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CANON AND LITERARY CRITICISM

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ABSTRACT

The idea of canon has a long history in religion and biblical studies, and some of its meanings have naturally been applied to secular literature. This dissertation examines, first, the idea of canon in contemporary biblical studies; second, the idea of canon as it is employed in Matthew Arnold's works, especially in Literature and Dogma and God and the Bible; and, finally, two contemporary approaches to canon in the criticism of Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom. It also includes as an appendix in a separate volume (and under separate copyright) a work which raised the question of canon and which is itself preoccupied with canonical values and canonicity: British Literary Manuscripts: Series I and II by Verlyn Klinkenborg, Herbert Cahoon, and Charles Ryskamp (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1981).

To call a work canonical, in biblical studies, suggests that its text has become fixed, that it is inspired, that it arose within a specific historical period and community, and, above all, that it has become normative for religious practice within the community. Also, a canon, as James Sanders and Brevard Childs have pointed out, manifests both stability and adaptability, and it engenders authoritative interpretation of two sorts: evaluative shaping of the text itself and exegesis.

Several of these canonical functions are described in Arnold's Literature and Dogma and God and the Bible; the uses of canon that appear in his attack on Puritanism also typify his secular literary criticism. There he uses the idea of "disengagement," which in his sense is analogous to creating a canon; he also stresses the value of a "canon within a canon." Also, Arnold's emphasis on poetical rank, comparative estimates, and a "high standard" of judgment demonstrates the prevalence of canonical evaluation in his work.

Two of his successors, Frye and Bloom, eradicate the possibility of canonical decisions by eliminating the critic's ability to choose a text to begin with. Frye does this by effectively canonizing all literature, of whatever quality, while Bloom destroys choice by his insistence on the ability of strong poems to elect their successors. Against these positions, it is argued that preliminary choice is a basic canonical function, that by selecting a work to write about the critic necessarily reflects on the canon, and that the critic invariably chooses from a universe of canonically inflected texts.

Accompanying this dissertation (in a separate volume and under separate copyright) as an appendix is British Literary Manuscripts: Series I and II (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1981), by Verlyn Klinkenborg, Herbert Cahoon, and Charles Ryskamp. This is a work which is itself preoccupied with canonical values and which, in its shape and the process of its writing, raised the questions on which this dissertation is based. It has not been microfilmed as a part of "Canon and Literary Criticism."

PREFACE

If my experience was not uncommon, most graduate students are brought up to their profession in an atmosphere of greatness, the greatness of their subjects. Over their first six or eight or ten years of serious study of English literature, great works by great authors so continuously surround them that they find themselves in a landscape which has shaped itself while they were not watching, but which nonetheless looks strangely familiar, as if they awoke one morning among ancestral mountains. They learn the names and the contours of all the peaks on the horizon, as well as those of the larger foothills through which lead trails to the distant ranges. Eventually, by training, habit, and finally predilection, they all become literary alpinists, intent on climbing only the biggest and most challenging of geological formations.

With a deepening knowledge of the classics of English literature, there grows an implicit awareness of literary standards. How it grows is another matter. No one says at any point, here are the reasons why Wordsworth is assigned and Cowper is not. In two years of course work at Princeton, not to mention their undergraduate years, they meet a dozen or so private

canons in the form of syllabi, canons which have been radically qualified by time and pedagogical necessity, syllabi laden with a sense of what might also have been taught. At what point the question "what is a classic?" or "why is this work more important than that?" begins to be asked is uncertain. Some students began asking it the day they started to read seriously; for others, it remains implicit, or arises only in connection with their teaching.

In my own case, these questions emerged when I was hired by The Pierpont Morgan Library to re-catalogue its collection of British literary manuscripts and, incidentally it seemed at first, to prepare and mount two major exhibitions and write a catalogue based on them. For me, the question of literary evaluation slipped into focus virtually overnight, as I passed from a setting where standards were immediately recognizable, if implicit, to a setting where the same standards would require open defense. At first, the change was not evident, for at the Morgan Library the tradition of English literature appears remarkably serene and the meaning of literary canon looks self-evident. The Morgan Library has long had a reputation for selectivity; Morgan himself had pursued only the choicest manuscripts, and within the limits of today's insane marketplace, the same acquisitions policy has been followed. As a result, any number of manuscripts in its collec-

tion can be considered canonical: Paradise Lost, An Essay on Man, Johnson's Life of Pope, "Dejection: An Ode," "Ode to Psyche," Don Juan, Our Mutual Friend, and on and on.

