorify abstract notions like freedom and love which in fact should be called a glorification of bourgeois arrogance and indulgence similar to the feudal aristocratic glorification of the same before they were put to the guillotine. As The Modern Century makes it clear, Frye sees the roots of Western social problems in the "alienation of progress" brought about by rapid technological changes; and his prophetic role is to discredit the new as something "totalitarian" and disastrous, to idealize the old, to revive the decayed theories of clerical obscurantism, to romanticise feudal-religious aristocracy, and to confuse people about the nature and possibilities of social revolution. This reactionary ideology informs Frye's view of liberal education.

The ethical purpose of a liberal education is to liberate, which can only mean to make one capable of conceiving society as free, classless, and urbane. So such society exists, which is one reason why a liberal education must be deeply concerned with works of imagination. The imaginative element in works of art, again, lifts them clear of the bondage of history. Anything that emerges from the total experience of criticism to form part of a liberal education becomes, by virtue of that fact, part of the emancipated and humane community of culture, whatever its original reference. Thus liberal education liberates the works of culture themselves as well as the minds that educate. The corruption out of which the imaginative quality of the art preserves it in its corruption, like the corpse of a saint. No discussion of beauty can confine itself to the formal relations of the isolated work of art; it must consider, too, the participation of the work of art in the vision of the goal of social effort, the idea of complete and classless civilization. This idea of complete civilization is also the implicit moral standard to which ethical criticism always refers, something very different from any system of morals.  
(AC pp. 347-348)

Frye's vision of liberal education is basically schizophrenic, it is only during an advance stage of schizopshrenia that somebody could lift himself "clear of the bondage of history" but even he would not have the preservative capacity of a saint's corpse to keep himself going. Frye disconnects completely "what is" from "what should be", erects a whole vision of "what should be" while rejecting completely "what is", sees no organic connection between the two visions, and pushes this schizophrenia as an ideal of liberal education. His schizophrenic view of human life splits it into four levels, and this kind of separation of reality and vision is characteristic of

clerical obscurantism. While Frye charms the liberally educated with his visions of a free, classless, and urbane society which does not and cannot exist, revolutionary movements are going on in the real world to bring about a free, classless and urbane society. These movements to Frye are just a sign of alienation of progress or totalitarianism or military dictatorships; in other words, his schizophrenic mind gazing at the world from four levels of vision, not with two eyes, is incapable of understanding the character of these movements. Of course, as an idealist and lackey of the bourgeois ruling circles his mission is not to investigate the real world but to mislead people about the very reality of their existence so that people do not participate in their own liberation from the oppression of imperialism.

It was stated earlier that a critic whose theory of civilization and literary criticism is idealistic cannot properly interpret a work of literature. Frye's criticism of Blake, Milton, Shakespeare, and other writers bears this out. Wherever Frye looks, he sees a vision of four levels of existence, four levels of imagination, five fictional and thematic modes, five kinds of symbolism, four mythical movements in literature, six phases in every mythical movement of literature, and finds some elements of his vision underlying or controlling every literary work. Works of literature repeat this pattern because the same shaping spirit of poetry possesses all poets of all ages and countries. It would not be possible to review all critical writings, and it should suffice to examine thoroughly his analysis of John Milton's pastoral elegy, Lycidas, to get some taste of his distortion and misrepresentation of poetry.

Frye believes that a student "could get a whole liberal education by picking up one conventional poem, Lycidas for example, and following its archetypes through literature" (AC, P. 121). As if tracing the pedigree of literary forms were the main aim of liberal education. Frye's interest in the pedigree of archetypes is not pure or dispassionate; this is his technique of imposing a pattern and a meaning on Milton's poem as well as on all literature. Frye suggests that Lycidas is a dying god (Adonis or Tammuz) a poet (Orpheus), and a priest (Peter), and continues:

But all these aspects are contained within the figure of Christ, the young dying god is eternally alive, the Word that contains all poetry, the head and body of the Church, the good shepherd whose pastoral world sees no winter, the Sun of righteousness that never sets, whose power can raise Lycidas, like Peter, out of the waves, as it redeems souls from the lower world-, which Orpheus failed to do. Christ does not enter the poem as a character, but he pervades every line of it so completely that the poem, so to speak, enters him. (AC. pp. 121-122)

