COLLECTED WORKS OF NORTHROP FRYE

Northrop Frye on Modern Culture

Northrop Frye

Edited by Jan Gorak

Copyrighted material

Northrop Frye on Modern Culture

VOLUME 11

Edited by Jan Gorak

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS
Toronto Buffalo London

Copyrighted material

© Victoria University, University of Toronto and Jan Gorak
(preface, introduction, annotation) 2003

Toronto Buffalo London

Printed in Canada

ISBN 0-8020-3696-1

Printed on acid-free paper

National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Frye, Northrop, 1912–1991
Northrop Frye on modern culture / edited by Jan Gorak.

(Collected works of Northrop Frye ; v. 11)
Includes index.
ISBN 0-8020-3696-1

1. Civilization, Modern – 20th century. 2. Arts, Modern – 20th century. I. Gorak, Jan, 1952– II. Title. III. Series.

CB428.F79 2002 909.82 C2002-903698-4

This volume has been published with the assistance of a grant from Victoria University.

University of Toronto Press acknowledges the financial assistance to its publishing program of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council.

University of Toronto Press acknowledges the financial support for its publishing activities of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP).

Copyrighted material

Contents

Preface
xi

Credits
xv

Abbreviations
xvii

Introduction
xix

The Modern Century

1 *The Modern Century*
3

I City of the End of Things 5
II Improved Binoculars 27
III *Clair de lune intellectuel* 48

The Arts

2 Current Opera: A Housecleaning
73

3 Ballet Russe
76

Copyrighted material

4 The Jooss Ballet
79
5 Frederick Delius
83
6 Three-Cornered Revival at Headington
87
7 Music and the Savage Breast
88
8 Men as Trees Walking
92
9 K.R. Srinivasa's *Lytton Strachey*
96
10 The Great Charlie
98
11 Reflections at a Movie
103
12 Music in the Movies
108
13 Max Graf's *Modern Music*
112
14 Abner Dean's *It's a Long Way to Heaven*
113
15 Russian Art
114
16 Herbert Read's *The Innocent Eye*
115
17 The Eternal Tramp
116

Copyrighted material

18 On Book Reviewing
123
19 Academy without Walls
126
20 Communications
134
21 The Renaissance of Books
140
22 Violence and Television
156
23 Introduction to *Art and Reality*
167

Politics, History, and Society

24 *Pro Patria Mori*
175
25 Wyndham Lewis: Anti-Spenglerian
178
26 War on the Cultural Front
184
27 Two Italian Sketches, 1939
188
28 G.M. Young's *Basic*
194
29 Revenge or Justice?
195
30 F.S.C. Northrop's *The Meeting of East and West*
197

Copyrighted material

31 Wallace Notestein's *The Scot in History*
201

32 Toynbee and Spengler
202

33 Gandhi
209

34 Ernst Jünger's *On the Marble Cliffs*
211

35 Dr. Kinsey and the Dream Censor
215

36 Cardinal Mindszenty
220

37 The Two Camps
222

38 Law and Disorder
224

39 Two Books on Christianity and History
226

40 Nothing to Fear but Fear
232

41 The Ideal of Democracy
235

42 The Church and Modern Culture
237

43 And There is No Peace
244

44 Caution or Dither?
246

Copyrighted material

45 Trends in Modern Culture
248
46 Regina versus the World
262
47 Oswald Spengler
265
48 Preserving Human Values
274
49 The War in Vietnam
282
50 The Two Contexts
283
51 The Quality of Life in the '70s
285
52 Spengler Revisited
297
53 The Bridge of Language
315
Notes
331
Emendations
381
Index
383

Copyrighted material

Preface

This volume contains almost all of Frye's published articles pertaining to twentieth-century art, politics, and culture. For many readers the showcase of the volume will be Frye's Whidden Lectures, delivered at McMaster University in 1967—the centenary year of the Canadian Confederation—and subsequently published as *The Modern Century*. Other relevant material will appear in the interviews which make up a later volume of the Collected Works (currently in preparation by Jean O'Grady), particularly many references to Marshall McLuhan, clearly both a stimulus and an irritant for much of Frye's work on electronic communications media from the 1960s until his death, and to Oswald Spengler, a formative influence on his early mental development. This volume traces chronologically Frye's contribution as an arts reviewer and essayist, before moving to a similar compilation of his work as a political commentator and analyst. The exception to this rule is the position given to *The Modern Century*, which opens the collection.

Headnotes to the individual items specify the copy-text, list all known reprintings in English of an item, and note the existence of typescripts and where they can be found in the Northrop Frye Fonds in Victoria University's E.J. Pratt Library. No prepublication typescript exists in the case of *The Modern Century*, although notes provided for his French translator clear up some problems of usage and meaning. The copy-text chosen is generally the first edition or the first printing for a journal contribution, which was often the only one carefully revised and proof-read by Frye himself. In some cases he did reread essays for inclusion in his own collections, such as *The Stubborn Structure*, which then becomes the source of the authoritative text. All substantive changes to the copy-text have been listed in an emendations list, with the source or explanation

Copyrighted material

The librarians at the Pratt library, University of Toronto, were invariably friendly and helpful to me on my visits to the Frye archive. The staff of the Penrose Library at the University of Denver offered me valued assistance. To everyone in the circulation and interlibrary loan departments I offer my warm thanks. Many of my colleagues have aided me in ways they may not have realized, but I must mention Jessica Munns, who kindly asked me to speak to our division on Frye and has always been the best kind of colleague, witty, irreverent, and lively. Bin Ramke and Robert Urquhart have also willingly exchanged views with me on these twentieth-century literary and cultural matters for a long time, often to my great advantage.

George Hunter supplied me with some typically stringent critical commentary on my introduction. Alvin Lee was confident that I was the man for this job, and I hope I have fulfilled my considerable obligation to him; together with Barbara McDonald of McMaster, he supplied me some important facts about Canadian institutions. I don't think I shall ever fulfil my obligations to Irene Gorak, who has been an incisive critic and a benevolent guide to the process of making a critical edition.

Copyrighted material

Credits

We wish to acknowledge the following sources for permission to reprint works previously published by them. We have not been able to determine the copyright status of all the works included in this volume, and welcome notice from any copyright holders who have been inadvertently omitted from these acknowledgments.

British Broadcasting Corporation for "Communications," from *The Listener* (1970).

Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission for "Summation," from *Symposium on Television Violence / Colloque sur la violence à télévision* (1976).

Indiana University Press for "The Renaissance of Books" and "Spengler Revisited," from *Spiritus Mundi* (1976).

Oxford University Press Canada for *The Modern Century* (1967).

Simon and Schuster, Inc. for the reply to a questionnaire, from *Authors Take Sides on Vietnam: Two Questions on the War in Vietnam Answered by the Authors of Several Nations*, ed. Cecil Woolf and John Bagguley (1967). © Copyright 1967 by Simon and Schuster.

University of Toronto Magazine for "The Quality of Life in the '70s," from the *University of Toronto Graduate* (1971).

Copyrighted material

With the exception of the items listed above, all works are printed courtesy of the Estate of Northrop Frye/Victoria University.

Copyrighted material

Abbreviations

AC *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.
BG *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*. Toronto: Anansi, 1971.
CW Collected Works of Northrop Frye
D *The Diaries of Northrop Frye, 1942–1955*. Ed. Robert D. Denham. CW, 8. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001.
DG *Divisions on a Ground: Essays on Canadian Culture*. Ed. James Polk. Toronto: Anansi, 1982.
DV *The Double Vision: Language and Meaning in Religion*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.
DW Oswald Spengler. *The Decline of the West*. 2 vols. in 1. New York: Knopf, 1939.
EI *The Educated Imagination*. Toronto: CBC, 1963.
FS *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947.
LN *The Late Notebooks of Northrop Frye, 1982–1990: Architecture of the Spiritual World*. Ed. Robert D. Denham. CW, 5–6. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.
LS *Northrop Frye on Literature and Society, 1936–1939: Unpublished Papers*. Ed. Robert D. Denham. CW, 10. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.
MC *The Modern Century*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967.
MD *The Myth of Deliverance: Reflections on Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983.
NF Northrop Frye
NFF Northrop Frye Fonds, Victoria University Library

Copyrighted material

NFCL *Northrop Frye on Culture and Literature: A Collection of Review Essays*. Ed. Robert D. Denham. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

NFHK *The Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp, 1932–1939*. Ed. Robert D. Denham. CW, 1–2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.

NFR *Northrop Frye on Religion: Excluding "The Great Code" and "Words with Power."* Ed. Alvin A. Lee and Jean O'Grady. CW, 4. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

OE *On Education*. Markham, Ont.: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1988.

RW *Reading the World: Selected Writings, 1935–1976*. Ed. Robert D. Denham. New York: Peter Lang, 1990.

SR *A Study of English Romanticism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

StS *The Stubborn Structure: Essays on Criticism and Society*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970.

WE *Northrop Frye's Writings on Education*. Ed. Jean O'Grady and Goldwin French. CW, 7. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.

Copyrighted material

1933 to 1945, marking Frye's emergence as a critic at large in reviews of Puccini, the Russian and the Jooss ballet companies, Surrealist exhibitions, and movies by Charlie Chaplin and Walt Disney, usually in the pages of the *Canadian Forum*. The second phase begins in 1946, when he wrote an editorial commentary on the Nuremberg trials. At this time, as the editors of the *Forum* recognized, old alliances lost their authority in a world "cut in two by forces that are not primarily European, but Asiatic and American."[2] As a member of the *Forum*'s editorial committee—and managing editor from 1948 to 1950—Frye reshaped the journal's policy from the directly political position of his predecessor, George Grube, preferring instead to function as a commentator on what he called "public affairs."[3] By focusing less on the policy implications of postwar political developments, he freed himself for the long investigation of cultural symbolism and political structures that culminated in the publication of *The Modern Century*.

From this date until his death in 1991, Frye's career enters a third phase. He now pursues the implications for the scholar-humanist of a society where knowledge and leisure are no longer minority pursuits but everybody's business. Frye acknowledges the enormous investments in image and drama made by postindustrial societies that simulate works of art in their everyday transactions and ostensible commitment to an ideology of perpetual freedom. Frye is a shrewd critic of such societies, unwilling to swallow the message that the present is the measure of all things, but he is not involved in a futile rearguard battle on behalf of "high" art. Instead he attempts practical cooperation with other groups concerned with cultivating and educating the human capacity to structure the world—social and mental health workers, radio and television producers, scientists—and compares their constructions of the world with those of art. In this way, Frye maintains his commitment to the crucial evidence of the arts that he first assimilated through Oswald Spengler, Wyndham Lewis, and André Malraux. As the opening paragraphs of his lecture "The Academy without Walls" make clear, however, he liberalizes the message of these authors. He shares their recognition that the standard canon has disappeared in the light of the enormous past opened up for artists by museums, reproductions, academies, and the entire "culture industry," but Frye pledges his loyalty to "the educational process" as both the source and the public for a self-aware art. For him, as for Habermas, the educational structure provides a buffer zone of free discussion and cooperation not only against what Malraux, Lewis,

Copyrighted material

Frye's own rapid ascent up the educational ladder registers how far this program of educational expansion and spiritual enrichment had already translated into upward mobility for a talented minority. Yet his is a restless mind, perpetually suspicious of the monopolist tendencies the institutionalized imagination possesses. If we compare the views put forward by Matthew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy* in 1869 with those Frye expresses nearly a century later, the grounds of his suspicion will become clearer. Arnold looks to culture as "a centre of authority" in an industrial, class-conscious, and faction-ridden Victorian England. He sees culture as an impersonal "idea of perfection . . . an *inward* condition of the mind and spirit." Arnold is careful to temper this Romantic inwardness with the educational, literary, and administrative activities of a Victorian state defined in terms of "the nation in its collective and corporate character, entrusted with stringent powers for general advantage, and controlling individual wills in the name of an interest wider than that of individuals."[4] If Arnold's program can be understood as synecdochic for the nineteenth-century effort to expand educational opportunity and political enlightenment, then it is also representative of the Victorian fear of inwardness unregulated by institutional restraint.

This is something that it did not take Frye long to recognize. In his first critical book *Fearful Symmetry*, he remarks that Blake's

> conception of culture as the source of order in society and as more complete in its appeal than religion, may remind us to some extent of *Culture and Anarchy*; enough, at any rate, to make us wonder why so strongly "Hebraic" a thinker and despiser of the Classics as Blake should hold such views. Blake believed, like Arnold, that culture preserves society: he did not believe, as Arnold apparently did, that society preserves culture. Society to Blake is an eternally unwilling recipient of culture: every genius must fight society no matter what his age. Arnold's view of both culture and society is conservative, traditional and evolutionary; Blake's is radical, apocalyptic and revolutionary. (*FS*, 90)

For Frye, Arnold's program remained too mired in the Victorian respectability and common sense it purported to despise. The network of institutions that Arnold took for granted made his dissent from Victorian values too comfortable and complacent. For Frye, Arnold had elevated the local manners of his Rugby and Oxford into those of culture as a whole. At the beginning of *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye pounces on

Copyrighted material

Arnold's dismissal of Ruskin's allegorical interpretation of *Othello* in *Munera Pulveris*. What Arnold sees as only "a piece of extravagance" is for Frye a genuine attempt to re-envision the play. Frye comments:

> it is Arnold who is the provincial. Ruskin has learned his trade from the great iconological tradition which comes down through Classical and Biblical scholarship into Dante and Spenser, both of whom he had studied carefully, and which is incorporated in the medieval cathedrals he had pored over in such detail. Arnold is assuming, as a universal law of nature, certain "plain sense" critical axioms which were hardly heard of before Dryden's time and which can assuredly not survive the age of Freud and Jung and Frazer and Cassirer. (*AC*, 10)

"Plain sense" cannot survive the exegetical strenuousness of modern thought; nor can it penetrate the visionary core of canonical achievement. At the University of Toronto, Frye was lucky enough to find instructors for whom "plain sense" was not the ultimate arbiter of intellectual inquiry, and who could strengthen his own intellectual resolve to forge his alliances elsewhere. From them, he learned that the ancient universities did not hold a monopoly of intellectual production and creative achievement.

III Canadian Cooperation

When Frye's lifelong association with Toronto began in 1929, it appeared an unlikely site for the formation of an alternative model of cultural criticism. As Frye remembered it, to a newcomer Toronto was a repressive, orthodox, and homogeneous city where an ostensibly fervent alliance to the British Empire masked the machinations of American technology and capital that already threatened to control the city's future. Yet at Victoria College and in the larger university community, Frye found pockets of resistance. His entry as a probationary student and subsequent outstanding performance in the honour course as a student of English literature and philosophy are charted comprehensively in *Northrop Frye's Writings on Education* (2000), edited by Jean O'Grady and Goldwin French. In the intense atmosphere of a collegiate university with the palpable but loosely defined religious connection the editors describe, Frye embarked on a course of study largely purged of the "electives" and devotion to the authority of "the textbook" that so

Copyrighted material

bedevilled college education in North America.[5] Here he could accordingly equip himself with enough knowledge of his subject to lay the foundations for the "scientific" study of literature exemplified in *Anatomy of Criticism*.

The university also gave Frye access to intellectuals unconstrained by disciplinary boundaries but committed to systematic enquiry. As Frye recognized, most of his teachers had begun in fields other than English: John Robins had initially been a student of German, E.J. Pratt of psychology, and the department head, Pelham Edgar, had taught French. If English at Toronto was a comprehensive, orderly field that marched from *Beowulf* to Hardy unimpeded by student choice or preference, its march was not an entirely linear one. Frye recalled how Robins would illuminate ballad tradition by referring to Hemingway, just as Edgar's Shakespeare lectures would break off to consider Woolf and James. Such methods licensed Frye's lifelong habit of seeing literature as an imaginary museum where authors were not separated by time, but united by structure. Moreover, it was a short step from the Robins who saw Hemingway and the poet of *Sir Patrick Spens* on a common plane to the Frye who could regard Charlie Chaplin as the logical fulfilment of devices and predicaments dramatized in Shakespeare's problem comedies.

The University of Toronto that Frye entered just a month before the Wall Street crash did not subscribe to the more pessimistic tenets of early twentieth-century thought. Frye's teachers endorsed neither the ideas of cultural catastrophe bruited at this time by Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and Huizinga, nor the dogmatic anti-romanticism so pervasive in modernist poetics. Robins's scholarship in the ballad tradition and Edgar's work as a student of Shelley acknowledged the way the Romantic imagination articulated in symbolic language the hopes of the new communities formed in the light of the late eighteenth-century revolutions. Through Pratt's poetry, Frye was invited to see Canada in terms of the same massive expansionary energies. Understanding the national culture demanded an understanding of the dynamism of industrial societies, not a retreat into the mythology of "the organic society" before the coming of the machine.

Perhaps most important of all for a future culture critic, Toronto reversed the tendency of modern universities to produce specialist scholars. Some of the most distinguished academics in the university were figures who, like Harold Innis or Charles Cochrane, had started their scholarly careers in one field and redefined that area completely in

Copyrighted material

subsequent work. As an economic historian Innis had won great acclaim with the publication of *The Fur-Trade in Canada* (1930) and *The Cod Fisheries: The History of an International Economy* (1940). These books viewed the history of Canada in terms of the "staple" products developed by its various regions. In a final series of monographs, *Empire and Communications* (1950), *The Bias of Communication* (1951), and *Changing Concepts of Time* (1952)—all so important for Frye's own *The Modern Century*—Innis engaged with communication systems and their function as the hidden engine of Canada and all modern technologically driven societies.

Cochrane's first book, *Thucidydes and the Science of History* (1929), exhibited all the virtues of scholarly caution, apparently resisting the innovations by which F.M. Cornford transformed the canonical ancient historian into a tragic poet and ritual dramatist. Yet Ernest Sirluck's memory of a Cochrane who "was eager to talk" and "felt somewhat isolated in his department, which is why he would stand in the cloister outside his office hand rolling cigarettes ... hoping to find someone interesting to talk to,"[6] is consistent with the professional identity of a scholar who, over a decade later, would publish the massive multidisciplinary study *Christianity and Classical Culture* (1940). The most innovative scholars at the University of Toronto cultivated habits of slow maturation culminating in massive production, production that often moved far beyond their initial field of inquiry. There was much here for the embryonic cultural critic to learn from, in a university culture that was itself neither genteel nor specialist.

Like many members of the university, Frye found a venue for his earliest efforts as a cultural commentator and literary journalist in the *Canadian Forum*, a monthly journal launched in October 1920 as a successor to the University of Toronto's *The Rebel*. The *Forum*'s hostility to "doctrines, whose authority springs mainly from their length of days," aligns it with iconoclastic twentieth-century journals like *The Dial* or *The Egoist*. Frye would have agreed with the opening editorial announcement that "Too much of our news is coloured and distorted, before ever it reaches the Canadian press. Too often our convictions are borrowed from London, Paris, or New York. Real independence is not the product of tariffs and treaties. It is a spiritual thing. No country has reached its full stature, which makes its goods at home, but not its faith and its philosophy." The emphasis on imagination and mind as the origin of any lasting spiritual emancipation is one that Frye and the founders of the *Forum* shared, as well as the commitment to "freer and more informed

Copyrighted material

country. Fairley had argued vigorously for a journal whose constituency would be the nation, not the university community. A native of Barnsley, a brilliant graduate of the German department at Leeds University, and a lifelong student of Goethe, Kleist, and Herder, Fairley shared none of the anti-Romantic assumptions of Eliot or Pound. The most significant feature of Fairley's work for Frye lay in his view of Romanticism as the last great popular movement, as one that could still enrich the spiritual life of the twentieth-century world. Fairley translated the Romantic belief in the creative potential of the community into an intensely practical program for educating the Canadian public in the arts.