But the longer I worked in the Morgan Library, the more it became apparent to me that, aside perhaps from the sumptuousness of its binding, there is no inherent index to the literary importance of a manuscript. (Market-value is an extremely misleading guide.) And as my familiarity with the collection grew, a different group of manuscripts appeared more regularly on my desk, manuscripts that seemed as important to the Library, but which were less certain, not to say altogether hopeless, of a place in the canonical succession of English literature: Belford Regis, Mr. Midshipman Easy, Hard Cash, The Woman in White, The City of Dreadful Night, to name only a few. These manuscripts came to occupy more and more of my time because they were unfamiliar and thus rather enticing. And, of course, as I worked on them more, I wondered more about how they differed from the manuscripts of obviously canonical works. One thing became clear. The emphasis on selectivity at the Morgan Library serves to disguise the fact that all the manuscripts in its collection, like all the poems in a language, occupy a perfectly identical historical plane; some are more hallowed by sentiment, others more valuable because of relative scarcity, but all are contemporaneous in their present existence, all

survivors due to whatever fate it is that overtakes manuscripts and allows them to come into the hands of collectors and institutions.

The incidental task of writing a catalogue about British literary manuscripts for The Pierpont Morgan Library soon became my primary occupation. It involved selecting some two hundred and sixty manuscripts from a collection of between twenty and twenty-five thousand, and it also involved providing a rationale for including those manuscripts whose inclusion was not immediately assumed. Inevitably, I became immersed in an overt process of selection and evaluation, a fundamental work of canon-formation on a limited scale. The book that resulted, British Literary Manuscripts: Series I and II (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1981), is laden with this weight of evaluation and preoccupied with the values of the authors and manuscripts it contains. If the book has an overriding principle of selection, other than that of a chronological survey of the most interesting literary manuscripts in the Morgan Library, I would say that it also gives a reasonable picture of the way our standard of literary values broadens as it moves forward in time. This is hardly a new or insightful point, for it merely records the predatory work of selection that time has already performed. But because the writing of British Literary Manuscripts was absorbed in the process of evaluation, it

may serve as a model--in the sense of a small imitation--of a canon and a demonstration of some of the anxieties that arise in canon-formation. That--and the important fact that it served as the occasion for my lengthy meditation on canon--is why it appears as the appendix to this dissertation.

The dissertation itself, "Canon and Literary Criticism," began with questions raised by British Literary Manuscripts, but rapidly outstripped them. In order to explain the meaning of the word "canon" and its possible critical utility, I had to consider the debate over the term in the only discipline where it is currently taken seriously: religious studies. What originally began as a brief comparison of the relative authority belonging to the notion of canon in classical and biblical literature (as a prelude to a discussion of the canonical idea in Matthew Arnold and our own time) has developed into a much more detailed examination of the nature of canon as understood by biblical scholars and theologians than I had initially expected. Contemporary study of the biblical canon, and especially the recent controversy over so-called "canonical criticism," opens some extremely interesting prospects for literary criticism; for though the two disciplines have almost entirely parted ways, each is fundamentally related to a text, and the sanction for speaking in similar terms of sacred and secular works ranges from Longinus to Lowth and from Arnold to Auerbach.

I have not drawn upon or written about the use of canon in contemporary biblical studies for its own sake. The section on biblical canon serves as a backdrop for a discussion of the canonical idea in Matthew Arnold's criticism. Arnold is a logical choice with which to begin a discussion of the canonical function in twentieth-century criticism because his own perceptions of canon are clearly expressed in two works, Literature and Dogma and God and the Bible, and because he is such a strong forebear of contemporary critics. While these two works do not appear to have been much noticed by biblical scholars or theologians (or, for that matter, to any great extent by literary critics) they reveal the close relation in Arnold's mind between the notion of biblical canonicity and a canon of secular literature. Arnold's argument, by which he applies a literary understanding to the Bible in order to rescue its truths, is just as subtle as the manner in which he applies the notion of canonical evaluation to secular literature in order to support and defend its authority. To the extent that contemporary criticism possesses an idea of canon-formation as a necessary basis for criticism, I believe it has inherited it from Arnold.