Lycidas is a re-incarnation of old themes, the rehearsal of a theme which travels through Western culture untouched by the social history of Western man. In the 1945 edition of his Poems Milton called Lycidas a "Monody" in which "the Author bewails a learned Friend, unfortunately drown'd . . . on the Irish Seas, 1637. And by

occasion foretells the ruin of our corrupted Clergy then in their height." The poem has supplied a happy occasion to a large number of critics to indulge their ideologies and to speculate liberally about the poet's intention on the basis of his imagery since it is loaded with literary and mythical allusions. The pastoral convention also invites critical speculations of all sorts, and there is the Christian element adding further complications. What is the theoretical justification for archetypal readings? The pedigree of literary forms. Frye traces the ancestry of Lycidas:

We think first of the pastoral's descent from Theocritus, where the pastoral elegy first appears as a literary adaptation of the ritual of the Adonis lament, and through Theocritus to Virgil and the whole pastoral tradition to The Shepheardes Calender and beyond to Lycidas itself. Then we think of the intricate pastoral symbolism of the Bible and the Christian Church, of Abel and the twenty-third Psalm and Christ the Good Sheperd, of the ecclesiastical overtones of "pastor" and "flock", and of the link between the Classical and Christian traditions in Virgil's Messianic Eclogue. Then we think of extensions of pastoral symbolism into Sidney's Arcadia, The Faerie Queene, Shakespeare's forest comedies, and the like; then of the post-Miltonic development of pastoral elegy in Shelley, Arnold Whitman, and Dylan Thomas; perhaps too of pastoral conventions in painting and music. (AC, pp.99-100)

This approach which seems so illuminating and plausible brings to mind some serious questions. To what extent is one justified in using statistically the historically developed rituals about Adonis and Christ and in assuming that they reside in human consciousness regardless of history? Can rituals which are part of historically changing beliefs of people be transmuted into universally held notions? Is pastoral symbolism uniform in Theocritus, Virgil, the Bible, Sidney, Spenser, Milton, Shelley, Arnold, Whitman, and Dylan Thomas? Does the fact that Milton employed the pastoral form warrant the importation of beliefs into the interpretation of Lycidas? Is there not a historically verifiable distinction between the form of pastoral and its symbolic meanings? Is it not naive to impose a static symbolism of the pastoral on the poem because of Milton's use of that form? According to Frye's theory, would it not happen that all pastoral elegies would tend to mean more or less the same thing? Does the pastoral elegiac form transcend history and man's social experience? Is it true that the "true father or shaping spirit of the poem is the form of the poem itself, and this form is a manifestation of the universal spirit of poetry"? Is there a universal spirit of poetry? Is a poet merely a medium of the universal spirit of poetry? Is a poet a poem's device to beget more poems? Is it true that the "poet has to give birth to the poem as it passes through his mind"? Idealists like Frye who think that essence precedes existence will answer these questions in the affirmative. This affirmation follows from their one-sided and detached philosophy.

Frye's analysis of Lycidas may remind some readers of the iconographic approach to art, associated with the Warburg Institute and E. Panofsky, E. H. Gom-

brich, Edgar Wind, and Frances Yates. The major distinction between the Warburg art critics and Frye is that the former observe historical distinctions very scrupulously, try to study art in the context of social life (see for example, Gombrich's Story of Art), distinguish iconography from symbolism very carefully, and do not generalize iconography into a whole theory about art; Frye disregards all these distinctions and precautions and does not find development of any sort in literature.