In the first number of the *Forum*, Fairley's "A Peep at the Art Galleries" reported on his renewed contact with the London art galleries. On returning to one of the world's great cultural capitals, he felt excitement tempered by reservation. If the paintings he viewed at London's avant-garde galleries exhibited remarkable technical proficiency, they were also "all a little too coldly conceived, too intellectual, too theoretical." Fairley knew that such heavy emphasis on form and theory ran entirely opposite to the legacy of Romanticism. He argued that

> theory is not enough to produce great art. It is only one side of the story and the other side is some objective world in which the theory can lose itself, find itself, dissolve itself. Call it what you will. The place for theory in the finished work is that of the skylark that loses itself in the blue, heard but not seen, forgotten yet flooding the air with melody. In many of these modern paintings the theory sits on the fence and croaks. Or it just stares at you coldly, which is still worse.[9]

For well over twenty years, Fairley regularly attempted to convince his readers of the fusion of imaginative power and passionate social concern he found in Joseph Conrad, O.M. Doughty, and Hugh MacDiarmid, but which he found strangely wanting in much modern art. He attempted to embody these qualities in his own creative work, which ranged from a Lawrentian playlet on the fishermen of coastal Yorkshire to lyrics reminiscent of Blake's sketches in their visionary simplicity.

Frye's debts to Eric Havelock, who joined Victoria College as a teacher of Classics in 1929 and whose commentaries on everyday events in Toronto and the larger direction of world politics appeared in the *Forum* throughout the 1930s, are more difficult to evaluate. At first

Copyrighted material

ing his discoveries to his readers in a lucid and unpatronizing prose. Whatever their differences in style and concern, Fairley and Havelock both assume the existence of a public capable of comprehending, weighing, and acting on its deliberations. Neither endorses the embattled modernist assumption that cultural questions can only be conveyed by a solitary outsider to a small group of fervent disciples.

This complex legacy of cooperative socialism, synoptic scholarship, and visionary thinking shaped Frye's subsequent efforts as a cultural critic. It enabled him to filter out some of the authoritarian and elitist assumptions of high modernism, while still acknowledging that form and convention remain the necessary conditions for artistic utterance and critical understanding. This committed Frye to a position that acknowledged the power of art, while recognizing its interplay with the larger complex of representations available in society as a whole. Finally, it led him to recognize that the "distinctly Canadian" could never really dislodge itself from the larger issues that threatened the stability of the world outside Canada. In a way Kant or Schiller might not have appreciated, the loyalties of a twentieth-century cultural critic were always to what might be called *humanity*—to a public not so much educated as capable of education—however much he might owe to his local roots.

IV Frye's Beginnings

The years immediately preceding Frye's earliest essays in this collection were peculiar "stop–go" ones for cultural criticism. T.S. Eliot's contributions to *The Dial* between 1920 and 1929, Edmund Wilson's journalism for *The New Republic*, and Gilbert Seldes' *The Seven Lively Arts* (1924), all signal a collective shift away from a narrowly classical yardstick for artistic achievement. For Eliot in the 1920s an abrasive, insolent music hall performance by Little Titch or Marie Lloyd was a more enriching cultural event than a Gilbert Murray translation of Euripides performed by Sybil Thorndike at the Old Vic for a self-approving audience. Wilson's quest for an alternative to the genteel tradition led him to Tennessee sharecroppers, New York burlesque shows, and Hopi snake dances. Seldes paid this alternative culture almost rapturous tribute in *The Seven Lively Arts*, where he celebrated the twin commitment to craft and anarchy embodied in a Chaplin movie or a Catskill revue. With its vaudeville acts, burlesque shows, and silent movies, early twentieth-century

Copyrighted material

culture in the United States was clearly developing along non-Arnoldian lines.

By 1929, as Frye began his undergraduate education, this emancipating moment was about to end. The Wall Street crash curbed the exuberance of the decade, eroding all hopes of stable prosperity within an unrestrained capitalism. In 1933, as Frye signalled his own dissent from the conventional pieties of patriotism, Eliot spelled out the cultural implications of his new loyalties to Anglo-Catholicism, monarchy, and classicism. In the lectures he delivered at the University of Virginia that year on "Tradition and Modern Literature" Eliot celebrated tradition, not as the innovative, sceptical artist of *The Sacred Wood*, but as a reactionary Christian, nostalgic for a homogeneous community. When they appeared a year later as *After Strange Gods*, Frye could hardly have welcomed the fortress culture severed from the twentieth century that Eliot erected for his Southern audience. Nor could he have enjoyed reading Eliot's assessment that "the chances for the reestablishment of a native culture are perhaps better here than in New England. You are farther away from New York; you have been less industrialized and less invaded by foreign races; and you have a more opulent soil."[11] This was not a usable past for a Canadian critic.

Frye's own position is sharply opposed to Eliot's. Where Eliot links culture to custom, creed, and region, Frye constructs his own tradition from very different sources. Having already noted the patterns of imagery shared by the anonymous ballad writers and an emerging Romanticism, he now found these images surfacing again in the new works he reviewed for the *Forum*. As his inventory of buried cities, enchanted gardens, and demonic machinery expanded, he began to wonder whether what Eliot called "heresy" in his lectures was the route to a lost truth. Frye also began to formulate an alternative model for the needs that art met and the conventions that it forged to meet these needs. In "Poetry and Drama" (1951) Eliot renewed his claim that "It is a function of all art to give some perception of an order in life, by imposing an order upon it."[12] In contrast, Frye saw dramatic production in terms of a shared endeavour that welds artistic skill to community practice, reminding his readers that "music and drama are the two great group art forms; that is, they are ensemble performances before audiences" (88). Art's origins, its specific manifestations in concert hall or gallery, and its continuing existence among future audiences, all rely on the cooperative labour of participant and public.

Copyrighted material

To Frye, Eliot is ultimately an Arnold in Yankee's clothing, always hankering for a metropolitan sophistication even as he purports to despise it. When Eliot reviews London opera for *The Dial*, he regrets its survival as "one of the last remainders of a former excellence of life, a sustaining symbol even for those who seldom went."[13] Frye knows that the Versailles most familiar to his audience will be the Versailles of the divisive peace treaty, not the Versailles of *le roi soleil*, and he sets about understanding how opera and ballet can expand the perceptions of citizens who belong to that volatile and divided world. Ultimately, his criticism seeks to estimate the function of ballet for a cooperative modern culture, not as Eliot's monument to high living. Frye argues that ballet belongs to a family of "dynamic arts appealing . . . to a group consciousness . . . depending on group production and group response" (79). For Frye, high art and an expanding audience are not necessarily contradictory, and no unpassable gulf separates Stravinsky from Disney. Frye never believes the group must *necessarily* slide into the mob, and this is a view shared by few early twentieth-century writers on art. Eliot's community is always ready-formed; for Frye, the whole challenge of art comes from the way its cooperative undertakings perpetually expand the horizons and the hopes of the communities responsive to it.

Yet just as Barker Fairley recognized the anxiety that was the underside of Canadian sublimity, Frye also acknowledges the "primitive fears of an uncanny and hostile world" (88) that shadow the utopian potential of human communities. This acknowledgment does not lead Frye to endorse Eliot's neoclassicist "order." Instead, he proposes an imaginative synthesis that fuses Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and Greek ritual to resurrect "the spirit of life and growth that died when the year died, and rose again at the year's rebirth." He then moves outward to his own audience, adding that the Greeks "were cursed with that, and we are born under that curse, but we and our children don't have to keep on applauding gangsters and allowing them to tear us to pieces with bombshells to the end of time. If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" (91). The quotation from the dislodged visionary-socialist Shelley indicates the gap between Frye's loyalties and those of many of his contemporaries. Frye understands culture as plot as well as imagery, and its plot takes on the shape of a collective hope and commitment to action, a deep *identification* with the imagery of a reborn world in garden, forest, or city. Such imagery promises the restoration of a beneficent pattern to the world through the construction of images congruent

Copyrighted material

with our most benignly utopian desires. In the political world of the 1930s, Frye sees only natural depravity actualized on the theatre of world politics. The cyclic structures of drama and art, on the other hand, hint at the self-renewing powers of humanity. Unlike Eliot, the Southern Agrarians, or the contributors to F.R. Leavis's *Scrutiny*, Frye does not see "the organic society" as demarcating the sole horizons for any valid cultural projections. He knows that Canada's existence is inseparable from the expansive energies that forged Blake and the industrial revolution alike. Frye's is a world where the imagined cities of Plato, the green world of Shakespeare, and the cartoon fantasies of Disney can exist on a common axis, as so many signals of a permanent hope for a renewed society.

By the late 1930s, North American intellectuals estranged by Eliot were looking for deliverance in quite different directions. To this group, Edmund Wilson embodied a powerful alternative to Eliot's example. The publication of *After Strange Gods* in 1934 crowned Wilson's own disenchantment with Eliot's leadership. Only a year later, Wilson journeyed to Odessa to begin his quest to redefine the relationship between politics and letters. In a trail-blazing essay on "Marxism and Literature" (1937), Wilson argued that "in practising and prizing literature, we must not be unaware of the first efforts of the human spirit to transcend literature itself."[14] Throughout this period, in such essays as "Flaubert's Politics" and "A.E. Housman" (1937), Wilson showed how nineteenth- and twentieth-century artists repeatedly arrived at the very brink of imagining the extinction of the existing social and political order but stopped short of supplying any vision of a new society. After a battery of preliminary sketches published in *The New Republic*, Wilson's blueprint for this transformed society, *To the Finland Station*—arguably the last great nineteenth-century historical novel—appeared in 1940.

Wilson welcomed Russian Communism as the logical terminus of a rational, scientific, progressive, bourgeois nineteenth-century Europe. For this ultimate fulfilment of humanity's emancipation, he looked to Michelet, Marx, Engels, and Lenin, the heroes of *To the Finland Station*, whom he fused in a kind of Balzacian *comédie humaine*. With its panoramic sweep and clearly-defined dramatic conflicts, Wilson's version of "the modern century" wrestled the responsibility for progress from a bourgeoisie that had lost its way. The torch of the future passed to men of action, not artist-dreamers.

Frye could hardly have viewed the emancipation Wilson delivered as

Copyrighted material

who inspired Frye to see the world as so many imaginative constructs and to understand the centrality of artistic evidence for the aspiring cultural critic. Spengler's cultural criticism, with its ambitious aim of plotting the geopolitical unconscious of an epoch, had first captured Frye's imagination when he read *The Decline of the West* (1919–22) and "practically slept with Spengler under my pillow for several years" (270). Yet Frye's is a Spengler with a difference, a virtuoso of visionary narrative, not a gloomy determinist. Frye reverses Spengler's assumptions about the long winter about to descend over the modern century. In Frye's eyes, this nightmare technopolis is one option for modern society, but it is not the only option. For Frye draws very different conclusions from the vast gulf that separates culture from nature, arguing that its existence shows that nothing is determined in human affairs, even though "everything contemporaneous in a given society is related" (181). Although Wyndham Lewis in *Time and Western Man* (1927) saw this as Spengler's own bleak capitulation to the spirit of the age, Frye discerns in his encyclopedia of cultural symbolism an order undetectable to those caught between the dogmas of Wall Street and Red Square. Ultimately, *The Decline of the West* enabled Frye to forge the latent affinities between twentieth-century technological and artistic styles in *The Modern Century*. Reading Spengler encouraged Frye to develop the historical parallels that elevated analogies between Classical Rome and modern Europe from guesswork to creative intuition. This schema for the "seasons" of cultural development allowed him to see the past at work in the present, to juxtapose Chaplin's problem comedy period with Shakespeare's. Far from being a capitulation to *Zeitgeist*, Spengler's book liberalized Hegel's *geist*.

If it is Spengler who awakened Frye's power to see the created world as so many imaginative constructions and established the centrality of the arts for cultural analysis, then it is Frye himself who makes the connection between Spengler and less drastically pessimistic theorists also concerned with culture as a system of symbolic thinking. Much of this thinking occurs beneath the level of the conscious mind. As Emile Durkheim recognizes in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), the exchange of coloured paper for goods and services belongs to the *sans dire*, the "taken-for-granted" features of everyday social reality in Paris or London. But it is no less binding for all that, as bankrupts and forgers rapidly discover. To see modern culture as a spectacular instance of symbolic breakdown—as Eliot, Benda, Hulme[15] and a host of twentieth-

Copyrighted material

Frye interprets Chaplin's comedies as updated reworkings of the religious ordeal enacted in pageant cycles or the visionary images of religious painting. This time, however, it is the soul of the West, as in Spengler, not the individual soul, that Frye sees as the disputed entity. The dark shadow of contemporary Europe descends over *The Great Dictator*, even down to the ineffectual German opposition to Hitler. In *Monsieur Verdoux,* Frye must confront one of his own traumas: the meaning of the great crash, an event he saw as so significant in his own experience. In Verdoux the Bluebeard, a man superfluous for international capital, Frye sees the victim turned revenger, a man able to turn the economic system against itself with murderously successful results. But Verdoux's is a Pyrrhic victory that only drags the world further into bloodshed. It is the outsider—the Huck Finn or the tramp—whose nonconformity offers the germs of a more humane alternative to existing society; in the tramp's detachment from social expectations, Frye perceives the potential for new deliverance. By 1948, Frye was ready to present "The Argument of Comedy" as an extension and elaboration of ideas he had worked out in his reviews of Chaplin. The *Forum*'s continuous faith in what it called "the common man" received perhaps one of the most powerful and original tributes as Frye recast the argument, imagery, and protagonists of comedy in terms of his hopes for a new world purged of tyranny.

V Frye and Modern Culture

By 1946, as ideological divisions between East and West widened, an independent Canadian response to political events became harder to maintain. Yet this often precarious, vituperative atmosphere did not stifle sustained debate about cultural policies inside the *Forum.* Despite unsettled leadership (between 1946 and 1950 editorial responsibilities passed from Eleanor Godfrey to George Grube, to Frye himself, and finally to Alan Creighton) and an understandably uncertain response to the politics of a nuclear age, the *Canadian Forum* continued to keep alive the ideal of cultural cooperation. Even as cold war rhetoric often hardened within its own pages, the journal entertained discussions on the provision of national and provincial libraries and the role of UNESCO, and expanded its arts reviewing to include discussion of radio and music programming.

In the university at large, the new structures of citizenship regnant in

Copyrighted material

the postwar world did not go unexamined. Harold Innis's pioneering studies of global communication pointed to the dangers of American dominance in this sphere. For Innis, a global communications industry controlled by American media like *Time* and *Newsweek* constituted the greatest threat to the rational public discussion on which the *Forum* had staked its hopes for Canadian democracy throughout the 1930s. In *The Crucifixion of Intellectual Man* (1951), a new translation of *Prometheus Bound* accompanied by a lengthy and speculative commentary, Eric Havelock, now a member of Harvard's Classics department, used the evidence of Classical antiquity to ask new questions about the modern state. From the many permutations of the Prometheus myth, Havelock detected the fear that humanity might not be at the centre of creation at all, and the suspicion that "we are a temporary event . . . the territory on which we have a foothold is like a boulder on a mountain slide."[16] What did the acceptable instruments of measuring social reality—individual, city, nation—mean in a world dominated by two vast ideological systems?

From 1946, Frye's own topical, terse commentaries maintain a close and lively concern with unfolding events in the postwar world. They consider the strained border relations between the United States and Canada, the potential stress points of world politics, the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, the metamorphosis of the United States from anarchist comedian to global policeman, and the sexual habits of the North American male. Frye also periodically reviews the efforts of Karl Löwith, Reinhold Niebhur, F.S.C. Northrop, and Arnold Toynbee to synthesize politics, religion, and science into a non-Marxist philosophical history. He is not slow to expose the ideologically driven energies that fuel so many of these works. Paradoxically, the period that saw "the end of ideology" was also the period in which Frye's awareness of ideology as a social force—as a set of symbols designed to elicit collective allegiance and thus to fix the shape of the future—was at its peak. At this time, Frye's method of understanding the overall direction of social reality through interpretation of its images took on an even sharper significance for a Cold War society where local symbols now assumed strategic significance. In a context where large "general histories" all too often seemed a covert means of making the world safe for the American way of life, Frye's is a sceptical voice.

Many readers will consider Frye's *The Modern Century* as the crown of these labours. In January 1967, Canada's centenary year of federation, Frye followed Robert Oppenheimer, Sir Ronald Syme, and Anthony

Copyrighted material

Blunt as Whidden lecturer at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. The series had originated in 1954 as McMaster's tribute to the Reverend Howard P. Whidden, described by the University's principal in 1967 as "a man of striking appearance, unusual dignity, deep Christian conviction, and ready tolerance" (3). Whidden shared Frye's Protestant faith, and his commitment to public service and to Canadian academic excellence. By 1967, the reach of the Whidden Lectures stretched far beyond Canada. Their subject matter engaged with the twentieth century's panic and fear as well as its widening educational opportunities and expanding democratic structures: the series included lectures on apartheid, avant-garde art and the Spanish Civil War, colonial elites, and nuclear weaponry. So it is perhaps not surprising that this was for Frye not simply a celebratory occasion, but an opportunity to extrude the spiritual pattern from the mass of wars, technical innovations, and artistic experiments in a Western-dominated world between 1867 and 1967.

Possibly uniquely in his canon, Frye's cultural analysis *of* the twentieth century frequently moves against the grain of his hopes *for* the century. In his first lecture Frye identifies "the alienation of progress" (11) as the latent feature that saps the morale of the modern citizen. His second talk anatomizes the various realisms that have made modern art a resistance movement dedicated to overcoming this pervasive self-estrangement. In his closing address, Frye offers his hopes for an "open mythology" (65) able to respond to modernity's collective desires and fears without transforming them into structures of domination. Through the free discussion of the stories that matter for societies Frye seeks to maintain twentieth-century Canada's commitment to cooperative democracy and the visionary imagination. He wants to avoid the opportunistic muddle his *Canadian Forum* columns repeatedly found so unsatisfactory in the daily operations of democracy. He hopes also to steer clear of the violent solutions to ideological impasse so characteristic of the twentieth century.

The three chapters of *The Modern Century* show Frye at his most versatile: as cultural diagnostician, historian of the avant-garde, sceptical analyst of the new communication technologies, and educator-humanist. He continues his search for the institutions that can licitly command a Canadian intellectual's loyalty in the twentieth century. These questions of loyalty bring Frye wheeling back to his earliest essays in cultural criticism, when the brazenly patriotic call of "King and Country" made pressing and irrational claims on a young intellectual's allegiances.