It is explicitly the relationship between evaluative choice, as a function of canon-formation, and the act of criticism that I discuss in the third chapter of this dissertation.

To anticipate my argument somewhat, I feel that evaluation is itself a canonical function and that the selection of a canon--usually a severely limited one--precedes and determines the nature of one's criticism. What I discuss is the fact that by opting exclusively for the task of elucidation as opposed to evaluation (to use Eliot's distinction) and by putting the question of evaluative canon-formation out of sight, contemporary critics have begged an extremely important question and cut themselves off from one of their most valuable roles. This is evident in the works of Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom, who eliminate, each in his own way, the possibility of critical choice and thus the validity of canon. They and their theories, insofar as they concern canon-formation, are the subjects of my third chapter.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Everyone knows that the first and most important canon in any work can be found in the acknowledgements. Mine begins with the two directors of this dissertation, Charles Ryskamp and Walt Litz, both of whom have been remarkable for their flexibility and patience. Next to them, I must also thank Willard Thorp, who has long been an unofficial advisor to me and many others and on whose back porch the question at the center of this dissertation was largely framed. Similarly, I owe a very large debt to Herbert Cahoon, of The Pierpont Morgan Library, who in every sense, made possible the writing of British Literary Manuscripts and thus this dissertation. Among my colleagues, I must mention Jerry Reedy and Connie Hassett of Fordham University, both of whom have read sections of this work, and Chris Dennis, Vicki Mahaffey, Steve Polansky, and Beth Witherell, who have listened to me talk about it. Finally, in what is the last, but always the most canonical position, I must thank Reggie, who for twenty months has put up with all the conflicting weather-systems engendered by this work.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

THE BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

These days it is difficult to propose in a serious or formal way the idea of a literary canon. The authority of the word "canon" has long since worn off, its meaning has dimmed, and it has come to suggest to some critics merely a pernicious elitism that accompanies any attempt to set apart as superior a special class of works. Within contemporary critical theory, which includes powerful analytical tools capable of cutting across hidebound distinctions and deconstructing the most firmly seated of philosophical artifices, the idea of canon appears to be a mere archaism, no more perhaps than a term that survives from a time when the reader's relation to the text was neither so sophisticated nor so vexed. What does survive of the idea of canon is little more than the meaning that describes the corpus of an author's works or marks out a field of study, much the way "tradition" or "curriculum" do.

The increasing diversity of literary studies in this century has clearly shown the looseness and informality of the sense of canon in the minds of most critics and scholars. The task of "opening up the canon," proposed in the title of the most recent volume of English Institute Essays, can hardly be performed when the idea of canon itself has so largely been superseded. The expansion of the industries of criticism and

scholarship in this century (not to mention other, sociological reasons) has largely obliterated the distinction between high and low, or elite and mass, culture, invalidated the evaluative function of criticism in response to a call for democracy in literature, and deracinated the idea of order in the literary arts. As the canon has exploded, so too has the curriculum, with the often paradoxical result that today the works which have traditionally been considered the most canonical seem less and less curricular. And as the canon is opened towards meaninglessness, it must be presented in smaller and smaller chunks, either in the classroom or in print, to be intelligible.

In this dissertation I discuss the nature of canon and its possible function in contemporary literary criticism. This topic was initially suggested by the task of selecting a canon (in its most limited sense: a list of works) of two hundred and sixty manuscripts from the autograph manuscript collection of The Pierpont Morgan Library. Obviously, such a canon is idiosyncratic and limited from the outset by the boundaries of the Morgan manuscript collection. The decision, for example, to omit Spenser and George Herbert was no decision at all, due to a lack of manuscripts, while the inclusion of R.D. Blackmore and Ouida or two manuscripts by William Cowper falls into the category of personal interest. I do not attempt to defend my choices solely on the basis of traditional literary values, for below a certain

level of literary renown they offer little guidance. Besides, the means of indicating relative importance in the book that resulted--the inclusion of one, two, or three manuscripts by an author--is patently rather crude.

During its writing, British Literary Manuscripts (which appears as the Appendix to this dissertation) raised several interesting questions about the relation between the authors of English literature. They are not questions about influence or historical associations, but about emphasis or proportion and the ways in which one discriminates between the relative value of writers' works. Who is major and who is minor and do the gradations between them continue to have any meaning? In what measure does tradition hand down both major and minor writers and are we capable of realigning traditional evaluations in any way? If major writers belong to a "canon" then what is the status of minor writers? By their goading simplicity these questions rival "what is literature?" for annoyance value.