Does Frye's approach illuminate the poem/poetry universality in Lycidas? What is universality in poetry? At least two senses of this term would be relevant here. In Frye's system universality would be the process of images expanding into conventional archetypes of literature; a symbol like the sea or the heath cannot remain within Conrad or Hardy: it is bound to expand over into an archetypal symbol of literature as a whole" (AC, p.100). And one of the deficiencies in contemporary education, says Frye, "has much to do with the decline in the explicit use of archetypes." When asked to justify the study of classics like Chaucer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, literary critics fall back upon universality as a term for those universal constants of ethical and social values which make human life worth living. The application of universality in the first sense, it has been suggested earlier, can only distort the poem. Actually Frye's argument can be true only to the extent that one comes across one image frequently in poetry, but that image must signify different periods of history. Pastoral symbolism certainly cannot be used by a critic as an excuse to find in Milton the cluster of beliefs connected with Adonis, Orpheus, Peter, and Christ. Archetypal critics start with formal similarities between poems, surreptitiously shift the premise to include beliefs, impose some sort of neo-Christian system on the poem, and end up converting their readers to accepting the validity of neo-Christianity.

Why would Milton, Shelley, and Arnold bother to write a poem if they merely repeated an archetypal pattern? Is it true that the three of them respond to death in a similar fashion? There is not one universal response to death in the West which is enshrined in the archetype of pastoral symbolism; at losing a friend who is intimate enough to deserve a memorial, a poet does not lazily reach for the pastoral and let the poem compose itself. Editors contribute to this fallacy by their glosses on Lycidas: Merritt Y. Hughes in his edition identifies Milton's echoes of earlier poets. An extension of Frye's argument would be that man is a slave of his language and that his intellectual and cognitive limits are drawn by his language; but -the fact is that even though language is a means of fixing and preserving the accumulated knowledge and passing it from generation to generation, language and thought are not identical. Language and archetypal forms do not limit man's cognition in an absolute sense. Language is a material form of consciousness which is a historical and social phenomenon. The theory of archetypal form is valid only if one believes that consciousness is not a product of social development and does and can exist outside of society.

Two points emerge from the preceding discussion: Milton's imitation of the form of pastoral elegy is no proof of existence of the shaping spirit of poetry; an exposition of Milton's imagery should not be changed into an imposition of beliefs on the text of the poem. The notion of poetry's shaping spirit is ultimately what may be

called an idealistic "input" theory of literature which makes a poem understandable to the extent it can be made predictable in terms of a pre-conceived hypothesis which conditions a critic's expectations of a poem. The idealistic "input" theory of literature takes three forms: archetypal, biographical, and sociological. In its archetypal form, this theory makes a poem understandable (predictable) in terms of its convention and history of ideas; in its biographical form, in terms of a poet's unfathomable intentions and beliefs; in its sociological form, in terms of the spirit of the age and communal experience. What is wrong with this theory which underlies a great deal of literary criticism? It overlooks the fundamental law of change and development of phenomena; it assumes a critic's ability to identify shaping influences; it assumes a theoretical equation of "input" and "output", it assumes a mechanical relationship of cause-and-effect between the poet and the poem. Idealistic critics isolate beliefs and ideas from man's economic and social experience as well as from the dialectical process of change and then use literature as an "illustration" of the universality of archetypes, beliefs, and ideas. According to this theory human beings produce literature only to "announce" their beliefs and archetypes. C. S. Lewis's A Preface to Paradise Lost is an excellent example of this idealistic tendency; according to this logic Milton's Satan is a "father of lies" because the Christian tradition says so. William Empson who refused to interpret Paradise Lost by the letter of Christian dogmas in his Milton's God was condemned by clerical obscurantist critics for doing so.

The problem of idealists is that they do not understand the nature of creative work and do not see the inseparable connection between man's productive life and his artistic and literary output. Idealists regard artistic creative work as divine obsession (Plato), as movement from the conscious to the subconscious (Schelling), as the life-giving breath of the unconscious (E. Hartman), as mystic intuition (Bergson), and as manifestation of instincts (Freud). Idealists do not understand that life as reflected in works of literature and art is on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life. Idealists conceal the progressive role of art and literature in changing society and confine artistic and literary activities to the preservation of the status quo.