Copyrighted material

There were also more immediate reasons for reconsidering these questions. Only two years previously, McMaster teacher and Canadian philosopher George Grant's *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (1965) had announced the demise of Canadian national sovereignty. Grant's lament was occasioned by the fall in 1963 of John Diefenbaker, the Canadian prime minister, after a controversy about national defence policy. Since 1957, Canada's participation in NATO had committed the country to a nuclear defence. By 1963, however, Diefenbaker appeared undecided about the purchase of the nuclear warheads on which his own administration had staked national security. Many political commentators ascribed the ensuing crisis to the prime minister's Hamlet-like capacity for indecision. Grant, however, interpreted it in terms of a national trauma, arguing that Canadians were now indistinguishable from the Americans whose presiding ideology of a mastered nature and a managerial political system they completely shared. With what sometimes appears like a certain grim relish, Grant described an imminent epoch of global U.S. domination in which questions of national loyalties would be ultimately irrelevant for Canadians. Grant did not stop at describing Canada's long slide into Americanism since the Second World War. He tracked the origins of American technocracy to the Lockean "contractualism" that effectively severed politics from moral categories. By this point, of course, Grant was on his way to estrangement from any political system at all, with the possible exception of that which prevailed in Classical antiquity.

Given the popularity of Grant's book in Canada, his was not a testimony that Frye could afford to disregard, even though Grant's analysis ran counter to Frye's own understanding of what nationalism meant in the modern age. When Grant invoked the normative properties of the nation, he ignored how often twentieth-century nationalism had functioned coercively. When Grant spoke of the traditional loyalties that bind subject to city and nation, he raised not only the shaping values but also the specific conditions of the Athenian city-state to permanent authority. Canada could never have been conceived in a world where the organic society was the ruling model of civil association. Grant was not among the audience for the Whidden Lectures, but his passionate pessimism shaped an important strand of Frye's argument.

When Frye described the unease in "the emotional relation to the future" (18) that unpredictable rapid change brings to the modern citizen, he may also have had another Canadian thinker in his sights. In

Copyrighted material

posits a coherent objective among artists: that of delivering back to the human being "the forms he had created" (31). Frye acknowledges that human groups fear no one more than the gift-bearer, but emphasizes that such fear derives from the wholesale dependence on the myths of "stupid realism" (33) imposed by the communications industry on modern citizens. Against these he pits the dynamic realism, perpetually adjusting itself to changes in consciousness, space, time, and environment, that propels the work of Turner, Eliot, or Joyce. Each of these artists elicits the audience's participation in the construction of illusion. Each shares a modern tendency to prefer "the imperfect work engaged in history to the perfected masterpiece that pulls away from time" (39). This is not true, Frye thinks, of television or electronic media as currently organized. Unlike McLuhan, from whose *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media* he borrows much of his imagery at the same time as he annihilates its historical argument and its technological determinism, Frye sees television as more market than rite. He deplores its continuous incitements to consumption. He sees its advertisements and rituals as only "counter-communication," not the expansion and redefinition of our categories of perception he finds in the best modern art. The closing example he draws from Genet's *The Balcony*, however, raises issues to be revisited in his last lecture. Genet's world admits authority only in parodic form, and it is the crisis of authority that Arnold himself recognizes as the central problem of modern society in *Culture and Anarchy*. Frye has thus positioned himself to reopen the questions raised in a book that appeared just ninety-eight years before his own lectures.

Like Arnold, Frye recognizes the existence of three major social tiers. In "*Clair de lune intellectuel*," he identifies these as the political, economic, and leisure spheres. Frye argues that the leisure sphere now enjoys the same structural importance for modern societies as the political and economic spheres did for previous societies. He returns to the galleries, museums, and exhibitions that were his beat in the Ontario of the 1930s. These activities are now no longer retreats from a world governed by industry, but are themselves "a rival form of society" (48) and "a structure of education" (59). Frye emphasizes that his preferred "structure of education" cannot end when its recipients reach twenty-one, and that it cannot reach the status of "a rival form of society" just by drilling an elite with great thoughts from the past. Instead, Frye sees the university as the site for learning the "myths of concern" that, in *A Study of English Romanticism*, a volume published a year after *The*

Copyrighted material

The Modern Century, the world of the tiger, where predatory appetites and destructive tendencies have free rein. It is also a world where in the West, at any rate, the tiger has disguised itself as the gift-horse, offering goods, services, and leisure for all who are able to afford to tune in to its continuous barrage of electronically produced counter-communication. A surfeit of aggression and desire faces the contemporary citizen at every turn. What can the humanities offer as a more tolerable version of society?

One of Frye's toughest assignments is to maintain the intellectual momentum for the project of cooperation in a period of affluence, inflation, and limitless but well-concealed potential for destruction. In the 1930s, as Mussolini and Hitler rose to power and unemployment figures and hunger marches lengthened, apologists for the utopian imperative had a fairly captive audience for their message. These are not the conditions Frye faced in the last thirty years of his life, however, as a managerial society disguises market conditions as utopia itself. How can Frye's continued commitment to the values of Canadian cooperation maintain its persuasive power even as its institutional presence fades from national politics? What answers has Frye to the challenge of American ideology as it saturates Canadian airwaves?

Frye's arguments for cooperation rest on four main pillars. The first strand of Frye's critique comes with his analysis of society as it is, an analysis that emphasizes the psychological and social destructiveness of the order managerial society tries to persuade us at every moment to take for granted. Second, Frye makes a quiet but unwavering restatement of the value possessed by traditional means of communication—books, images, and works of art. Third, Frye reconceptualizes the social function of the images and narratives dispersed through such agencies, stringing them together into a larger narrative of "the world man is trying to build out of nature" and of the identity crises he encounters every day in the neurotic order he is encouraged to accept as natural. Fourth, Frye recasts the university not as an elite finishing school or factory for knowledge production, but as a site for the preservation, construction, performance, interpretation, and transmission of the alternative social realities that can rescue human society from alienation.

One of Frye's few ventures into the orthodox history of ideas, "Tenets of Modern Culture" (no. 42, 1950), recognizes the dominance of the United States in modern civilization and the consequent dominance of American social thinking in the world. Too bad, then, that for Frye,

Copyrighted material

American social thinking is so deeply antisocial, amounting to no more than the unbridled pursuit of self interest. Frye summarizes its central axioms as a belief that "the chief end of man is to improve his own lot in the natural world, and the essential meaning of human life is the progressive removal of the obstacles presented by nature, including atavistic impulses in man himself" (238). Such assumptions for Frye have their logical terminus not in a participatory democracy but in a "managerial dictatorship" (238) that promises to maximize the satisfaction of ever-intensifying predatory habits and appetites. Yet even in this essay Frye is as concerned as ever with the *means* by which such a self-destructive machinery manages to appear self-evidently natural for its citizens. Frye points to the "vast and ruthless irony" (242) that controls its communication systems, the scapegoating rituals of its machinery for justice and governance, and "the sense of imminent apocalypse" (238) that overtakes so many people in their pursuit of the illusions they call life, liberty, and happiness.

Frye's social analysis rests on understanding society's systems of meaning. His introduction to *Art and Reality: A Casebook of Concern* (no. 23, 1986) judges that "nine-tenths of what we call reality is not some ineluctably existing group of objects or conditions 'out there': it is rather the rubbish left over from previous human constructs" (167). This emphasis on social reality as constructed and reinforced by cultural symbols dates back to his earliest essays when, as we have seen, he was more likely to discuss the arguments for and against war in terms of a symbolic event like the Oxford Union debate on "King and Country" than through a detailed analysis of imperial foreign policy. So in some senses, Frye was always a semiotician *avant le signe*, intensely interested in the social rituals—trials, coronations, book bannings—of the modern world.

Frye's assessment of postindustrial society is a harsh one. He sees the violence against nature that sustained nineteenth-century society as moving inward in the late twentieth-century, first of all through the perpetual solicitation of television "markets" and then by means of a perpetual cycle of drama disguised as "news." Like Raymond Williams,[18] Frye sees the late twentieth century as a uniquely "dramatized society," exposed to more dramatic productions in a year than any previous society in a lifetime. This continuous spectacular performance conceals for Frye "an undercurrent of hysteria . . . a hysteria I had heard before" (286). The unbridled forces unleashed on contemporary audiences fan "a

Copyrighted material

deliberate creation of hysteria, which takes such forms as violent language, a constant suppression of dissent, shouting slogans, breaking up meetings, invoking emergency measures to get rid of troublemakers" (291). From this perspective, the Vietnam war merely replays on a massive scale the scapegoating rituals that have erupted in American culture throughout its history, in the "Red Scare" of the early twentieth century, in the Nuremberg trials, and in the McCarthy hearings. Frye's inspection of the modern century's cultural symbolism moves from political critique to psychological diagnosis:

> Spokesmen on both American and Russian sides of the armaments race have said that there is no sense in an atomic war, nothing is to be gained by it, and that no rational person would start such a thing. Such statements do not reassure us . . . : a century that has seen Hitler and Stalin, besides many similar phenomena, knows that too many of the people who seek power within society are insane, and that such insanity is contagious and not isolating. (171)

The "rubbish left over from previous human constructs" (167) includes, most dangerously of all, the eagerness to use new technology to recycle old dramas of prohibition and revenge previously transmitted in "laws . . . myths and stories about the traditional gods and heroes, magical formulas, proverbs, and the like" (321).

Yet Frye continues to insist on the liberating potential of myth and narrative. In their recurring images and stories, Frye finds traces of latent affinities between culture and nature. He notes in them a property he calls "concern," but emphasizes that concern itself may either lock groups together in the defence of their identity ("This is a story about the purity of the Teutonic race and about the threat you Jews present to it") or may look beyond immediate realities to the "myths of deliverance" Frye finds in *Measure for Measure* and *Monsieur Verdoux*. Unlike Frank Kermode in *The Genesis of Secrecy* (1979), Frye does not attach this alternative layer of meaning to any occult properties in the stories themselves, nor does he entrust it to the custodianship of an interpretative community. (Frye's mistrust of experts and elites is one of the most constant and most appealing features of his cultural criticism.) The distinctive feature of narrative for Frye rests in its capacity for transformation, exemplified in the metamorphosis that takes *Monsieur Verdoux*, against all odds, from crime story to indictment of the world-as-it-is, and that,

Copyrighted material

with similar unexpectedness, propels *Measure for Measure* from captivity narrative to myth of deliverance. For Frye, Shakespeare's drama serves as ordeal *and* emancipation, not one or the other. In this way it brings our contemporary canons of behaviour to the clean light of accountability, before reconceptualizing them through an act of imaginative charity. This crystallizes in Frye's own modification of reception theory. For Frye any valuable work enjoys a dual identity, the first of which a reader construes "like other plays," the second of which releases "an exploding force in the mind that keeps destroying all the barriers of cultural prejudice that limit the response to it" (*MD*, vii). Such a view of narrative sees it ultimately as a release of benign and transforming energy, a counterforce to the merely repetitive momentum of a contemporary society that drives its audience only into a *cul de sac*.

Having defined the cultural function of narrative and its internal dynamic, Frye next considers the authority enjoyed by the book—the principal medium for narrative up to the arrival of television and cinema. Is any book only the monument to dead ideas and slow thinking proclaimed in Marshall McLuhan's influential *The Gutenberg Galaxy*? In "The Renaissance of Books" Frye emphasizes that the authority of books does not reside completely in their factual content, since an afternoon in any secondhand bookstore is an object lesson in the obsolescence of factual knowledge. Yet books do educate the reader, in ways no author can ever have anticipated. Frye reminds his audience that reading has historically fostered much less introverted habits than those encouraged by the electronic media now said to have superseded it. "When society still contained a number of illiterates, or habitual nonreaders," he observes, "a village community, say, would form around a man who could read aloud to them the news . . . and current literature" (150). As Frye argues, the authority of even factual or polemical works rests not so much in the certainties they embody as in the habits of cooperation they foster among their readers. In Frye's words:

> The written expository treatise looks at first sight like a dictatorial monologue, but this is a misunderstanding. Nothing of the hypnotic rhetoric of speech to a present audience is left in it: the author is forced, by the nature of his medium, to put all his cards on the table, to take his reader into his confidence, to appeal to nothing but the evidence of the argument itself. And so, however often it may fail in meeting the standards prescribed by its own physical shape, the expository or thesis-book remains the normal

Copyrighted material

university as an institution for learning about the structures of reality in a postmodern society where the structuring of reality, rather than the production of commodities or the refining of raw materials, enjoys a centrality unthinkable when his career began. It is in the university that we can learn that "gods are really human constructs" (324) and that "practically all the reality we wake up facing is a human construct left over from yesterday" (327). Most important of all, it is in the university that a joint commitment to the enlightened habit of creative scepticism can be renewed, where we can learn that our myths of order and ultimately our social reality itself are, like art, "hypothesis from beginning to end, assuming anything and verifying nothing" (320). Frye began his career attempting to slay the monsters constructed by the sleep of reason: nationalism, Fascism, and Communism. His final efforts in cultural criticism rejoice in the endlessly transformative property of the grammars that encode social reality. Just as important, however, is Frye's emphasis on the university as the site where the capacity to read these codes must be transmitted to a community pledged to continuous education and discussion.

VII Frye and Contemporary Cultural Criticism

Frye's most significant contributions to the study of cultural criticism are arguably fourfold. First of all, he recognized that, even with the enormous expansion of cultural media and educational opportunity in the twentieth century, cultural theory habitually lagged behind the demographics of modern society. In short, it remained an elite activity. Second, he transferred the primary site of cultural activity from its official agencies in Oxford or Harvard to the constructive powers of the mind, realizing that it was not only among "primitive" societies that myths, narratives, images, and metaphors shape the course of social action. Third, Frye refused to see these as evidence of humanity's will to regression, but instead saw in them the store of emancipating narratives all societies have entrusted with their hopes for a better future. Hence the role of a cultural critic was not to patronize provincials, mobilize malcontents, or even to promise to "raise" outsiders to metropolitan sophistication. Rather, it was to enable as many people as possible to identify the major constructs—the great families of myths and narratives that circulate in any human society—and to explore the "reservoir of possibilities" (65) for emancipation in each. Frye's fourth contribution,

Copyrighted material

1

The Modern Century

1967

The Modern Century: The Whidden Lectures, 1967 *(Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967). Originally presented at McMaster University on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, 17–19 January 1967, at 8:00 P.M. in the university's new Athletic Centre. Frye wrote a summary of the lectures for a brochure outlining their content to the university community and attendance was high (see NFF, 1988, box 1, file x). After their delivery, E.T. Salmon, principal of University College, McMaster, wrote back to Frye thanking him "in the name of the University for the splendid series of lectures which you gave us," adding that "We have had any number of complimentary remarks passed upon them" (NFF, 1988, box 60, file 7). The Oxford University Press edition also included the following foreword by Dr. Salmon, dated February 1967:*

> *The Whidden Lectures were established in 1954 by E.C. Fox, B.A., LL.D., of Toronto, the senior member of the Board of Governors, to honour the memory of a former Chancellor of McMaster University.*
>
> *The Reverend Dr. Howard P. Whidden, D.D., LL.D., D.C.L., F.R.S.C., was a man of striking appearance, unusual dignity, deep Christian conviction, and ready tolerance. Born in 1871 in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, where his family had settled in 1761 after three-quarters of a century's residence in New England, he attended universities in both Canada (Acadia and McMaster) and the United States (Chicago), and also served as a minister of Baptist churches in both countries (in Ontario, Manitoba, and Ohio). From 1913 to 1923 he was President of Brandon College, Manitoba, then an affiliate of McMaster University, and for part of that period (1917–21) he represented Brandon as a member of Parliament in the Canadian House of Commons at Ottawa. He was appointed administrative head (Chancellor) of McMaster University in 1923 and in 1930 became, in a manner of*

Copyrighted material

speaking, its second founder when he directed its transfer from Toronto, where it had been established since 1887, to Hamilton. His broad educational outlook and effective leadership resulted in the University's burgeoning greatly in its new location, and Dr. Whidden was able to retire in 1941 with the comforting conviction that he had built both wisely and well. He died in Toronto in 1952.

The selection of a Canadian scholar to be the Whidden Lecturer in 1967, the year of Canada's centennial, was inevitable. And that the choice should fall on H. Northrop Frye, the first person ever to be named by the University of Toronto as its University Professor, was almost equally inevitable. His reputation as one of the most significant of contemporary literary critics is worldwide and securely established. It is a cause for pride to academic circles in his native country that he should be the subject of a special volume, issued by the Columbia University Press just over a year ago. A graduate of Toronto and Merton College, Oxford, he made his mark some twenty years ago with a penetrating study of William Blake, Fearful Symmetry; *and since that time a steady stream of books and articles from his pen has made his name one of the most familiar and most respected wherever the study of English letters is seriously pursued. He has lectured in scores of universities throughout the English-speaking world and has received honorary doctorates from many of them.*

For the 1967 Whidden Lectures he chose as his theme The Modern Century, *the century in which, as the saying goes, Canada came of age. He did not restrict his vision, however, to the literary and creative activities that have occurred in this country over the past one hundred years. Rather, he attempted to relate Canadian developments to those of the world as a whole; and it was a stimulating and exciting exercise to accompany him as his purview ranged over other countries, other continents, and other cultures. That the perspective of the many hundreds who had the privilege of hearing him was deepened and broadened, there is not the slightest doubt.*

McMaster University is now very pleased to publish the lectures in book form so that an even wider audience may share in the rewarding experience of learning the views of a distinguished Canadian on man's spiritual and intellectual adventures since 1867.

Frye judged these to have been among his best delivered and best received public lectures. Four pages of typescript notes concerning the French translation clarify some of Frye's dense allusions and emphases in this work and these have

Copyrighted material

been drawn upon where appropriate for explanatory comment (see NFF, 1988, box 62, file 1).

Author's Note

The operation of giving the Whidden Lectures for 1967 was made pleasant and memorable by the hospitality of McMaster University and my many friends there. To them, as well as to the extraordinarily attentive and responsive audience, I feel deeply grateful.

I am indebted to the Canada Council for a grant which enabled me to work on this and other projects, and to Mrs. Jessie Jackson for her preparation of the manuscript.