But they all concern canon, the extent of its authority, if it still has any, and the process by which it is formed. In fact, if one looks at the English literary tradition in a certain way--through canonizing lenses--the process of secular canon-formation can be seen everywhere. Certain poems, like Pope's "Temple of Fame," propose a canon while other poems, of the sort represented by "MacFlecknoe" and "The Dunciad," posit

an anti-canon. At a lesser level, poems like Suckling's "A Sessions of the Poets" also indicate the presence of a canonizing spirit. The same is true of poetic elegy, e.g., Coleridge and Wordsworth on Chatterton, Collins on Thomson, or Dryden on Oldham. The question of poetic diction has canonical overtones, and, at the most basic level, a canonizing tendency can be seen even in the very manner in which one author alludes to another, though here one must distinguish between illustrative and authoritative allusion. Certainly, as teachers, we canonize to a degree when we form our traditional syllabi, and, as I shall argue, before we begin to criticize we must, consciously or not, erect a canon or select from within one.

In one sense, the process of canonization implies transformation. Like the metamorphoses of humans into gods in Ovid, some works slough off their mortality and are allowed to dwell in a more durable realm. Others, like Tithonus, have been granted immortality without the necessary gift of eternal youth. In Judaism, canonization is accorded only those works that were assembled or written while the spirit of prophecy still lingered among the Jews. In the Christian tradition, canonization of the Bible can be considered analogous to incarnation, the word made flesh. But in the region of secular letters, it can only be promotion to the sides of Parnassus, farther up or down, not always according to the poet's desire. Spenser may compare "that

pleasaunt Mount, that is for ay/ Through famous Poets verse each where renownd" to "the highest Mount;/ Such one, as that same mighty man of God...dweld forty dayes upon" (Faerie Queene, I.x.53-54), but no one claims to share Sinai with Moses. There is a difference in secular literature. As Auden wrote to Byron,

Parnassus after all is not a mountain
Reserved for A.1. climbers such as you;
It's got a park, it's got a public fountain.

Writers who claim or have been relegated to the lower slopes pose the greatest problem when one considers the nature of the English literary canon. Many lesser authors in the English tradition surprise us with their freshness, often the result of unfamiliarity, and with a sense of disproportionate value when one considers their lowly status in or absence from the canon. As Arnold's demand "to know the best which has been thought and said" echoes in one's mind,[1] one comes to wonder about the distinction between best and worst, or greater and lesser, and to conclude as many have that it is not necessarily an inherent quality in a work that determines such questions of degree. Enough Cowleys and Wallers have slipped out of what was once a firm canon to assure one of that. But if the canonical or non-canonical status of minor authors raises interesting questions, it does so only in the light provided by works that are truly canonical. If canon has any meaning for literary

studies today, it will probably be seen most clearly not at the point where the canon breaks off, if such a point could ever be determined, but where it is felt most strongly. Thus the purpose of this dissertation is not so much to admire, for example, the chasm between Edmund Waller and John Milton, who stand next to each other in British Literary Manuscripts, as to explore the nature of the concept that gives meaning to it.

This will be done in three closely related chapters. In the first, I shall discuss the authority and function of a sacred canon, the Old Testament, and the development of the study of canon within modern, biblical scholarship, the only place where the idea is treated seriously. In the second, I shall examine the canonical idea in the biblical writings and criticism of Matthew Arnold, the critic for whom it had the greatest significance and in whose work a strong resistance to the lapse of canon and canonical evaluation may be seen. Finally, I shall discuss modern ideas concerning canon in the work of Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom, the role of critical evaluation or selection as a canonical function, and the relationship between critical methodology and hierarchy in the study of literature.