The proper context for the study of literature and art is the human history itself, the struggle between the new and the old, between that which is dying out and that which is coming into being. Idealistic critics study literature and art in the context of their own idealistic view of life. For Northrop Frye the context of literature is the four levels of life: the order of grace, the order of human nature, the order of physical nature, and the disorder of the unnatural. A poet lives in the third order and is supposed to imagine the first or second orders like a schizophrenic. Frye's other context for literature is that of the four creative principles:

One in convention, the reshaping of the poetic material which is appropriate to this subject. Another is genre, the choosing of the appropriate form. A third is archetype, the use of appropriate and there-

fore recurrently employed, images and symbols. The fourth, for which there is no name, is the fact that the forms of literature are autonomous: that is, they do not exist outside literature. (FI, p.123)

Through this critical procedure Frye makes Milton an unconscious imitator of his own theories or an unconscious medium of the shaping spirit of poetry. Frye specializes in making grand idealistic and obscurantist generalizations and never stoops to the mundane task of verifying them because he serves the ruling circles. To Frye literature illustrates the universal pervasiveness of four levels of life and four creative principles.

Frye's theory removes the poet from the poem and replaces him with a shaping spirit. If a poet is the medium of the shaping spirit, what could one understand by human consciousness or Milton's sense of loss at Edward King's death? Frye's answer is obvious: "Milton is not writing an obituary. he does not start with Edward King and his life and times, but with the conventions and archetypes that poetry requires for such a theme" (FI, p.123). The significant point here is the contrast between an obituary and a poem, an obituary being a brief biography and a poem being a vision of King as a god, a poet, and a priest. The vision of Edward King as a god, Orpheus, and Peter. The problem may be put thus:

Edward King	=a god	=Adonis	=Christ
Edward King	=a poet	=Orpheus	=Christ
Edward King	=a priest	=Peter	=Christ

An archetypal critic's method of distortion is evident here. Did Milton think of his friend as an incarnation of Adonis, Orpheus and Peter, all of whom merge in Christ? Did Milton feel that the only way to write a poem instead of an obituary was to use the ceremonial form of pastoral elegy, which unconsciously forced upon him the vision of his friend as a god, etc.? Frye holds that Milton could write either his friend's obituary or a poem about a god, a poet, and a priest. Why? Because of the conventions and archetypes of poetry. Is Milton's consciousness of death no more than a consciousness of convention of poetry? Yes, says Frye. How would a materialist answer this question? That both the form and content of Lycidas constitutes a single unit of Milton's consciousness of death; death is a solemn, serious, and ceremonial occasion for Milton. The occurrence of death causes ontological insecurity among human beings and arouses them to reconcile themselves with it. The imaginative form of the pastoral environment helps Milton create a distance between himself and the immediate occasion of King's death and is an objective image of his apprehensions and feelings. This imaginary transference of Edward King's funeral from Milton's Cambridge to the pastoral landscape is the transformation of a subjective into an objective situation. The form of pastoral elegy is not an eternally fixed archetype but a historically determined, specific way of reflecting being and reality and expressing man's aesthetic appreciation of the world around him. Reading Lycidas one responds to Milton's consciousness materialized in language and artistic images instead of idealistically changing the elegy into a mechanical imitation of set conventions. Poetry is born out of man's social experience and not out



of the conventions and archetypes of poetry in the abstract.

Having noted the distortions of Lycidas affected by Frye's ideology, one can observe the immense importance of literary theory in literary interpretation. Those who advise students to respond to and interpret literature in an idealistic manner are the upholders of the bourgeois outlook in literary criticism; by demanding this type of criticism from them, scholars make idealists and clerical obscurantists out of students. There can be no criticism without the mediation of an ideology, and the only progressive and valid ideology for literature is that of materialism, which is the ideology of the oppressed and working people of the world. Without any ideology at all there would be no criteria of relevance or irrelevance, of class interests and of compatibility and incompatibility. If there were data, they would have no significance, they would point in no direction. The genuine critic of literature is not the man who uses his ideology, for he would never start at all; it is the man who uses his ideology as a tool for examining facts and for serving the interests of the working people. Volumes full of data or facts can never of themselves generate a new idea; an ideology brings ideas into the open.



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