The lectures were delivered in the centenary year of Canada's Confederation, and were originally intended to be Canadian in subject matter. I felt, however, that I had really said all I had to say about Canadian culture for some time, with the help of about forty colleagues, in the "Conclusion" to the recently published *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English* (1965). Hence the shift of theme to a wider context. I have tried to make my Canadian references as explicit as possible, for the benefit of non-Canadian readers, but have not invariably succeeded. For example, the titles of the three lectures are titles of poems by well-known Canadian poets: respectively, Archibald Lampman, Irving Layton, and Émile Nelligan.[1]

N.F.
Victoria College in the
University of Toronto
January 1967

I City of the End of Things

The Whidden Lectures have been a distinguished series, and anyone attempting to continue them must feel a sense of responsibility. For me, the responsibility is specific: I have been asked to keep in mind the fact that I shall be speaking to a Canadian audience in the Centennial year of Confederation. I have kept it in mind, and the first thing that it produced there was what I hope is a sense of proportion. The centenary of Confederation is a private celebration, a family party, in what is still a

Copyrighted material

relatively small country in a very big world. One most reassuring quality in Canadians, and the one which, I find, chiefly makes them liked and respected abroad, when they are, is a certain unpretentiousness, a cheerful willingness to concede the immense importance of the non-Canadian part of the human race. It is appropriate to a Canadian audience, then, to put our centenary into some kind of perspective. For the majority of people in North America, the most important thing that happened in 1867 was the purchase of Alaska from Russia by the United States. For the majority of people in the orbit of British traditions, the most important thing that happened in 1867 was the passing of the Second Reform Bill, the measure that Disraeli called "a leap in the dark,"[2] but which was really the first major effort to make the Mother of Parliaments represent the people instead of an oligarchy. For a great number, very probably the majority, of people in the world today, the most important thing that happened in 1867, anywhere, was the publication of the first volume of *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx, the only part of the book actually published by Marx himself. It was this event, of course, that helped among other things to make the purchase of Alaska so significant: another example of the principle that life imitates literature,[3] in the broad sense, and not the other way round. There is a still bigger majority to be considered, the majority of the dead. In the year 1867 Thomas Hardy wrote a poem called *1967*,[4] in which he remarks that the best thing he can say about that year is the fact that he is not going to live to see it.

My own primary interests are in literary and educational culture. What I should like to discuss with you here is not Canadian culture in itself, but the context of that culture in the world of the last century. One reason for my wanting to talk about the world that Canada is in rather than about Canada is that I should like to bypass some common assumptions about Canadian culture which we are bound to hear repeated a good deal in the course of this year. There is, for instance, the assumption that Canada has, in its progress from colony to nation, grown and matured like an individual: that to be colonial means to be immature,[5] and to be national means to be grown up. A colony or a province, we are told, produced a naive, imitative, and prudish culture; now we have become a nation, we should start producing sophisticated, original, and spontaneous culture. (I dislike using "sophisticated" in an approving sense, but it does seem to be an accepted term for a kind of knowledgeability that responds to culture with the minimum of anxi-

Copyrighted material

eties.) If we fail to produce a fully mature culture, the argument usually runs, it must be because we are still colonial or provincial in our attitude, and the best thing our critics and creators can do is to keep reminding us of this. If a Canadian painter or poet gets some recognition, he is soon giving interviews asserting that Canadian society is hypocritical, culturally constipated, and sexually inhibited. This might be thought a mere cliché, indicating that originality is a highly specialized gift, but it seems to have advanced in Canada to the place of an obligatory ritual. Some time ago, when a Canadian play opened in Paris, a reviewer, himself a Canadian, remarked sardonically, "Comme c'est canadien! Comme c'est pur!"[6] I should add that this comment was incorporated by the Canadian publisher as a part of his blurb.

Analogies between the actual growth of an individual and the supposed growth of a society may be illuminating, but they must always be, like all analogies, open to fresh examination. The analogy is a particularly tricky form of rhetoric when it becomes the basis of an argument rather than merely a figure of speech. Certainly every society produces a type of culture which is roughly characteristic of itself. A provincial society has a provincial culture; a metropolitan society has a metropolitan culture. A provincial society will produce a phenomenon like the tea party described in F.R. Scott's well-known satire, *The Canadian Authors Meet*. A metropolitan society would turn the tea party into a cocktail party,[7] and the conversation would be louder, faster, more knowing, and cleverer at rationalizing its pretentiousness and egotism. But its poets would not necessarily be of any more lasting value than Mr. Scott's Miss Crotchet, though they might be less naive. It is true that relatively few if any of the world's greatest geniuses have been born in Canada, although a remarkable British painter and writer, Wyndham Lewis,[8] went so far as to get himself born on a ship off Canadian shores, and developed an appropriately sea-sick view of Canada in later life. But we do not know enough about what social conditions produce great or even good writers to connect a lack of celebrated birthplaces with the moral quality of Canadian civilization.

Another aspect of the same assumption is more subtle and pervasive. It is widely believed, or assumed, that Canada's destiny, culturally and historically, finds its fulfilment in being a nation, and that nationality is essential to identity. It seems to me, on the other hand, quite clear that we are moving towards a postnational world, and that Canada has moved further in that direction than most of the smaller nations. What is

Copyrighted material

ety, the economic and the political. Recently these two conceptions have begun to merge into the single category of "public relations."[12]

One very obvious feature of our age is the speeding up of process: it is an age of revolution and metamorphosis, where one lives through changes that formerly took centuries in a matter of a few years. In a world where dynasties rise and fall at much the same rate as women's hemlines, the dynasty and the hemline look much alike in importance, and get much the same amount of featuring in the news. Thus the progression of events is two-dimensional, a child's drawing reflecting an eye that observes without seeing depth, and even the effort to see depth has still to deal with the whole surface. Some new groupings result: for example, what used to be called the trivial or ephemeral takes on a function of *symbolizing* the significant. A new art of divination or augury has developed, in which the underlying trends of the contemporary world are interpreted by vogues and fashions in dress, speech, or entertainment. Thus if there appears a vogue for white lipstick among certain groups of young women, that may represent a new impersonality in sexual relationship, a parody of white supremacy, the dramatization of a death-wish, or the social projection of the clown archetype. Any number may play, but the game is a somewhat self-defeating one, without much power of sustaining its own interest. For even the effort to identify something in the passing show has the effect of dating it, as whatever is sufficiently formed to be recognized has already receded into the past.

It is not surprising if some people should be frustrated by the effort to keep riding up and down the manic-depressive roller-coaster of fashion, of what's in and what's out, what is U and what non-U, what is hip and what is square, what is corny and what is camp.[13] There are perhaps not as many of these unhappy people as our newspapers and magazines suggest there are: in any case, what is important is not this group, if it exists, but the general sense, in our society, of the panic of change. The variety of things that occur in the world, combined with the relentless continuity of their appearance day after day, impress us with the sense of a process going by a little too fast for our minds to focus on anything in it.

Some time ago, the department of English in a Canadian university decided to offer a course in twentieth-century poetry. It was discovered that there were two attitudes in the department towards that subject: there were those who felt that twentieth-century poetry had begun with Eliot's *The Waste Land* in 1922, and those who felt that most of the best of

Copyrighted material

it had already been written by that time. There also appeared to be some correlation between these two views and the age groups of those who held them. Finally a compromise was reached: two courses were offered, one called Modern Poetry and the other Contemporary Poetry. But even the contemporary course would need now to be supplemented by a third course in the postcontemporary, and perhaps a fourth in current happenings.[14] In the pictorial arts the fashion parade of "isms" is much faster: I hear of painters, even in Canada, who have frantically changed their styles completely three or four times in a few years, as collectors demanded first abstract expressionism, then pop art, then pornography, then hard-edge, selling off their previous purchases as soon as the new vogue took hold. There is a medieval legend of the Wild Hunt, in which souls of the dead had to keep marching to nowhere all day and all night at top speed. Anyone who dropped out of line from exhaustion instantly crumbled to dust. This seems a parable of a type of consciousness frequent in the modern world, obsessed by a compulsion to keep up, reduced to despair by the steadily increasing speed of the total movement. It is a type of consciousness which I shall call the alienation of progress.

Alienation and progress are two central elements in the mythology of our day, and both words have been extensively used and misused. The conception of alienation[15] was originally a religious one, and perhaps that is still the context in which it makes most sense. In religion, the person aware of sin feels alienated, not necessarily from society, but from the presence of God, and it is in this feeling of alienation that the religious life begins. The conception is clearest in evangelical thinkers in the Lutheran tradition like Bunyan, who see alienation of this kind as the beginning of a psychological revolution.[16] Once one becomes aware of being in sin and under the wrath of God, one realizes that one's master is the devil, the prince of this world, and that treason and rebellion against this master is the first requirement of the new life.

A secularized use of the idea appears in the early work of Marx, where alienation describes the feeling of the worker who is cheated out of most of the fruit of his labour by exploitation. He is unable to participate in society to the extent that, as a worker, he should, because his status in society has been artificially degraded. In this context the alienated are those who have been dispossessed by their masters, and who therefore recognize their masters as their enemies, as Christian did Apollyon.[17] In our day those who are alienated in Marx's sense are, for

Copyrighted material

example, the Negro, whose status is also arbitrarily degraded, or those who are in actual want and misery. The Negro, looking at the selfishness and panic in white eyes, realizes that while what he has to fight is ultimately a state of mind, still his enemies also include people who have got themselves identified with this state of mind. Thus his enemies, again, are those who believe themselves his masters or natural superiors. Apart from such special situations, not many in the Western democracies today believe that a specific social act, such as expropriating a propertied class, would end alienation in the modern world.

The reason is that in a society like ours, a society of the accepted and adequately fed, the conception of alienation becomes psychological. In other words it becomes the devil again, for the devil normally comes to those who have everything and are bored with it, like Faust. The root of this aspect of alienation is the sense that man has lost control, if he ever had it, over his own destiny. The master or tyrant is still an enemy, but not an enemy that anyone can fight. Theoretically, the world is divided into democracies and peoples' republics: actually, there has never been a time when man felt less sense of participation in the really fateful decisions that affect his life and his death. The central symbol of this is of course the overkill bomb, as presented in such works as *Dr. Strangelove*,[18] the fact that the survival of humanity itself may depend on a freak accident. In a world where the tyrant-enemy can be recognized, even defined, and yet cannot be projected on anything or anybody, he remains part of ourselves, or more precisely of our own death wish, a cancer that gradually disintegrates the sense of community. We may try to persuade ourselves that the complete destruction of Communism (or, on their side, of capitalist imperialism) would also destroy alienation. But an instant of genuine reflection would soon tell us that all such external enemies could disappear from the earth tomorrow and leave us exactly where we were before.

In this situation there is a steady pressure in the direction of making one's habitual responses passive. The first to succumb to this pressure are those whose attitude to the world is deliberately frivolous, who have only an instinct for avoiding any kind of stimulus that might provoke a genuine concern. Such an attitude tries to ignore the issues of the day and responds mainly to the "human interest" stories in the tabloids[19] provided for it, gathering its experience of life much as one might pick up a number of oddly shaped stones on a beach. But even here the effort to shut out anxiety is itself an anxiety, and a very intense one, which

Copyrighted material

keeps the conscious and critical part of the mind very near to the breaking point of hysteria. The mind on the verge of breakdown is infinitely suggestible, as Pavlov demonstrated,[20] and the forces of advertising and propaganda move in without any real opposition from the critical intelligence.

These agencies act in much the same way that, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton depicts Satan acting on Eve. All that poor Eve was consciously aware of was the fact that a hitherto silent snake was talking to her. Her consciousness being fascinated by something outrageous, everything that Satan had to suggest got through its guard and fell into what we should call her subconscious. Later, when faced with a necessity of making a free choice, she found nothing inside her to direct the choice except Satan's arguments, which she perforce had to take as her own, the more readily in that she did not realize how they had got there. Similarly, the technique of advertising and propaganda is to stun and demoralize the critical consciousness with statements too absurd or extreme to be dealt with seriously by it. In the mind that is too frightened or credulous or childish to want to deal with the world at all, they move in past the consciousness and set up their structures unopposed.

What they create in such a mind is not necessarily acceptance, but dependence on their versions of reality. Advertising implies an economy which has some independence from the political structure, and as long as this independence exists, advertising can be taken as a kind of ironic game. Like other forms of irony, it says what it does not wholly mean, but nobody is obliged to believe its statements literally. Hence it creates an illusion of detachment and mental superiority even when one is obeying its exhortations. When doing Christmas shopping, there is hardly one of us who would not, if stopped by an interviewer, say that of course he didn't hold with all this commercializing of Christmas. The same is to some extent true of propaganda as long as the issues are not deeply serious. The curiously divided reaction to the Centennial—a mixture of the sentimental, the apprehensive, and the sardonic—is an example. But in more serious matters, such as the Vietnam war, the effects of passivity are more subtly demoralizing. The tendency is to accept the propaganda bromide rather than the human truths involved, not merely because it is more comfortable, but because it gives the illusion of taking a practical and activist attitude as opposed to mere hand-wringing. When propaganda cuts off all other sources of information, rejecting it, for a concerned and responsible citizen, would not only

Copyrighted material

isolate him from his social world, but isolate him so completely as to destroy his self-respect. Hence even propaganda based on the big lie, as when an American or Chinese politician tries to get rid of a rival by calling him a Communist or a bourgeois counter-revolutionary, can establish itself and command assent if it makes more noise than the denial of the charge. The epigram that it is impossible to fool all the people all the time may be consoling, but is not much more.

What eventually happens I may describe in a figure borrowed from those interminable railway journeys that are so familiar to Canadians, at least of my generation. As one's eyes are passively pulled along a rapidly moving landscape, it turns darker and one begins to realize that many of the objects that appear to be outside are actually reflections of what is in the carriage. As it becomes entirely dark one enters a narcissistic world, where, except for a few lights here and there, we can see only the reflection of where we are. A little study of the working of advertising and propaganda in the modern world, with their magic-lantern techniques of projected images, will show us how successful they are in creating a world of pure illusion. The illusion of the world itself is reinforced by the more explicit illusions of movies and television, and the imitation world of sports. It is significant that a breakdown in illusion, as when a baseball game or a television program is proved to have been "fixed," is more emotionally disturbing than proof of crime or corruption in the actual world. It is true that not all illusion is a bad thing: elections, for example, would hardly arouse enough interest to keep a democracy functioning unless they were assimilated to sporting events, and unless the pseudo-issues were taken as real issues. Similarly the advantages of winning the game of space ships and moon landings may be illusory, but the illusion is better than spending the money involved on preparations for war. Then again, when illusion has been skilfully built up, as it is for instance by such agencies as the *Reader's Digest*, it includes the illusion of keeping abreast of contemporary thought and events, and can only be recognized as illusion by its effects, or rather by the absence of any effects, in social action.

Democracy is a mixture of majority rule and minority right, and the minority which most clearly has a right is the minority of those who try to resist a passive response, and thereby risk the resentment of those who regard them as trying to be undemocratically superior. I am speaking however not so much of two groups of people as of two mental attitudes, both of which may exist in the same mind. The prison of illusion

Copyrighted material

has finely described as "an uncritical reliance on the alleged self-healing virtues of unconscious growth."[24] That is, the belief in social progress was transferred from the human will to the autonomous social force. Similar conceptions of autonomous mass movement and historical process dominate much of our social thinking today. In Communist theology the historical process occupies much the same position that the Holy Spirit does in Christianity: an omnipotent power that cooperates with the human will but is not dependent on it.

Even earlier than the rise of the market, the feeling that man could achieve a better society than the one he was in by a sufficiently resolute act had done much to inspire the American and more particularly the French Revolutions, as well as a number of optimistic progressive visions of history like that of Condorcet.[25] Here the ideal society is associated with a not too remote future. Here too there are underlying paradoxes. If we ask what we are progressing to, the only conceivable goal is greater stability, something more orderly and predictable than what we have now. After all, the only thing we can imagine which is better than what we have now is an ensured and constant supply of the best that we do have: economic security, peace, equal status in the protection of law, the appeal of the will to reason, and the like. Progress thus assumes that the dynamic is better than the stable and unchanging, yet it moves toward a greater stability. One famous progressive thinker, John Stuart Mill, had a nervous breakdown when he realized that he did not want to see his goals achieved, but merely wished to act as though he did.[26] What was progress yesterday may seem today like heading straight for a prison of arrested development, like the societies of insects. In the year 1888 Edward Bellamy published *Looking Backward*, a vision of a collectivized future which profoundly inspired the progressive thinkers of that day, and had a social effect such as few works of literature have ever had. Today it impresses us in exactly the opposite way, as a most sinister blueprint for a totalitarian state.

A more serious consequence is that under a theory of progress present means have constantly to be sacrificed to future ends, and we do not know the future well enough to know whether those ends will be achieved or not. All we actually know is that we are damaging the present. Thus the assumption that progress is necessarily headed in a good or benevolent direction becomes more and more clearly an unjustified assumption. As early as Malthus[27] the conception of sinister progress had made its appearance, the vision of a world moving

Copyrighted material

onward to a goal of too many people without enough to eat. When it is proposed to deface a city by, say, turning park lots into parking lots, the rationalization given is usually the cliché "you can't stop progress." Here it is not even pretended that progress is anything beneficent: it is simply a Juggernaut, or symbol of alienation. And in history the continued sacrificing of a visible present to an invisible future becomes with increasing clarity a kind of Moloch-worship [1 Kings 11:7; Acts 7:43]. Some of the most horrible notions that have ever entered the human mind have been "progressive" notions: massacring farmers to get a more efficient agricultural system, exterminating Jews to achieve a "solution" of the "Jewish question," letting a calculated number of people starve to regulate food prices. The element of continuity in progress suggests that the only practicable action is continuous with what we are already doing: if, for instance, we are engaged in a war, it is practicable to go on with the war, and only visionary to stop it.

Hence for most thoughtful people progress has lost most of its original sense of a favourable value judgment and has become simply progression, towards a goal more likely to be a disaster than an improvement. Taking thought for the morrow, we are told on good authority, is a dangerous practice [Matthew 6:34]. In proportion as the confidence in progress has declined, its relation to individual experience has become clearer. That is, progress is a social projection of the individual's sense of the passing of time. But the individual, as such, is not progressing to anything except his own death. Hence the collapse of belief in progress reinforces the sense of anxiety which is rooted in the consciousness of death. Alienation and anxiety become the same thing, caused by a new intensity in the awareness of the movement of time, as it ticks our lives away day after day. This intensifying of the sense of time also, as we have just seen, dislocates it: the centre of attention becomes the future, and the emotional relation to the future becomes one of dread and uncertainty. The future is the point at which "it is later than you think" becomes "too late." Modern fiction has constantly dealt, during the last century, with characters struggling toward some act of consciousness or self-awareness that would be a gateway to real life. But the great majority of treatments of this theme are ironic: the act is not made, or is made too late, or is a paralysing awareness with no result except self-contempt, or is perverted into illusion. We notice that when the tone is less ironic and more hopeful about the nature and capacities of man, as it is for instance in Camus's *La Peste*, it is usually in

Copyrighted material

a context of physical emergency where there is a definite enemy to fight.

Even in theory progress is as likely to lead to the uniform and the monotonous as to the individual and varied. If we look at the civilization around us, the evidence for uniformity is as obvious and oppressive as the evidence for the rapid change toward it. The basis of this uniformity is technological, but the rooted social institutions of the past—home, school, church—can also only be adapted to a nomadic society by an expanding uniform pattern. Whatever the advantages of this situation, we have also to consider the consequences of the world's becoming increasingly what in geology is called a peneplain, a monotonous surface worn down to a dead level by continued erosion. We are not far into the nineteenth century before we become aware of a different element both in consciousness and in the physical appearance of society. This is a new geometrical perspective, already beginning in the eighteenth century, which is scaled, not to the human body, but increasingly to the mechanical extensions of the body.[28] It is particularly in America, of course, that this perspective is most noticeable: Washington, laid out by L'Enfant in 1800, is already in the age of the automobile. This mechanical perspective is mainly the result of the spreading of the city and its technology over more and more of its natural environment. The railway is the earliest and still one of the most dramatic examples of the creation of a new kind of landscape, one which imposes geometrical shapes on the countryside. The prophet Isaiah sees the coming of the Messiah as symbolized by a highway which exalts valleys and depresses mountains, making the crooked straight and the rough places plain [Isaiah 40:3–5]. But, as so often happens, the prophecy appears to have been fulfilled in the wrong context.