The antecedents of our decayed sense of canon are to be found in the classical tradition, which offers a weak, secular

model of canon, and in the Jewish scriptural tradition, which offers a strong, sacred model. The secular, scholastic history of canon properly begins with the Alexandrian scholars of the third and second centuries B.C., Callimachus, Aristophanes of Byzantium, and Aristarchus. Callimachus was the author of Pinakes--a forebear of The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature--which survives only in fragments. There are enough of these, however, to make the importance of his work obvious. As the editor of Callimachus' writings, Rudolf Pfeiffer, observes, "the Pinakes...made the greatest treasures of literature accessible by dividing poetry and prose books into appropriate classes and by listing the authors in alphabetical order."[2] Callimachus' main contribution to the development of a secular canon was, however, largely preparatory. While his purpose was to impose order on the contents of the library at Alexandria, the order he sought to create was comprehensive, not selective, and the evaluative distinctions presented in Pinakes are only those between literary kinds, not between greater and lesser examples of the same kind.

The task of making a selective list--a canon--that discriminated between the quality of various writers' works fell to Callimachus' successors, Aristarchus and Aristophanes of Byzantium, whom Quintilian called "poetarum iudices."[3] The character of their selected lists is inferred primarily from Aristo-

phanes' editions of a small number of poets, references in his other writings, and allusions to their work in Latin literature, particularly in Cicero, Horace, and Quintilian.[4] The word given to authors who were included in their selective lists was ἐγκριθέντες, which has not survived in a modern language.[5] Instead, it came, through Cicero, to be reinterpreted as "classici," or, as Pfeiffer glosses it, "writers of the first class, 'primae classis' in the political and military language."[6] The word "classic," of course, developed meanings along its own lines, while the selective lists themselves went without a name until the eighteenth century when the philologist David Ruhnken, borrowing a term from the Church, applied the word "canones" to them.[7]

The Alexandrian canon consisted of fixed numbers of books divided generically, e.g., three superior tragedians and nine lyric poets. Such clearly prescribed numbers, which rapidly gained traditionary force, recall the familiar topos in which a poet expresses anxiety about being included in the canonical number, a topos which has been troped extensively by Harold Bloom, who has also discussed the Alexandrians.[8] This commonplace occurs, for example, in the second book of Keats's Endymion:

> Aye, the count
> Of mighty poets is made up; the scroll
> Is folded by the Muses; the bright roll

> Is in Apollo's hand; our dazèd eyes
> Have seen a new tinge in the western skies.
> The world has done its duty. II.723-728

In one sense, neither Keats nor any other secular author need have worried about admission to the "bright roll" of canonical authors, for the secular canon as conceived by the Alexandrians and their successors is merely a loose and informal gathering of writers compared to the rigidity of the biblical canon. Even in the case of classical literature, which, because of the stability of its canon (fixed, like the biblical canon, in a remote era), has been invested with greater authority than any other secular literature, the canon and its authority are largely informal.

Three centuries after Aristophanes, near the end of the first century A.D., Quintilian commented on the canonizing activities of his scholastic predecessors. His remarks on canon, or, as he called it, "ordo," come in Book I of Institutio Oratoria. They appear incidentally, for Quintilian begins by discussing the authors a young orator might study most profitably, and so alludes to his Alexandrian forebears, who had developed the "canon Alexandrinus." Here, he calls them "veteres grammatici."

> quo quidem ita severe sunt usi veteres grammatici,
> ut non versus modo censoria quadam virgula notare

> et libros, qui falso viderentur inscripti, tanquam subditos summovere familia permiserint sibi, sed auctores alios in ordinem redegerint, alios omnino exemerint numero.
>
> The old school of teachers indeed carried their criticism so far that they were not content with obelising lines or rejecting books whose titles they regarded as spurious, as though they were expelling a suppositious child from the family circle, but also drew up a canon of authors, from which some were omitted altogether.[9]

These are not the words of one who perceives dogmatic authority in the Alexandrian canon. The idea of order is important to Quintilian, but a literary order that is proposed in too rigid a form or is too exclusive carries something absurd about it; hence, he makes no claim for peculiar authority when he introduces his own selective list at the beginning of Book X of the Institutio.[10] Fully to appreciate the informality of Quintilian's approach to canon, however, it is necessary to consider another locus classicus in the literature on canon which was written at about the same time as Institutio Oratoria by an exact contemporary of Quintilian, Flavius Josephus.