The traditional city is centripetal, focused on market squares, a pattern still visible in some Ontario towns. Its primary idea is that of community, and it is this idea that has made so many visions of human fulfilment, from Plato and the Bible onward, take the form of a city. To the modern imagination the city becomes increasingly something hideous and nightmarish, the *fourmillante cité* of Baudelaire, the "unreal city" of Eliot's *Waste Land*, the *ville tentaculaire* of Verhaeren.[29] No longer a community, it seems more like a community turned inside out, with its expressways taking its thousands of self-enclosed nomadic units in a headlong flight into greater solitude, ants in the body of a dying dragon, breathing its polluted air and passing its polluted water. The map still

Copyrighted material

shows us self-contained cities like Hamilton and Toronto, but experience presents us with an urban sprawl which ignores national boundaries and buries a vast area of beautiful and fertile land in a tomb of concrete. I have had occasion to read Dickens a good deal lately,[30] and Dickens was, I suppose, the first metropolitan novelist in English literature, the first to see the life of his time as essentially a gigantic pulsation toward and away from the great industrial centres, specifically London. And one notices in his later novels an increasing sense of the metropolis as a kind of cancer, as something that not only destroys the countryside, but the city itself as it had developed up to that time.

The Victorian critics of the new industrialism contemporary with Dickens, such as Ruskin and Morris, concentrated much of their attack on its physical ugliness, which they saw as a symbol of the spiritual ugliness of materialism and exploitation. Critics of our time are more impressed by the physical uniformity which they similarly interpret as a symbol of spiritual conformity. If certain tendencies within our civilization were to proceed unchecked, they would rapidly take us towards a society which, like that of a prison, would be both completely introverted and completely without privacy. The last stand of privacy has always been, traditionally, the inner mind. It is quite possible however for communications media, especially the newer electronic ones, to break down the associative structures of the inner mind and replace them by the prefabricated structures of the media. A society entirely controlled by their slogans and exhortations would be introverted, because nobody would be saying anything: there would only be echo, and Echo was the mistress of Narcissus. It would also be without privacy, because it would frustrate the effort of the healthy mind to develop a view of the world which is private but not introverted, accommodating itself to opposing views. The triumph of communication is the death of communication: where communication forms a total environment, there is nothing to be communicated.

The role of communications media in the modern world is a subject that Professor Marshall McLuhan has made so much his own that it would be almost a discourtesy not to refer to him in a lecture which covers many of his themes. The McLuhan cult, or more accurately the McLuhan rumour, is the latest of the illusions of progress: it tells us that a number of new media are about to bring in a new form of civilization all by themselves, merely by existing. Because of this we should not, in staring at a television set, wonder if we are wasting our time and

Copyrighted material

develop guilt feelings accordingly: we should feel that we are evolving a new mode of apprehension. What is important about the television set is not the quality of what it exudes, which is only content, but the fact that it is there, the end of a tube with a vortical suction which "involves" the viewer. This is not all of what a serious and most original writer is trying to say, yet Professor McLuhan lends himself partly to this interpretation by throwing so many of his insights into a deterministic form.[31] He would connect the alienation of progress with the habit of forcing a hypnotized eye to travel over thousands of miles of type, in what is so accurately called the pursuit of knowledge. But apparently he would see the Gutenberg syndrome as a cause of the alienation of progress, and not simply as one of its effects. Determinism of this kind, like the determinism which derives Confederation from the railway, is a plausible but oversimplified form of rhetoric.[32]

Similarly with the principle of the identity of medium and message, which means one thing when the response is active, and quite another when the response is passive. On the active level it is an ideal formulation which strictly applies only to the arts, and to a fully active response to the arts. It would be true to say that painting, for example, had no "message" except the medium of painting itself. On the passive level it is an ironic formulation in which the differences among the media flatten out. The "coolness" of television is much more obvious in the privacy of a middle-class home than it is when turned on full blast in the next room of a jerry-built hotel. All forms of communication, from transistors to atom bombs, are equally hot when someone else's finger is on the button. Thus the primary determining quality of the medium comes from the social motive for using it and not from the medium itself. Media can only follow the direction of the human will that created them, and a study of the social direction of that will, or what Innis called the bias of communication,[33] is a major, prior, and separate problem.

Technology cannot of itself bring about an increase in human freedom, for technological developments threaten the structure of society, and society develops a proportionate number of restrictions to contain them. The automobile increases the speed and freedom of individual movement, and thereby brings a proportionate increase in police authority, with its complication of laws and penalties. In proportion as the production of retail goods becomes more efficient, the quality of craftsmanship and design decreases. The aeroplane facilitates travel, and therefore regiments travel: a modern traveller, processed through

Copyrighted material

deliberately forgetting that the distinction between here and there has ceased to exist. It is significant that intense nationalism or regionalism today is a product either of resistance to or of disillusionment with progress. Progress, when optimistic, always promises some form of exodus from history as we know it, some emergence onto a new plateau of life. Thus the Marxist revolution promised deliverance from history as history had previously been, a series of class struggles. But just as there are neurotic individuals who cannot get beyond some blocking point in their emotional past, so there are neurotic social groups who feel a compulsion to return to a previous point in history, as Mississippi keeps fighting the Civil War over again, and some separatists in Quebec the British Conquest.

However, one wonders whether, in an emergency, this compulsion to return to the same point, the compulsion of Quixote to fight over again the battles he found in his books, is not universal in our world. In ordinary life, the democratic and Communist societies see each other as dystopias, their inhabitants hysterical and brainwashed by propaganda, identifying their future with what is really their destruction. Perhaps both sides, as Blake would say, become what they behold [*Jerusalem*, pl. 44, l. 32]: in any case seeing tendencies to tyranny only on the other side is mere hypocrisy. The Nuremberg trials laid down the principle that man remains a free agent even in the worst of tyrannies, and is not only morally but legally responsible for resisting orders that outrage the conscience of mankind. The Americans took an active part in prosecuting these trials, but when America itself stumbled into the lemming-march horror of Vietnam the principle was forgotten and the same excuses and defiances reappeared.

All the social nightmares of our day seem to focus on some unending and inescapable form of mob rule. The most permanent kind of mob rule is not anarchy, nor is it the dictatorship that regularizes anarchy, nor even the imposed police state depicted by Orwell. It is rather the self-policing state, the society incapable of formulating an articulate criticism of itself and of developing a will to act in its light. This is a condition that we are closer to, on this continent, than we are to dictatorship. In such a society the conception of progress would reappear as a donkey's carrot, as the new freedom we shall have as soon as some regrettable temporary necessity is out of the way. No one would notice that the necessities never come to an end, because the communications media would have destroyed the memory.

Copyrighted material

The idea of progress, we said, is not really that of man progressing, but of man releasing forces that will progress by themselves. The root of the idea is the fact that science progressively develops its conception of the world. Science is a vision of nature which perceives the elements in nature that correspond to the reason and the sense of structure in the scientist's mind. If we look at our natural environment with different eyes, with emotion or desire or trying to see in it things that answer other needs than those of the reason, nature seems a vast unthinking indifference, with no evidence of meaning or purpose. In proportion as we have lost confidence in progress, the scientific vision of nature has tended to separate from a more imaginative and emotional one which regards nature or the human environment as absurd or meaningless. The absurd is now one of the central elements in the contemporary myth, along with alienation and anxiety, and has extended from man's feeling about nature to his feeling about his own society. For society, like nature, has the power of life and death over us, yet has no real claim on our deeper loyalties. The absurdity of power is clearer in a democratic society, where we are deprived of the comforting illusions that surround royalty. In a democracy no one pretends to identify the real form of society either with the machinery of business or with the machinery of government. But in that case where is the society to be found to which we do owe loyalty?

There are two contemporary plays which seem to sum up with peculiar vividness and forcefulness the malaise that I have described as the alienation of progress. One is Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The main theme of this play is the paralysis of activity that is brought about by the dislocation of life in time, where there is no present, only a faint memory of a past, and an expectation of a future with no power to move towards it. Of the two characters whose dialogue forms most of the play, one calls himself Adam; at another time they identify themselves with Cain and Abel; at other times, vaguely and helplessly, with the thieves crucified with Christ. "Have we no rights?" one asks. "We got rid of them" the other says—distinctly, according to the stage direction. And even more explicitly: "at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us." They spend the whole action of the play waiting for a certain Godot to arrive: he never comes; they deny that they are "tied" to him, but they have no will to break away. All that turns up is a Satanic figure called Pozzo, with a clown tied to him in a parody of their own state. On his second appearance Pozzo is blind, a condition

Copyrighted material

which detaches him even further from time, for, he says, "the blind have no notion of time."[36]

The other play is Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The title of this play is echoed from the Depression song, "Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?" where the "wolf" was a specific fear of unemployment. I began this talk by saying that the modern century was the first to study itself objectively, and that this has created an opposition between the active mind that struggles for reality and the passive mind that prefers to remain in an illusion. Art, culture, the imagination, are on the side of reality and activity: Virginia Woolf, chosen because of the sound of her last name, represents this side, and the characters are "afraid" of her because they cannot live without illusion. The two men in the play are a historian and a scientist, facing the past and the future, both impotent in the present. "When people can't abide things as they are," says the historian George, "when they can't abide the present, they do one of two things . . . either they turn to a contemplation of the past, as I have done, or they set about to . . . alter the future."[37] But nobody in the play does either. George can murder his imaginary child, but the destruction of illusion does not bring him reality, for the only reality in his life was contained in the illusion which he denied.

I have tried to indicate the outlines of the picture that contemporary imagination has drawn of its world, a jigsaw-puzzle picture in which the Canada of 1967 is one of the pieces. It is a picture mainly of disillusionment and fear, and helps to explain why our feelings about our Centennial are more uneasy than they are jubilant. In the twentieth century most anniversaries, including the annual disseminating neurosis of Christmas, are touched with foreboding. I noticed this early in life, for my twenty-first birthday was spent at the Chicago World's Fair of 1933, entitled "A Century of Progress," where the crowds were much more preoccupied with worrying about the Depression than with celebrating what had led to it. And yet this picture, as I have tried also to explain, is the picture that the contemporary imagination draws of itself in a mirror. Looking into the mirror is the active mind which struggles for consistency and continuity of outlook, which preserves its memory of its past and clarifies its view of the present. Staring back at it is the frozen reflection of that mind, which has lost its sense of continuity by projecting it on some mechanical social process, and has found that it has also lost its dignity, its freedom, its creative power, and its sense of the present, with nothing left except a fearful apprehension of the future.

Copyrighted material

The mind in the mirror, like the characters in Beckett, cannot move on its own initiative. But the more repugnant we find this reflection, the less likely we are to make the error of Narcissus, and identify ourselves with it. I want now to discuss the active role that the arts, more particularly literature, have taken in forming the contemporary imagination, which has given us this picture. The picture itself reflects anxiety, and as long as man is capable of anxiety he is capable of passing through it to a genuine human destiny.

II Improved Binoculars

Let us begin by looking at some of the characteristics that we generally associate with the word "modern," especially in the arts. "Modern," in itself, means simply recent: in Shakespeare's day it meant mediocre, and it still sometimes carries that meaning as an emotional overtone. In its ordinary colloquial sense it implies an advanced state of technology and the social attitudes of a highly urbanized life. In some Western Canadian towns, for example, houses with outdoor privies are advertised as "unmodern." But "modern" has also become a historical term like "Romantic," "Baroque," or "Renaissance." It would be convenient if, like "Romantic," the colloquial uses of the word were spelled in lower case and the cultural term with a capital, but this is not established. Like "Romantic" again, "modern" as a cultural term refers partly to a historical period, roughly the last century, but it is also partly a descriptive term, not a purely historical term like "medieval." Just as we feel that Keats or Byron are Romantic and that some of their contemporaries, Jane Austen for example, are either not Romantic at all or are less Romantic, so we feel that "modern" is in part a style or attitude in recent culture, and that some of the artists and writers of the last century have been "more modern" than others.

"Modern," so used, describes certain aspects of an international style in the arts which began, mainly in Paris, about a hundred years ago. Out of compliment to our centenary, I shall date it from 1867, the year of the death of Baudelaire. The larger context of this "modern" is the series of vast changes that began to take place, not around 1867, but a century earlier. These earlier changes included the American and French Revolutions, the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, new and more analytical schools of thought, such as the French Encyclopedists and the British Utilitarians, and the cultural development we call Romantic. By

Copyrighted material

1867 this movement had entered on a second phase, continuous with but distinguishable from its predecessor, and this begins the modern century properly speaking. The thinkers Darwin and Marx, and later Freud and Frazer, the writers Rimbaud, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche, the Impressionist painters and their successors, belong to it.

During the whole of the last century, there has naturally been the most frantic resistance to "modern" culture, for both the highbrow arts and the popular ones, though for different reasons, have a powerful capacity to stir up guilt feelings, personal insecurities, and class resentments. The Nazis called the modern style a Jewish conspiracy, the Jews being for them the symbols of a racism without a national boundary. The Communist hierarchy calls it an imperialistic conspiracy, and particularly attacks the "formalism" which it asserts symbolizes the ideology of a decadent class. One may suspect from such things as the Sinyavsky-Daniel trial[38] that the periodic "thaws" in the Soviet Union are mainly a device to determine where the really dangerous threats to the bureaucracy are coming from, but even so they show something of the tremendous pressure building up against the barriers of official stupidity and panic, which may eventually break through them. Chinese resistance is still militant, though of course the cultural traditions there are different. Hysterical people in the democracies, in their turn, call the modern style a Communist conspiracy; in Canada it is often called Americanization. It is true that many aspects of modern culture, especially popular culture, are of American origin, like jazz, but America is a province conquered by the international modern much more than it is a source of it.

In literature, the international character of the modern style has been partly disguised by difference in language. Just as we seem to be moving into a world in which we meet the same kind of things everywhere, from hydro installations to Beatle haircuts, so we seem to be moving into a world in which English will become either the first or the second language of practically everybody. But of course it does not follow that English or any other language will become a world *literary* language. The last hundred years have also been a period in which many minority languages have been maintained, revived, or in some cases practically invented, by an intense regional patriotism. Hebrew, Norwegian, Flemish, Irish, and French in Canada are examples. The prestige of such movements is one of several elements that have helped to shape a common view which is the opposite of the one I am advancing here. Culture,

Copyrighted material

tance? Spontaneous generation is no more credible in culture than it is in biology. Seeds of culture can only come from the centres of civilization which are already established, often those centres against which the local culture is revolting. As I have tried to show elsewhere, the forms of art are autonomous: poems and pictures are born out of earlier poems and pictures,[46] not out of new localities, and novelty of content or experience in such localities cannot produce originality of form. We notice that the more popular an aspect of culture is, such as jazz music, films, or the kind of poetry associated with beatnik and similar groups, the more quickly it becomes international in its idiom. To try to found a serious culture in Canada on a middle-class intellectual resistance to popular culture of this kind would be the last word in futility. All this may seem too obvious now to insist on, but many intellectuals, in both English and French parts of the country, have in the past been engaged in an inglorious rearguard action of trying to encourage a regional or tourist's-souvenir literature, and it is perhaps still worth repeating that the practice is useless and the theory mistaken. Complete immersion in the international style is a primary cultural requirement, especially for countries whose cultural traditions have been formed since 1867, like ours. Anything distinctive that develops within the Canadian environment can only grow out of participation in this style.

The distinctively "modern" element in the culture of the last century has played, and continues to play, a revolutionary role in society. It may be easiest to illustrate this from the pictorial arts. In medieval painting the prevailing conventions were religious, and for that and many other reasons the technique of representation was highly stylized. As the centuries went on, we can see a growing realism in the painting which, in its historical context, was an emancipating force. The Byzantine type of stylizing comes to be thought stiff and angular; lighter and springier lines succeed in later Gothic; more human touches appear in the divine faces; landscapes sprout and blossom in the background; an occasional nude appears if the iconography makes it possible, as in pictures of St. Sebastian or Mary Magdalene. The growth of realism, in other words, is also a growth in the humanizing of the projected myths, man recovering for himself the forms he had created.

As we pass into the Renaissance, and painting becomes more secularized, it begins to reflect something of the spirit that is also in Renaissance science, the feeling of man as a subject confronting an objective world. With the development of perspective the pictorial vision settled

Copyrighted material

on a fixed point in space. As a result there grew up some curiously pedantic critical theories of painting, which assumed that it was primarily a representational art, and that the function of painting was not to create a vision but to record one. The Elizabethan critic Puttenham,[47] writing in the age of Michelangelo and Titian, even asserted that the painter had no creative power at all, but merely imitated nature in the same way that an ape imitates a man. This dreary doctrine found its way into Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* [4.4.89–93] somewhat disguised. I mention it only to emphasize the fact it misunderstands, which is the tremendous projecting force in Renaissance and Baroque painting. In Rubens, the great spiralling and twisting rhythms, usually starting from a diagonal, that, so to speak, pick up the eye and hurl it into the furthest point of the picture, express a kind of will to objectify. The same kind of will is also in Rembrandt, in a quieter and more contemplative form, as the eye is led to the points of light that emerge from the graduated shadows. Rembrandt carried this objectified form of painting about as far as human skill could carry it, and imposed his way of seeing on successors for generations.

When we look at the later work of Turner, contemporary with the great English Romantic poets, there is a different feeling which, in the particular context we are speaking of now, might be called a colossal emancipation of vision. It is not the titles of such pictures as *Rain, Steam and Speed* that make us feel that we are in a new world, but the sense of a new way of seeing. We are not looking *at* nature here, but are identified with the processes and powers of nature, the creative forces symbolized by the swirling colours, the dissolving shapes, and the expanding perspective where we seem to see everything at once, as though the eye were surrounding the picture. This is imitating nature as the Romantic age conceived imitation, where man and nature are thought of as connected, not by the subject–object relation of consciousness, but by an identity of process, man being a product of the organic power of nature. As Coleridge says, it is this latter, the *natura naturans*, that the painter imitates, not the structure of *natura naturata* in front of him.[48] With the great Impressionists who followed Turner the realistic tendency achieves a second culmination. Impressionism portrays, not a separated objective world that man contemplates, but a world of power and force and movement which is in man also, and emerges in the consciousness of the painter. Monet painting Rouen cathedral in every aspect of light and shade, Renoir making the shapes in nature explode into vibrations

Copyrighted material

of colour, Degas recording the poses of a ballet, are working in a world where objects have become events, and where time is a dimension of sense experience. We can, of course, look back on earlier painters and see the same things in Rubens or Tintoretto, but we see them there with the hindsight that Impressionism has given us.

In all these centuries the representational aspect of painting is the organically growing aspect, the liberalizing force, the avant-garde movement. It is a realism of form, and as it develops it tends to become something of a conservative social force. Thus Dutch realism often reflects a quiet satisfaction in middle-class Dutch life, and in some modern painters—I think particularly of Vuillard[49]—the visual aspect of our social experience is similarly bathed in a benevolent glow of beauty and charm. There is nothing wrong with this, but it was inevitable that there should also develop, as part of the expanding horizon of pictorial experience, a revolutionary or prophetic realism, of the sort that runs through Brueghel, Hogarth, Goya, and Daumier. This kind of realism is often not realistic in form: it may be presented as fantasy, as in Brueghel's *Mad Margaret* or Goya's *Caprichos*. But it tears apart the façade of society and shows us the forces working behind that façade, and is realistic in the sense of sharpening our vision of society as a mode of existence rather than simply as an environment.

By 1867 Impressionism was reaching its climax of development, and the "modern" world was taking shape. But there are very different elements in the modern world which are also making pictorial impressions. In advertising, propaganda, and a great deal of mass culture, of the type I referred to in my previous lecture, and which is usually intended to be received passively, the prevailing idiom is one that may be called stupid realism. By stupid realism I mean what is actually a kind of sentimental idealism, an attempt to present a conventionally attractive or impressive appearance as an actual or attainable reality. Thus it is a kind of parody or direct counter-presentation to prophetic realism. We see it in the vacuous pretty-girl faces of advertising, in the clean-limbed athletes of propaganda magazines, in the haughty narcissism of shop-window mannequins, in the heroically transcended woes of soap-opera heroines, in eulogistic accounts of the lives of celebrities, usually those in entertainment, in the creation by Madison Avenue of a wise and kindly father-figure out of some political stooge, and so on. The "socialist realism" of Communism, though much better in theory than this, has in practice much in common with it.[50] It seems clear that

Copyrighted material

an officially approved realism cannot carry on the revolutionary tradition of Goya and Daumier. It is not anti-Communism that makes us feel that the disapproved writers, Daniel and Babel and Pasternak, have most to say to us: on the contrary, it is precisely such writers who best convey the sense of Russians as fellow human beings, caught in the same dilemmas that we are. Revolutionary realism is a questioning, exploring, searching, disturbing force: it cannot go over to established authority and defend the fictions which may be essential to authority, but are never real. We may compare in American painting the lively development of the so-called ashcan school[51] with the WPA murals[52] in post offices which glumly rehearsed the progress of transportation from camel to jeep, and which are now mostly covered up.

In this context we can see that realism of form has changed sides: it is no longer a liberalizing and emancipating force, incorporating the hopes and fears of humanity into the icons demanded by churches, public buildings, and well-to-do patrons. The projected image is now the weapon of the enemy, and consequently it is the power to project the image that becomes liberalizing. A new kind of energy is released in the painting that followed the impressionists, an energy which concentrates on the sheer imaginative act of painting in itself, on painting as the revolt of the brain behind the eye against passive sensation. Cézanne is the hinge on which this more specifically "modern" movement turns, but it has of course taken a great variety of forms since. One is the abstraction, or Abstract Expressionism later, which portrays the combination of form and colour without reference to representation. Another is the action-painting which tries to communicate the sense of process and growth in the act of painting. Still another is the "pop art" which presents the projected images of stupid realism itself, in a context where the critical consciousness is compelled to make an active response to them.[53]

Stupid realism depends for its effect on evoking the ghost of a dead tradition: it is a parody of the realism which was organic a century or two ago. The active and revolutionary element in painting today is the element of formalism. (I know that I am using "formalism" in a looser sense than it is used in Marxist criticism, but I am trying to suggest some of the wider implications of the contrasting views.) I said that to the painters of the age of Giotto the old Byzantine conventions were beginning to seem unnecessarily constricting. But in the stupid realism of commercial late Roman sculpture, with its stodgy busts and sarcophagi, the sharp angu-

Copyrighted material

lar patterns of Byzantine leap out with a clean and vital flame. The cycle of culture has turned once more, and once again it is the stylized that is the emancipating force. Of course there is always a central place for a realism which is not stupid, which continues to sharpen our vision of the world and the society that are actually there. But the exhilarating sense of energy in great formalism is so strong that modern realism tends to express itself in formalist conventions. In Brueghel's *Slaughter of the Innocents* a conventional religious subject is located in a realistic landscape that recalls the terror and misery of sixteenth-century Flanders; in Picasso's *Guernica*[54] the terror and misery of twentieth-century Spain is expressed with the stylizing intensity of a religious primitivism.

In literature there is a change from Romantic to modern around 1867 that is in some respects even sharper and more dramatic than the shift from Impressionism to Cézanne. At the beginning of the Romantic period around 1800, an increased energy of propulsion had begun to make itself felt, an energy that often suggests something mechanical. When the eighteenth-century American composer Billings developed contrapuntal hymn settings which he called "fuguing-tunes," he remarked that they would be "more than twenty times as powerful as the old slow tunes."[55] The quantitative comparison, the engineering metaphor, the emphasis on speed and power, indicate a new kind of sensibility already present in pre-Revolutionary and pre-industrial America. Much greater music than his is touched by the same feeling: the finale of Mozart's Linz Symphony in C is based on the bodily rhythm of the dance, but the finale of the Beethoven Rasoumovsky Quartet in the same key foreshadows the world of the express train. Bernard Shaw compares the finale of Beethoven's Opus 106 to the dance of atoms in the molecule, whatever that sounds like.[56] A similar propulsive movement makes itself felt in those greatly misunderstood poems of Wordsworth, *The Idiot Boy, Peter Bell, The Waggoner,* where we also have references to "flying boats" and the like, and in many poems of Shelley, where again some of the characters seem to be operating private hydroplanes, like the Witch of Atlas. This sense of the exhilaration of mechanical movement continues into the modern period, especially in the Italian Futurist movement around the time of the First World War. In fact the modern is often popularly supposed to be primarily a matter of "streamlining,"[57] of suggesting in furniture and building, as well as in the formal arts themselves, the clean, spare, economical, functional lines of a swiftly moving vehicle.

Copyrighted material

worth to Gertrude Stein. Of poets, perhaps Auden in English has given us most clearly the sense of creation as play, an expression of man as *homo ludens*.[65] The contrived and artificial patterns of his verse are consistent with this, just as the light verse they resemble is more contrived than heavy verse, and play-novels like detective stories more contrived than "serious" fiction. Valéry's view of poetry as a game bound by arbitrary rules like chess is similar, and Valéry remarks that "inspiration" is a state of mind in the reader, not in the writer[66]—another example of the modern tendency to turn as much activity as possible over to the reader.

There are many complaints about the obscurity of the arts in the modern world, and about the indifference that the modern artist seems to have for his public. But we can see by now that modern art is directly involved in a militant situation peculiar to our time. It does not simply come into being as an expression of human creative power: it is born on a battlefield, where the enemies are the anti-arts of passive impression. In this context the arts demand an active response with an intensity that hardly existed before. Hence the modern artist is actually in an immediate personal relation with his reader or viewer: he throws the ball to him, so to speak, and his art depends on its being caught at the other end. We have already noticed how in *The Waste Land* (and much other modern poetry) the poet hands the continuity of his poem over to the reader, and one could make out a very good case for saying that the reader of *Finnegans Wake* is the hero of that book, the person who laboriously spells out the message of the dream. *Finnegans Wake* belongs of course to the stream-of-consciousness technique in modern fiction. This technique, which is still going strong in the novels of Samuel Beckett, is continuous, but not rhetorically continuous: that is, the links are associative and not merely ready-made as they are in a propagandist speech, hence they require an active reader to see the sequential logic in them.

One would expect to find in the modern, then, some decline in the prestige of the particular quality in art represented by the term "craftsmanship," or, perhaps more accurately, by the highly significant epithet "finished." The work of art is traditionally something set up to be admired: it is placed in a hierarchy where the "classic" or "masterpiece" of perfect form is at the top. Modern art, especially in such developments as action-painting, is concerned to give the impression of process rather than product, of something emerging out of the heat of struggle and still showing the strain of its passing from conception to birth. Balzac tells a celebrated story about a painter whose masterpiece broke

Copyrighted material

down into a tangle of meaningless lines. But the modern century has to take this parable of the *chef d'oeuvre inconnu* [unknown masterpiece] seriously, for the lines are not meaningless if they record the painter's involvement with his subject and also demand ours. Malraux[67] has remarked how much the sketch, the sense of something rapidly blocked out and left incomplete, seems to us the index of an artist's vitality. The same principles hold for poetry, even to the extent that a poet today can get more money out of selling his manuscript excreta to libraries than he can out of royalties on the published volume. Dramatists try to break up the hypnotic illusion of the play by various devices that suggest a dramatic process in formation, such as introducing stagehands or prompters, or breaking down the distinction between actor and role. Such devices are regarded by Brecht as a creative form of alienation, giving the audience a closer view of imaginative reality by chopping holes in the rhetorical façade.[68] Novelists adopt similar devices to break the story-teller's spell on the reader: thus Gide's *The Counterfeiters* is a story about a novelist writing a novel called *The Counterfeiters*. Readers of Canadian literature may see similar tendencies in Reaney's *Listen to the Wind* or Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*.[69]

The tendency to prefer the imperfect work engaged in history to the perfected masterpiece that pulls away from time is closely related to another tendency which also originates in the opposition to passive anti-art. Advertising and propaganda are interested arts, arts with ulterior motives. Behind them is a course of action which they end by exhorting one to follow. A good deal of literature has followed the same pattern (e.g., *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Self-Help* by Samuel Smiles) and still does. But as a rule the work of art as such is disinterested: there is nothing beyond itself to which it points as the fulfilment of itself. In modern painting and poetry, especially in the last two decades, there has been a good deal of emphasis not only on this disinterested and self-containing aspect of the arts, but of attack on those tendencies within the arts themselves that seem to lead us passively on from one thing to another. A detective story is a good example of this donkey's-carrot writing: we begin it to find out what we are told on the last page. Writing with this structure is teleological: it contains a hidden purpose, and we read on to discover what that purpose is.

Many modern poets, with William Carlos Williams[70] at their head, regard such concealing of a hidden design as gimmick-writing: for them, the image, the scene, the thing presented, the immediate experience, *is*

Copyrighted material

the reality that the arts are concerned with, and to go beyond this is to risk dishonesty. The theory of the modern style in poetry is set out in the letters of Rimbaud known as the *lettres du voyant,* with their insistence that the genuine poet sees directly, in contrast to the rhetorician who talks about what he sees. The same kind of emphasis has been common in painting for a long time: music has been affected by it more recently, but perhaps more radically than any other art. Classical music, up to quite recent times, has been intensely teleological: in symphonies from Haydn to Brahms we feel strongly how the end of a movement is implied in the beginning, and how we are led towards it step by step. In much contemporary music, both electronic and conventional, the emphasis is on the immediate sense impression of sound: the music is not going anywhere; it may even be proceeding by chance, as in some of the experiments of John Cage.[71] The ear is not thrown forward into the future, to hear a theme being worked out or a discord resolved: it is kept sternly in the present moment. This conception of the unit of experience as a thing in itself is of course an intensely impersonal attitude to art: the writer (and similarly with the other arts) is doing all he can to avoid the sense of impressing himself on his reader by suggesting meaning or form or purpose beyond what is presented. In this conception of *chosisme,*[72] as it is sometimes called, it is not simply continuity, but significance or meaning itself, which has been handed over to the reader.

One may see in most of these modern tendencies a good deal of distrust in the rational consciousness as the main area of communication in the arts. Modern art is irrational in many respects, but it is important to see why and in what ways it is. We spoke of advertising and propaganda as stunning or demoralizing the critical consciousness in order to move past it and set up their structures in the rest of the mind. There is clearly no point in setting the artists to defend a Maginot line[73] that has already been outflanked: the artist has to move directly back into the attacked area, and set up his own structures there instead. Hence the various Freud-inspired movements, like surrealism, which communicate on a normally repressed level; hence too the great variety of modern developments of fantasy and articulated dream, where there is no identity, and where the world is like that of Milton's chaos, with things forming and disappearing by chance and melting into other things. In Kafka, for example, the event, the ordinary unit of a story, is replaced by the psychological event, and the social and other significances of what is happening are allegories of these psychological events. The primary

Copyrighted material

emphasis is on the mental attitude that makes the events possible. Thus *The Castle* is presented as a kind of anxiety nightmare, yet a theological allegory of God's dealings with man and a political allegory of the police state run in counterpoint with it.

I am not trying to suggest that all these modern tendencies form part of a single consistent pattern: far from it. All that they have in common is an imaginative opposition to the anti-arts of persuasion and exhortation. The obvious question to ask is, of course: granted that the arts in the modern world are full of antagonism to the anti-arts, granted that they parody them in all sorts of clever ways, granted that they encourage an active instead of a passive response, does this really make them socially effective? In a world resounding every day with the triumphs of slanted news and brainwashed politics, what can poetry and painting do, tortoises in a race with hares? This question is one of the most powerful arguments of our enemy the accuser. We are constantly learning from the alienation of progress that merely trying to clarify one's mind is useless and selfish, because the individual counts for so little in society. Marxism, with its carefully planned agenda of revolution, provides the most complete answer to the question, "What then must we do?"[74] The democracies provide more limited and piecemeal forms of social activism, demonstrations, sit-ins, teach-ins, protest marches, petitions, and the like, partly (if one may say so with all due sympathy and respect) as gestures of homage to the superior effectiveness to be found in the world of public relations and controversies. Similarly, the artist often feels an impulse to guarantee his vision by his life, and hence we find the pattern of antagonism of art to anti-art repeated in an antagonism of artist to society.

In political thought there is a useful fiction known as the social contract, the sense that man enters into a certain social context by the act of getting born. In earlier contract theories, like that of Hobbes, the contract was thought of as universal, binding everyone without exception. From Rousseau on there is more of a tendency to divide people into those who accept and defend the existing social contract because they benefit from it, and the people who are excluded from most of its benefits, and so feel no obligation, or much less, to it. As everyone knows, Marx defined the excluded body as the proletariat or workers, and saw it as the means to a reconstituted society. Those who accept and are loyal to the social contract are known consistently, throughout the whole period, as the bourgeoisie or middle class, otherwise known, in

Copyrighted material

different contexts, as Philistines or squares. Whenever artists think of themselves as a social group, they seem inclined to define themselves in terms of their opposition to the bourgeois society of the contract, with its materialistic and conformist standards.

Some of them have followed the Marxist form of this opposition, though very few in the English-speaking countries, and very few even of those, have been of a type that under a proletarian dictatorship would survive the first purge. Radical sympathies in American fiction have tended rather to take the form of a sentimental populism, of a the-people-keep-marching-on type. During the Depression, the contest of labour and management began to assume something of the dimensions of a revolution, and the labour movement still had, like the Negroes today, the dignity of an oppressed group. As a result there was a considerable infiltration of working-class sympathies into the drama, films, and musical comedies of that period. But today few areas of American life are less inspiring to the Muse than the trade unions. The collapse of Communist sympathies in American culture was not the result of McCarthyism and other witch-hunts, which were not a cause but an effect of that collapse. The object of the witch-hunt is the witch, that is, a helpless old woman whose dangerousness is assumed to rationalize quite different interests and pleasures. Similarly the Communist issue in McCarthyism was a red herring for a democratic development of the big lie as a normal political weapon: if internal Communism had been a genuine danger the struggle against it would have taken a genuine form. Sympathy with Communism collapsed under the feeling that, even at its best, and ignoring its atrocities, the bureaucracy of Communism was enforcing much the same kind of social contract as the managerial and authoritarian elements in the democracies. Hence American liberals, even radicals, soon lost all faith in the moral superiority of Communism. Losing the faith[75] was undoubtedly right: the immense relief with which they lost it may have been less so.

But if the Marxist form of radicalism, of the kind that helps to shape the dramas of Brecht and Gorky, is rare in American literature, there is a type of anarchism in it which is far more common. The figure of the individual who will not play the silly games of society, who seems utterly insignificant but represents an unbreakable human force, runs through its literature from Rip van Winkle and the romances of Cooper to the present day. The patron saint of this tendency is Thoreau, retreating to Walden to build his own cabin and assert that the only genuine America

Copyrighted material

who had begun to hate and fear the rise of a metropolitan civilization, as a relation of innocence to experience, of the healthy natural virtues of the country corrupted by the feverish excitements of the town. This myth produced a good deal of nineteenth-century literature and social propaganda, ranging in value from Wordsworth's *Michael* to temperance melodramas. The pronouncements on drinking and sexual mores made by those in our society who are most spectacularly not with it, like many members of the lower clergy and the higher judiciary, are still often inspired by such visions of a virtuous rustic daring to be a Daniel in a wicked Babylon [Daniel 7–12].

A number of other writers who continued the tradition of eighteenth-century primitivism also nurtured a tangled garden of metaphors about the need for being "rooted in the soil," as part of a similar opposition to the metropolitan development of society. This form of *nostalgie de la boue*[80] was a strong influence on nineteenth-century fiction (Jean Giono, Knut Hamsun),[81] though the ponderous prose lyrics it tended to specialize in are largely forgotten now. It is an attitude with a naturally strong bias toward racism, and in this form it entered into the *völkisch* developments in Germany which lay behind much of Nazism. Nineteenth-century French Canada also had its propagandists for the motto *emparons-nous du sol*,[82] idealizing the simple peasant bound to his land and his ancestral faith, a picture with a strong resemblance to Millet's *Angelus*, of which the most famous expression is *Maria Chapdelaine*.[83] There were similar movements elsewhere in America, like the Southern agrarian movement of a generation ago.[84] In Miller and Lawrence this pastoral theme is less sentimentalized and more closely connected with the more deeply traditional elements of the pastoral: spontaneity in human relations, especially sexual relations; the stimulus to creative power that is gained from a simpler society, less obsessed by satisfying imaginary wants; and, at least in Lawrence, a sense of identity with nature of great delicacy and precision.

The pastoral withdrawal from bourgeois values merges insensibly into another, the sense of the artist as belonging to an elite or neo-aristocracy. The origin of this attitude is the feeling that in a world full of the panic of change, the artist's role is to make himself a symbol of tradition, a sentinel or witness to the genuine continuity in human life, like the London churches in *The Waste Land*. In religion this attitude expresses itself, as a rule, in adherence or conversion to the Catholic Church. Here it is often the Church as a symbol of authority or tradition that is the

Copyrighted material

attraction: Charles Maurras expressed this most bluntly by saying that he was interested in Catholicism but not in Christianity.[85] Political preferences are right-wing, with emphasis on the traditional functions of aristocracy and royalty, especially among those who actually were of aristocratic origin, like Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. Eliot's characterizing of himself as "royalist in politics"[86] is a late and not very resonant British echo of what was mainly a French and nineteenth-century tendency. Economic preferences vary, but are always strongly against the conspiracies of international finance. In the 1920s and '30s many of this group were attracted to Fascism, which they saw as leading to a new recognition of heroic energy in life, including the creative energy of the arts. Both this group and the pastoralists are haunted by the sense of an invisible serenity which has disappeared from contemporary life but can be re-experienced through tradition. Often this feeling takes the form of a sense of vanished gods, like the "dignified, invisible"[87] presences of Eliot's rose garden. Yeats tried to identify these presences with his pantheon of Irish gods and heroes; Lawrence with his darker gods and his historical myths like that of the Etruscans; George and other German Romantics with the Classical gods; Jung with unconscious archetypes. Christian writers tend to think more conceptually of the organizing ideas of religion—original sin, Incarnation, a personal power of evil, and the like—as giving a new richness and depth of significance to life, whether of joy or terror. "I do wish those people who deny the reality of eternal punishment," said the Catholic poet Lionel Johnson, "would understand their own dreadful vulgarity."[88]

One type who most obviously withdraws from the social contract and sets up a way of life in opposition to it is the criminal. There are two kinds of criminals, professional and amateur: those for whom crime is money and those for whom crime is fun. We are concerned with the latter group. It is obvious that the criminal or conspirator is a ready symbol for the artist who breaks with the social contract; one thinks of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus and his conspiratorial motto of silence, exile, and cunning, or Rimbaud's identification of himself as a child of Satan, linked to criminals, slaves, and outcasts of all kinds. The symbol of the artist as criminal, however, goes much deeper. I spoke of the way in which optimistic theories of progress and revolution had grown out of Rousseau's conception of a society of nature and reason buried under the injustices of civilization and awaiting release. But, around the same time, the Marquis de Sade was expounding a very different view of the natural soci-

Copyrighted material

ety. According to this, nature teaches us that pleasure is the highest good in life, and the keenest form of pleasure consists in inflicting or suffering pain. Hence the real natural society would not be the reign of equality and reason prophesied by Rousseau: it would be a society in which those who liked tormenting others were set free to do so. So far as evidence is relevant, there is more evidence for de Sade's theory of natural society than there is for Rousseau's. In any case there is an unpleasantly large degree of truth in the sadist vision, and a good many literary conceptions have taken off from it, or near it. One is the cult of the holy sinner,[89] the person who achieves an exceptional awareness, whether religious or aesthetic in character, from acts of cruelty, or, at least, brings about such an awareness in us. Dostoevsky's Stavrogin, Gide's Lafcadio, with his *acte gratuit* or unmotivated crime, the hero of Camus's *L'Étranger* and of Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux*, are examples.[90] A good deal of contemporary American writing links not merely picaresque law-breaking, smoking marijuana and the like, but outright violence and terror, with serious social attitudes. There is something of this in Mailer, and a good deal more in LeRoi Jones and other "black power" adherents.[91] In D.H. Lawrence, too, a curious hysterical cruelty occasionally gets out of hand, most continuously, perhaps, in *The Plumed Serpent*.

Jean Genet is the most remarkable example of the contemporary artist as criminal: his sentence of life imprisonment was appealed against by Sartre, Claudel, Cocteau, and Gide, and even before his best-known works had appeared, Sartre had written a seven-hundred-page biography of him called *Saint Genet*. Genet's most famous play, in this country, is *Le Balcon*. Here the main setting is a brothel in which the patrons dress up as bishops, generals, or judges and engage in sadistic ritual games with the whores, who are flogged and abused in the roles of penitents or thieves. The point is that society as a whole is one vast sadistic ritual of this sort. As the mock-bishop says, very rudely, he does not care about the function of bishop: all he wants is the metaphor, the idea or sexual core of the office. The madam of the brothel remarks, "They all want everything to be as true as possible . . . minus something indefinable, so that it won't be true"[92]—a most accurate description of what I have been calling stupid realism. A revolution is going on outside: it is put down by the chief of police, and the patrons of the brothel are pulled out of it to enact the "real" social forms of the games they have been playing. Nobody notices the difference, because generals and judges and bishops

Copyrighted material

are traditional metaphors, and new patrons come to the brothel and continue the games. The chief of police, the only one with any real social power, is worried because he is not a traditional metaphor, and nobody comes to the brothel to imitate him. Finally, however, one such patron does turn up: the leader of the revolution. There is a good deal more in the play, but this account will perhaps indicate how penetrating it is as a sadist vision of society.

All these antisocial attitudes in modern culture are, broadly speaking, reactionary. That is, their sense of antagonism to existing society is what is primary, and it is much clearer and more definite than any alternative social ideal. Hugh MacDiarmid, supporting both Communism and Scottish nationalism, and Dos Passos, moving from a simple radicalism to a simple conservatism, are random examples among writers of what sometimes seems a dissent for its own sake. Wherever we turn, we are made aware of the fact that society is a repressive anxiety structure, and that creative power comes from a part of the mind that resists repression but is not in itself moral or rational. In Vladimir Nabokov's novel, *Pale Fire*, a gentle, wistful, rather touching pastoral poem falls into the hands of a lunatic who proceeds to "annotate" it with a wild paranoid fantasy about his own adventures as a prince in some European state during a revolution. Poem and commentary have nothing to do with each other, and perhaps that is the only point the book makes. But the title, taken from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* [4.3.438], suggests a certain allegory of the relation of art to the wish-fulfilment fantasies that keep bucking and plunging underneath it. Such forces are in all of us, and are strong enough to destroy the world if they are not controlled through release instead of repression. In my last lecture I want to talk about the way in which the creative arts are absorbed into society through education. Meanwhile we may notice that the real basis for the opposition of artist and society is the fact that not merely communications media and public relations, but the whole structure of society itself, is an anti-art, an old and worn-out creation that needs to be created anew.

III *Clair de lune intellectuel*

The modern world began with the Industrial Revolution and the Industrial Revolution set up an economic structure beside the political one which was really a rival form of society. Industry had often enough taken the form of an organization distinct from the state, but never

Copyrighted material

before in history did man have so strong a feeling of living under two social orders as he did in the period of laissez-faire. The separation could not, of course, last indefinitely, because the economic social order had so revolutionary an effect on the political one. Explicitly in Marxism, and more tentatively in the democracies, all society eventually comes to be thought of as consisting functionally only of workers or producers. Marxism moves in the direction of a final or once-for-all revolution in which the productive society becomes the only society; in the democracies the nonproductive groups, or leisure classes, gradually become socially unfunctional. In both types of society, however, there are, in addition to the workers and their directors, a large group who exist to explain, manifest, encourage, rationalize, and promote the various forms of production. In Marxist societies, those in this second group are known as party workers; in the democracies, especially in North America, they are thought of as advertisers and educators.

It seems clear that even with the heavy handicap of defence budgets, even with the assistance given to those parts of the world which are committed to the West but are otherwise unfortunate, the productive power of American and other advanced democracies has become so overefficient that it can continue to function only by various featherbedding[93] devices. One device, of the type satirized in *Parkinson's Law*,[94] is the subsidizing of employment; another, of the type lamented in *The Feminine Mystique*,[95] is the effort to encourage as many as possible of the female half of the population to devote themselves to becoming full-time consumers. But these devices do not conceal the fact that leisure is growing so rapidly, both in the amount of time and the number of people it affects, as to be a social complex equal in importance to employment itself.

Thus the technological revolution is becoming more and more an educational rather than an industrial phenomenon. For education is the positive aspect of leisure. As long as we think of society, in nineteenth-century terms, as essentially productive, leisure is only spare time, usually filled up with various forms of distraction, and a "leisure class," which has nothing but spare time, is only a class of parasites. But as soon as we realize that leisure is as genuine and important an aspect of everyone's life as remunerative work, leisure becomes something that also demands discipline and responsibility. Distraction, of the kind one sees on highways and beaches at holiday weekends, is not leisure but a running away from leisure, a refusal to face the test of one's inner

Copyrighted material

dents go to college because industry and business now require more education, I suspect a hangover of the old self-justifying arguments. I think students come to college because they realize, more clearly than many of their elders, that by doing so they are fully participating in their society, and can no longer be thought of as getting ready for something else more important.

It inevitably follows from the same principle, however, that the university, or at least the kind of thing the university does, can hardly remain indefinitely the exclusive preserve of the young. The question of adult education is still too large and shapeless for us to be able to look squarely at it along with all our other problems of expansion, but, apart from the very large amount of education within industry itself, the adult population will also need institutions of teaching and discussion as the organized form of their leisure time: I think particularly of married women with grown-up families. It is difficult for a government not to think of education in terms of training, and to regard the university as a public service institution concerned with training. Such a conception naturally puts a heavy emphasis on youth, who are allegedly being trained for society, the human resources of the future, as we say. Adult education will no doubt enter the picture first in the context of retraining, as it does now in industry, but before long we shall have to face a growing demand for an education which has no immediate reference to training at all.

We have next to consider the relation of the leisure structure to the arts. Down to the nineteenth century, painters, poets, composers tended to follow the traditions set by their predecessors, imitating them and carrying on their conventions in a more elaborate way. Thus there was a steady increase in self-awareness and complexity, and a process resembling that of aging, with each generation building on what had been done up to that point. With the nineteenth century there came, along with the continuing of this process, a prodigious lateral expansion in influence. It was mainly in the second half of the nineteenth century that the great museums came into being, at least in their present form, and the museums brought together an immense assemblage, not merely of works of art, but of objects that presented analogies to and suggestions for the arts. The result was to provide the artist with an encyclopedic range of influences; it made the artist an academician instead of an apprentice learning from masters. What the museums did for the visual arts modern recordings have done for music.

Copyrighted material

The increase of historical knowledge, of which archaeology formed a central part, was so vast as to make it seem as though the cemeteries were on the march, the entire past awakening to an aesthetic apocalypse. Painters and sculptors in particular were presented with a worldwide panorama of creative skills, very largely in the applied or so-called "minor" arts. This was naturally an important influence on the trend to formalism that I spoke of in my last lecture, for what this panorama revealed was primarily a universal language of design. Design in its turn has provided a basis for the unifying of the "major" and "minor" arts. Anyone today comparing an exhibition of modern painting or sculpture with one of textiles or pottery gets the impression that in the modern period there is really only an art of design, which is applied equally to all the visual arts, major and minor. I have referred to the view of William Morris,[97] at the threshold of the modern period, that the minor or useful arts were a key area in social revolution because they represent, more clearly than the major arts, the imagination as a way of life, as providing the visible forms of a free society. Although social developments have not followed Morris's antimechanistic anarchism, it is still no doubt true that the principles which link such a painter as Mondrian[98] to textile or ceramic design are a part of a considerable democratizing of aesthetic experience. If so, Morris was right in seeing a significant social, even a political dimension in modern cultural developments.

Along with archaeology and its "museum without walls,"[99] as it has been called, came anthropology and its study of "primitive" cultures, which brought primitive art, with its weird stylizing of form, its openly phallic and sexual themes, its deliberate distortion of perspective, squarely in front of the artist's eye. Of all elements in the modern tradition, perhaps that of primitive art, of whatever age or continent, has had the most pervasive influence. The primitive, with its immediate connection with magic, expresses a directness of imaginative impact which is naive and yet conventionalized, spontaneous and yet precise. It indicates most clearly the way in which a long and tired tradition of Western art, which has been refining and sophisticating itself for centuries, can be revived, or even reborn. Perhaps the kinship between the primitive and ourselves goes even deeper: it has frequently been remarked that we may be, if we survive, the primitives of an unknown culture, the cave men of a new mental era.[100]

It is not always realized how closely analogous the developments of modern literature are to those in the visual arts. The worldwide pan-

Copyrighted material

orama of the museums is not attainable in literature with the same immediacy, because of the barriers of language. Linguistics sometimes gives an illusion of having surmounted these barriers, but the illusion of literature in translation is even less convincing. However, the trend to formalism, stylizing, and abstraction is quite as marked in poetry as in painting. The elements of verbal design are myth and metaphor, both of which are modes of identification. That is, they are primitive and naive associations of things, a sun and a god, a hero and a lion, which turn their backs on realism or accurate descriptive statement. In literature, as in painting, realism was an emancipating force down to the nineteenth century, when it reached its culmination in the great novelists of that period. The modern period begins with Baudelaire and the *symbolisme* that followed him, and literature ever since has been increasingly organized by symbolism, dense and often difficult metaphor, myth, especially in drama, and folk tale. This development was anticipated in the great mythopoeic poetry of the Romantics, especially Blake, Shelley, and Keats, who correspond in poetry to the revolution of Turner in painting. Like the parallel developments in visual art, the increase of consciously employed myth and metaphor is also an increase in erudition and the conscious awareness of tradition.

When the Romantic movement began, there was one important primitive influence on it, that of the oral ballads, which began to be collected and classified at that time. The oral ballad makes a functional use of refrains and other strongly marked patterns of repetition, which correspond to the emphasis on design in the primitive pictorial arts. The fact that it depended for survival on an oral tradition meant that whatever personal turns of phrase there may originally have been in it were smoothed out, the poem thus acquiring a kind of stripped poetic surface quite unlike that of written poetry. The literary ballads which imitate these characteristics—the *Lyrical Ballads* of Wordsworth and Coleridge, Blake's *Mental Traveller*, Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*—come about as close as poetry can come to reproducing directly the voice of the creative powers of the mind below consciousness, a voice which is uninhibited and yet curiously impersonal as well. This was also the "democratic" voice that Whitman attempted to reproduce, and Whitman is the godfather of all the folk singing and other oral developments of our time which cover so large an area of contemporary popular culture. A different but related Canadian tradition is that of the *chansonniers*, as represented today by Gilles Vigneault.[101]

Copyrighted material

Fifty years ago it could be said that the university and the creative artist were at opposite ends of the cultural spectrum. The university, on its humanistic side, ran a critical and scholarly establishment concerned with the past, and related itself to the present by translating the values of the past into contemporary middle-class values. Anyone interested in painting or writing was likely to drop out of school as soon as it had wasted the legal amount of his time and devote himself to living precariously by his wits. I spent a dinner talking to such a (Canadian) writer recently: he told me of how he had left school at grade ten and eventually established himself as a writer, of how his life since had been financially difficult, even despairing at times, but redeemed by the excitement of an unexpected sale, or, more genuinely, by occasional gleams of satisfaction over a creative job well done. A century ago this would have been a familiar type of story, but while I listened with interest and respect, because I knew his work and admired it, I felt that I was hearing one of the last legends of a vanishing species, of a way of life that was going and would not return.

For in the last few decades the leisure structure has become much more integrated. The university's interest in contemporary culture is now practically obsessive, nor is its relation to it confined to mere interest. More and more of the established artists are on its teaching staff, and more and more of the younger rebels are their undergraduate students. While serving on a committee for awarding fellowships to Canadian writers, I noticed that practically all the serious English candidates were employed by universities and practically all the French ones by the National Film Board or the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. What cultural differences this implied I do not know, but for both groups some professional connection with the leisure structure was so regular as to amount practically to a closed shop. When the beatnik movement began about ten years ago, it seemed as though an anti-academic, even anti-intellectual tendency was consolidating around a new kind of cultural experience. It attracted certain types of expression, such as the improvising swing ensembles and their derivatives, which had traditionally been well outside the orbit of higher education. But the academics got interested in them too, and vice versa.

The nineteenth-century artist was typically a loner: even in the twentieth he was often the last stand of laissez-faire, resisting every kind of social mediation between himself and his public. It is still often asserted that he ought to continue to be so, and should avoid the seductions of

Copyrighted material

university posts and foundation grants. The social facts of yesterday are the clichés of today. But he is now in a world where such agencies as the Canada Council[102] represent a growing concern on the part of society with the leisure structure. This has affected all aspects of the arts: we may note particularly the changes in genre. Some arts, like music and drama, are ensemble performances for audience; others, like the novel and the easel painting, are individualized. In an intensely individualized era like the Victorian age, the novel goes up and the drama goes down. Up until quite recently, the creative person, say in literature, was typically one who "wanted to write," and what he wanted to write was usually poetry or fiction. He might dream of rivalling Shakespeare, but he would be unlikely to want Shakespeare's job of a busy actor-manager in a profit-sharing corporation. It looks as though creative interests were shifting again to the dramatic: it is Pinter and Albee and Beckett on the stage, Bergman and Fellini and others in film, who seem to be making cultural history today, as the novelists were making it a century ago. The creative undergraduate tends less to bring his sheaf of poems to his instructor, and tends more to ask his advice about where he can get financial assistance, private or foundational, as a result of having gone broke with a film-making or dramatic venture. This may be a temporary vogue, but I think not, and of course it is obvious how this kind of creative interest immediately involves the artist in the social aspects of the leisure structure. (Psychotherapy, so profoundly connected with the contemporary imagination, has recently changed its emphasis from narrative and confessional techniques to dramatic ones,[103] which is perhaps another aspect of the same cultural trend.)

In my earlier talks I spoke of the modern imagination as resisting the pressure of advertising and propaganda, which assume and try to bring about a passive response. Advertising and propaganda come respectively from the economic and the political structures, and I touched on the neurosis in modern life which springs from the feeling that these structures are not worth loyalty. For all our dislike of the word "totalitarian,"[104] we have to recognize that there is a profound and genuine, if ultimately specious, appeal in any form of social activity which promises to expand into a complete way of life, engaging all aspects of one's interests and providing fulfilment for one's cultural, spiritual, and intellectual as well as social needs. A generation ago many people plunged into radical politics in the hope of finding a total program of this kind, but all forms of politics, including the radical form, seem sooner or later

Copyrighted material

Yet so far as it is concerned with contemporary culture, its material includes all the reactionary and antisocial attitudes I glanced at earlier, some of which are, in detail, quite obviously silly, perverse, or wrong-headed. But when contemporary authors are assigned for compulsory reading, and when they are taught in a way that relates them to their cultural heritage, a certain detachment comes into the attitude toward them. Not all the detachment is good, but one thing about it is: the social attitude of the writer is taken over by the social attitude of education itself, and loses its crankiness by being placed in a social context. Study, as distinct from direct response, is a cool medium, and even the most blatant advocacy of violence and terror may be, like Satan in the Bible, transformed into an angel of light by being regarded as a contribution to modern thought. Where shall wisdom be found? [Job 28:12]. Chiefly, for our age, in the imaginative and technical skills of the more or less unwise.

The leisure structure, then, is essentially a structure of education, which means that it is vitally concerned with teaching. One can teach only what is teachable, and what the university must teach is the only thing it can teach: the specific disciplines into which genuine knowledge is divided. What results from this in the mind of the student? Facts, perhaps; ideas; information; the techniques of the present; the traditions of the past. But all these things are quickly acquired by the good student, and, unless used for some definite purpose, quickly forgotten. What emerges from university teaching, as its final result in the student's mind, is something the university cannot, or should not, explicitly teach. As most great theorists of education, from Castiglione to Newman, have recognized, the form of liberal education is social, in the broadest sense, rather than simply intellectual. I should call the social form of liberal education, provisionally, a vision of society, or, more technically, a mythology.

In every age there is a structure of ideas, images, beliefs, assumptions, anxieties, and hopes which express the view of man's situation and destiny generally held at that time. I call this structure a mythology, and its units myths. A myth, in this sense, is an expression of man's concern about himself, about his place in the scheme of things, about his relation to society and God, about the ultimate origin and ultimate fate, either of himself or of the human species generally. A mythology is thus a product of human concern, of our involvement with ourselves, and it always looks at the world from a man-centred point of view. The early and

Copyrighted material

primitive myths were stories, mainly stories about gods, and their units were physical images. In more highly structured societies they develop in two different but related directions. In the first place, they develop into literature as we know it, first into folk tales and legends of heroes, thence into the conventional plots of fiction and metaphors of poetry. In the second place, they become conceptualized, and become the informing principles of historical and philosophical thought, as the myth of fall becomes the informing idea of Gibbon's history of Rome, or the myth of the sleeping beauty Rousseau's buried society of nature and reason. My first lecture dealt primarily with mythology in this sense, particularly with the so-called existential myths.

It seems to me that there have been two primary mythological constructions in Western culture. One was the vast synthesis that institutional Christianity made of its Biblical and Aristotelian sources. This myth is at its clearest in the Middle Ages, but it persisted for centuries later, and much of its structure, though greatly weakened by the advance of science, was still standing in the eighteenth century itself. The other is the modern mythology that began when the modern world did, in the later eighteenth century, but reached its more specifically modern shape a century later, and a century before now.

The older mythology was one that stressed two things in particular: the subject–object relation and the use of reason. Man was a subject confronting a nature set over against him. Both man and nature were creatures of God, and were united by that fact. There were no gods in nature: if man looked into the powers of nature to find such gods they would soon turn into devils. What he should look at nature for is the evidence of purpose and design which it shows as a complementary creation of God, and the reason can grasp this sense of design. The rational approach to nature was thus superior to the empirical and experimental approach to it, and the sciences that were most deductive and closest to mathematics were those that were first developed. Of all sciences, astronomy is the most dependent on the subject–object relationship, and in the Middle Ages particularly, astronomy was the science par excellence, the one science that a learned medieval poet, such as Dante or Chaucer, would be assumed to know.

In the premodern myth man's ultimate origin was of God, and his chief end was to draw closer to God. Even more important, the social discipline which raised him above the rest of creation was a divine ordinance. Law was of God; the forms of human civilization, the city and the

Copyrighted material

garden, were imitations of divine models, for God planted the garden of Eden and had established his city before man was created; the ultimate human community was not in this world, but in a heaven closer to the divine presence. Philosophers recognized that the ordinary categories of the mind, such as our perception of time and space, might not be adequate at a purely spiritual level. It was possible, for example, that a spiritual body, such as an angel, did not occupy space or travel in space at all. The unfortunate wretch who attempted to put this question into a lively and memorable form by asking how many angels could stand on the point of a pin has become a byword for pedantic stupidity, a terrible warning to all instructors who try to make a technical subject interesting. But as far as popular belief and poetic imagery were concerned, the spiritual world was thought of as essentially another objective environment, to be described in symbols—city, temple, garden, streets—derived from human life, though the myth taught that human life had been derived from them. This mythology, relating as it did both man and nature to God, was a total one, so complete and far-reaching that an alternative world picture was practically unthinkable. This is the real significance of Voltaire's familiar epigram, that if God did not exist it would be necessary to invent him, which was, in his day, a much more serious remark than it sounds.[107] One could, theoretically, be an atheist; but even an atheist would find God blocking his way on all sides: he would meet the hypothesis of God in history, in philosophy, in psychology, in astronomy. As for morality, its standards were so completely assimilated to religious sanctions that even a century ago it was impossible for many people to believe that nonreligious man could have any moral integrity at all.

In the eighteenth century there began to grow, slowly but irresistibly, the conviction that man had created his own civilization. This meant not merely that he was responsible for it—he had always been that—but that its forms of city and garden and design, of law and social discipline and education, even, ultimately, of morals and religion, were of human origin and human creation. This new feeling crystallized around Rousseau in the eighteenth century, and the assumptions underlying the American and French Revolutions were relatively new assumptions. Liberty was no longer, as it had been for Milton, something that God gives and that man resists: it was something that most men want and that those who have a stake in slavery invoke their gods to prevent them from getting. Law was no longer, as it had been for Hooker, the reflec-

Copyrighted material

tion of divine order in human life, but in large part the reflection of class privilege in property rights. Art and culture were no longer, as they had been for the age of Shakespeare, the ornaments of social discipline: they took on a prophetic importance as portraying the forms of civilization that man had created. The Romantic movement brought in the conception of the "serious" artist, setting his face against society to follow his art, from which the modern antagonism of the artist to society that I discussed earlier has descended.

A major principle of the older mythology was the correspondence of human reason with the design and purpose in nature which it perceives. This correspondence was still accepted even after God had dwindled into a deistic first cause, a necessary hypothesis and nothing more. The modern movement, properly speaking, began when Darwin finally shattered the old teleological conception of nature as reflecting an intelligent purpose. From then on design in nature has been increasingly interpreted by science as a product of a self-developing nature. The older view of design survives vestigially, as when religion tells us that some acts are "contrary to nature." But contemporary science, which is professionally concerned with nature, does not see in the ancient mother-goddess the Wisdom which was the bride of a superhuman creator. What it sees rather is a confused old beldame who has got where she has through a remarkable obstinacy in adhering to trial and error—mostly error—procedures. The rational design that nature reflects is in the human mind only. An example of the kind of thinking that Darwin has made impossible for the modern mind is, "If the Lord had intended us to fly, he'd have given us wings." The conception of natural functions as related to a personal and creative intention is no longer in our purview.

Modern mythology, at least with us, is naturally not as well unified as the earlier one, but it does possess some unity nonetheless. It reaches us on two main levels. There is a social mythology, which we learn through conversation and the contacts of family, teachers, and neighbours, which is reinforced by the mass media, newspapers, television, and movies, and which is based fundamentally on cliché and stock response. In the United States, elementary education, at least before the Sputnik revolution of 1957,[108] consisted very largely of acquiring a stock-response mythology known as the American way of life. Canadian elementary teaching has been less obsessed by social mythology, as its children do not require the indoctrination that citizens of a great world

Copyrighted material

power do, but it has its own kind, as in fact do all societies in all ages. Social mythology in our day is a faint parody of the Christian mythology which preceded it. "Things were simpler in the old days; the world has unaccountably lost its innocence since we were children. I just live to get out of this rat race for a bit and go somewhere where I can get away from it all. Yet there is a bracing atmosphere in competition and we may hope to see consumer goods enjoyed by all members of our society after we abolish poverty. The world is threatened with grave dangers from foreigners, perhaps with total destruction; yet if we dedicate ourselves anew to the tasks which lie before us we may preserve our way of life for generations yet unborn." One recognizes the familiar outlines of paradise myths, fall myths, exodus-from-Egypt myths, pastoral myths, apocalypse myths.

The first great modern novelist is usually taken to be Flaubert, whose last and unfinished work, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, included, as part of its scheme, a "Dictionary of Accepted Ideas." In recent years there has been a phenomenal growth of books which are written from within one of the social sciences, but are actually read as social satires. Anyone can think of a dozen titles: *The Lonely Crowd, The Affluent Society, The Organization Man, The Academic Market-Place, The Status Seekers, The Insolent Chariots, The Hidden Persuaders, Games People Play*. This last one breaks the rhythm of the conventional titles: a stock phrase preceded by the inside-knowledge suggestion of the definite article. Not all of these are good books, but they all deal with subjects about which good books ought to be written. The importance of this form of literary fiction, for that is what it is, is that it studies society from the point of view of its popular or cliché mythology, its accepted ideas. It is bound to have a revolutionary impact on other fiction by making novelists and dramatists more aware of the symbolic and ritual basis of social behaviour.

A more complicated mythology emerges in general education and liberal arts courses, where we become aware of the immense importance of the thinkers who have helped to shape our mythology: Rousseau, Marx, Freud, the existentialists, and others whose importance depends on what versions of it we take most seriously. In addition to the art and scholarship which is specialized and works with limited objectives, there is a wide variety of "idea books," books that survey the intellectual world, or a large section of it, from a certain comprehensive point of view. On the bookshelves of my study in front of me as I write I see works of history: Spengler's *Decline of the West*, Toynbee's *A Study of His-*

Copyrighted material

says he believes, thinks he believes, believes he believes. A creed is essentially an assertion that one belongs to a certain social body: even if one is trying to define an individual belief not exactly like anyone else's, one is still defining one's social and intellectual context. One's profession of faith is a part of one's social contract. Practical belief is what a man's actions and attitudes show that he believes. Pascal's conception of the "wager,"[113] the assumptions underlying one's conduct, is a conception of practical belief. Similar conceptions are in Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, and, more generally, in Vaihinger's theory of assumed fictions.[114] A closed mythology, like Christianity in the Middle Ages, requires the statement of theoretical belief from everyone, and imposes a discipline that will make practice consistent with it. Thus the closed mythology is a statement both of what is believed to be true and of what is going to be made true by a certain course of action. This latter more particularly is the sense in which Marxism is a closed mythology, and the sense in which another revolutionary thinker, Sorel, generally conceives of myth.[115]

A closed mythology forms a body of major premises which is superior in authority to scholarship and art. A closed myth already contains all the answers, at least potentially: whatever scholarship or art produce has to be treated deductively, as reconcilable with the mythology, or, if irreconcilable, suppressed. In Marxist countries the physical sciences are allowed to function more or less independently of the myth, because, as remarked earlier, society picks up too many of its golden eggs to want to kill the goose, but as the physical sciences do not form an integral part of the myth of concern, their autonomy, up to a point, would not be fatal to it. A closed myth creates a general elite. In the Middle Ages this elite consisted of clerics; in Marxist countries it consists of those who understand both the principles of Marxism and the way that the existing power structure wants Marxism rationalized.

In the democracies there are many who would like to see a closed myth take over. Some are hysterical, like the John Birch Society,[116] who want a myth of the American way of life, as they understand it, imposed on everything, or like the maudlin Teutonism which a generation ago welcomed the formulating of the Nazi closed myth in Alfred Rosenberg's *Myth of the Twentieth Century*. It may be significant that the book which actually bears that title should be one of the most foolish and mischievous books of our time. Some are nostalgic intellectuals, usually with a strong religious bias, who are bemused by the "unity" of medi-

Copyrighted material

eval culture and would like to see some kind of "return" to it. Some are people who can readily imagine themselves as belonging to the kind of elite that a closed myth would produce. Some are sincere believers in democracy who feel that democracy is at a disadvantage in not having a clear and unquestioned program of its beliefs. But democracy can hardly function with a closed myth, and books of the type I have mentioned as contributions to our mythology, however illuminating and helpful, cannot, in a free society, be given any authority beyond what they earn by their own merits. That is, an open mythology has no canon. Similarly, there can be no general elite in a democratic society: in a democracy everybody belongs to some kind of elite, which derives from its social function a particular knowledge or skill that no other group has.

The earlier closed mythology of the Western world was a religion, and the emergence of an open mythology has brought about a cultural crisis which is at bottom a religious crisis. Traditionally, there are two elements in religion, considered as such apart from a definite faith. One is the primitive element of *religio*, the collection of duties, rituals, and observances which are binding on all members of a community. In this sense Marxism and the American way of life are religions. The other is the sense of a transcendence of the ordinary categories of human experience, a transcendence normally expressed by the words "infinite" and "eternal." As a structure of belief, religion is greatly weakened; it has no secular power to back it up, and its mandates affect far fewer people, and those far less completely, than a century ago. What is significant is not so much the losing of faith as the losing of guilt feelings about losing it. Religion tends increasingly to make its primary impact, not as a system of taught and learned belief, but as an imaginative structure which, whether "true" or not, has imaginative consistency and imaginative informing power. In other words, it makes its essential appeal as myth or possible truth, and whatever belief it attracts follows from that.

This means that the arts, which address the imagination, have, ever since the Romantic movement, acquired increasingly the role of the agents through which religion is understood and appreciated. The arts have taken on a prophetic function in society, never more of one than when the artist pretends to deprecate such a role, as, for instance, T.S. Eliot did. It is sometimes said that the arts, especially poetry, have become a "substitute" for religion,[117] but this makes no sense. The arts contain no objects of worship or belief, nor do they constitute (except

Copyrighted material

professionally for a few people) a way of life. If a man is brought up to believe, say, in the immortality of the soul, loses that belief, and then reconciles himself to death by saying that he will continue to live in the memories of his friends, he really does have a substitute for religion—that is, an accommodation of a transcendent religious conception to the categories of ordinary experience. Many "philosophies of life," like that of Sartre in our day, are substitutes for religion in this sense, but the arts are not and never can be. The alliance of religion and art is based on the fact that religion deals with transcendent conceptions and that the arts, being imaginative, are confined, not by the limits of the possible, but by the limits of the conceivable. Thus poetry speaks the mythical language of religion. And perhaps, if we think of the reality of religion as mythical rather than doctrinal, religion would turn out to be what is really open about an open mythology: the sense that there are no limits to what the human imagination may conceive or be concerned with.

I developed my own view of such questions by studying the poetry of William Blake. Most of Blake's lyrical poems are either songs of innocence or songs of experience. One of the songs of innocence is a poem called *The Lamb*, where a child asks a lamb the first question of the catechism, "Who made you?" The child has a confident answer: Christ made the lamb because he is both a lamb and child himself, and unites the human and subhuman worlds in a divine personality. The contrasting poem is the song of experience called *The Tyger*, where the poet asks, "Did he who made the lamb make thee?" Some students of Blake, I regret to say, have tried to answer the question. The vision of the world as created by a benevolent and intelligent power is the innocent vision, the vision of the child who assumes that the world around him must have parents too. Further, it is a world in which only lambs can live: lions and tigers can enter it only on condition that they lie down with the lamb, and thereby cease to be lions and tigers. But the child's vision is far behind us. The world we are in is the world of the tiger, and that world was never created or seen to be good. It is the subhuman world of nature, a world of law and of power but not of intelligence or design. Things "evolve" in it, whatever that means, but there is no creative power in it that we can see except that of man himself. And man is not very good at the creating business: he is much better at destroying, for most of him, like an iceberg, is submerged in a destructive element.[118]

Hence the fragility of all human creations and ideals, including the ideal that we are paying tribute to this year. The world we see and live

Copyrighted material

in, and most of the world we have made, belongs to the alienated and absurd world of the tiger. But in all our efforts to imagine or realize a better society, some shadow falls across it of the child's innocent vision of the impossible created world that makes human sense. If we can no longer feel that this world was once created for us by a divine parent, we still must feel, more intensely than ever, that it is the world we ought to be creating, and that whatever may be divine in our destiny or nature is connected with its creation. The loss of faith in such a world is centrally a religious problem, but it has a political dimension as well, and one which includes the question we have been revolving around all through: What is it, in society, to which we really owe loyalty? The question is not easy to answer in Canada. We are alienated from our economy in Marx's sense, as we own relatively little of it ourselves; our governments are democratic: that is, they are what Nietzsche calls "all too human." We have few ready-made symbols of loyalty: a flag perfunctorily designed by a committee, a national anthem with its patent pending, an imported Queen.[119] But we may be looking in the wrong direction.

I referred earlier to Grove's *A Search for America*, where the narrator keeps looking for the genuine America buried underneath the America of hustling capitalism which occupies the same place. This buried America is an ideal that emerges in Thoreau, Whitman, and the personality of Lincoln. All nations have such a buried or uncreated ideal, the lost world of the lamb and the child, and no nation has been more preoccupied with it than Canada. The painting of Tom Thomson and Emily Carr, and later of Riopelle and Borduas,[120] is an exploring, probing painting, tearing apart the physical world to see what lies beyond or through it. Canadian literature even at its most articulate, in the poetry of Pratt, with its sense of the corruption at the heart of achievement, or of Nelligan with its sense of unfulfilled clarity, a reach exceeding the grasp,[121] or in the puzzled and indignant novels of Grove,[122] seems constantly to be trying to understand something that eludes it, frustrated by a sense that there is something to be found that has not been found, something to be heard that the world is too noisy to let us hear. One of the derivations proposed for the word "Canada" is a Portuguese phrase meaning "nobody here." The etymology of the word "Utopia" is very similar, and perhaps the real Canada is an ideal with nobody in it. The Canada to which we really do owe loyalty is the Canada that we have failed to create. In a year bound to be full of discussions of our identity, I

Copyrighted material

should like to suggest that our identity, like the real identity of all nations, is the one that we have failed to achieve. It is expressed in our culture, but not attained in our life, just as Blake's new Jerusalem to be built in England's green and pleasant land [*Milton*, Preface, l. 16] is no less a genuine ideal for not having been built there. What there is left of the Canadian nation may well be destroyed by the kind of sectarian bickering which is so much more interesting to many people than genuine human life. But, as we enter a second century contemplating a world where power and success express themselves so much in stentorian lying, hypnotized leadership, and panic-stricken suppression of freedom and criticism, the uncreated identity of Canada may be after all not so bad a heritage to take with us.

Copyrighted material

2

Current Opera: A Housecleaning

October 1935

From Acta Victoriana, *60 (October 1935): 12–14. Reprinted in* RW, *1–4. Noteworthy here is Frye's interest in the comic potential of opera.*

This is not a criticism of the performances of the opera company that visited Toronto recently, as the present critic succeeded in seeing only *Madame Butterfly*. If this was typical, they were adequate enough, if somewhat perfunctory. Of course *Madame Butterfly* is unfortunate in having a modern and quasi-realistic setting, which throws an onus of stage "business" on the singers. The result in this case was a good deal of spasmodic cigarette-lighting and nose-blowing and uneasy and rather aimless puttering about the stage in an effort to make some gesture in the direction of drama. But the response to a melodrama of stock pathos is one thing, and the response to Puccini's extraordinarily competent and fluent journalistic style of composition is quite another, and a general impression remained of an hermaphroditic and ill-conceived mingling of outlines.

This suggests the obvious reflection that the opera would be all the better for being completely conventionalized; surely a drama that depended on automatic movements making no pretence of holding a mirror to any kind of nature[1] would be better suited to the declamation and rhetoric which singing involves. If *Madame Butterfly* depended at all on chorus work the demands of the drama would of course be less obtrusive, but when it proceeds almost entirely by aria and recitative the stage effect is bound to be stiff and awkward. The opera began as a method of incorporating Greek drama in Western art forms: two or three leading characters, a chorus, a mythological setting; all this was *de*

Copyrighted material

The Collected Works of Northrop Frye

PUBLISHED VOLUMES

1 & 2 *The Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp*
Edited by Robert D. Denham

3 *Northrop Frye's Student Essays*
Edited by Robert D. Denham

4 *Northrop Frye on Religion*
Edited by Alvin A. Lee and Jean O'Grady

5 & 6 *Northrop Frye's Late Notebooks, 1982–1990: Architecture of the Spiritual World*
Edited by Robert D. Denham

7 *Northrop Frye's Writings on Education*
Edited by Jean O'Grady and Goldwin French

8 *The Diaries of Northrop Frye, 1942–1955*
Edited by Robert D. Denham

9 *The "Third Book" Notebooks of Northrop Frye, 1964–1972: The Critical Comedy*
Edited by Michael Dolzani

10 *Northrop Frye on Literature and Society, 1936–1989: Unpublished Papers*
Edited by Robert D. Denham

11 *Northrop Frye on Modern Culture*
Edited by Jan Gorak

12 *Northrop Frye on Canada*
Edited by Jean O'Grady and David Staines

13 *Northrop Frye's Notebooks and Lectures on the Bible and Other Religious Texts*
Edited by Robert D. Denham

ISBN 0-8020-3696-1

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS

Copyrighted material