Though he lived in Rome, Josephus was a Pharisee, one of the sect that founded the rabbinic tradition, and his book Con-

tra Apionem is a spirited defense of the Jews and their beliefs against recent anti-semitic writings. Quintilian and Josephus both wrote from and as adherents of Rome, but Josephus' sentiments lay naturally with the Jews, whose chief cultural symbol--the Temple at Jerusalem--had been destroyed by Titus in A.D. 70 as a consequence of open rebellion in Judea (which Josephus had opposed; in fact, he was a witness of the assault on Jerusalem). As Jew and Gentile, Josephus and Quintilian obviously approach their world in radically different ways, but they are never more distant from each other than when they discuss their literary heritages and specifically the idea of canon in their respective literatures.

Josephus' purpose in Contra Apionem is clearly more polemical than Quintilian's in Institutio Oratoria. In the following passage he lists the books that properly belong to the canon of Jewish scriptures and then contrasts the veneration of the Jews for their scriptures with the insufficient reverence of the Greeks towards their own histories.

> Our books, those which are justly accredited, are but two and twenty, and contain the record of all time.
>
> Of these, five are the books of Moses, comprising the laws and the traditional history from the birth of man down to the death of the lawgiver.

This period falls only a little short of three thousand years. From the death of Moses until Artaxerxes, who succeeded Xerxes as king of Persia, the prophets subsequent to Moses wrote the history of the events of their own times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life.

From Artaxerxes to our own time the complete history has been written, but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records, because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets.

We have given practical proof of our reverence for our own Scriptures. For, although such long ages have now passed, no one has ventured either to add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable; and it is an instinct with every Jew, from the day of his birth, to regard them as the decrees of God, to abide by them, and, if need be, cheerfully to die for them. Time and again ere now the sight has been witnessed of prisoners enduring tortures and death in every form in the theatres, rather than utter a single word against the laws and the allied documents.

What Greek would endure as much for the same

> cause? Even to save the entire collection of his nation's writings from destruction he would not face the smallest personal injury. For the Greeks they are mere stories improvised according to the fantasy of their authors; and in this estimate even of the older historians they are quite justified, when they see some of their own contemporaries venturing to describe events in which they bore no part, without taking the trouble to seek information from those who know the facts.[11]

The attitudes expressed in these quotations from Quintilian and Josephus represent two possible extremes in discussing canon, both of which have survived in one form or another to the present day: Josephus accepts a canon as absolutely binding; Quintilian disputes the very reasons for its existence. The differences between them only begin with tone. Josephus, writing against racist propaganda, is sarcastic, fiercely observant of the past; Quintilian, a retired teacher of rhetoric, is calm, respectful of the accomplishments of his scholastic predecessors, but in no sense bound by their example. A more important contrast is evident in the words they choose to describe the literatures in question. Josephus speaks of "scriptures," a word that primarily describes the religious function of a work within a society; Quintilian uses a less weighted term, "authors."

Furthermore, Josephus remarks that not a "syllable" in scripture has been altered over "such long ages," while Quintilian discounts the creation of a canon or "ordinem" from which not merely syllables but whole authors are capable of being omitted.

Quintilian's approach to canon has at its root the fact that he knows the names, place of activity, and dates of the "veteres grammatici" who created the canonical order he calmly rejects. Though Aristophanes and Aristarchus preceded him by some three centuries, they remain mere scholars, whose skills are finally similar to his own. The spirit of scholarship had not, after all, fled the Western world; it had merely suffered a translation from Greece to Rome. In rejecting their canon, he does not reject a tradition received directly from God, merely a doubtful practice common to men like himself. Finally, his word "ordinem" is itself interesting, though, as Pfeiffer remarks, it was not generally accepted.[12] As Quintilian uses it, order suggests hierarchy, an unbroken succession of writers ranging from greatest to least and encompassing an entire literature. Similarly, the "classici" of Cicero are merely those taken from the "primae classis"; they are not the sole representatives of Roman literature. Quintilian's order is not, strictly speaking, the same as the Alexandrian's canon; they differ in their inclusiveness. It is, in fact, the attempt by the "veteres grammatici" to apply a sharp, canonical judgment, which exludes

some authors, that provokes his disdain.

All this is different in Josephus. He alludes to an anciently established canon, and though he is able to name the writings it includes he does not say who created or shaped the canon itself. This is at least partly because there has been a radical disjunction in history since the canonical works were written or assembled; after Artaxerxes I, the spirit of prophecy, Josephus claims, abandoned the Jews. Thus, there is a fundamental distinction between the authors (and presumably the editors) of the canonical works and the present generation of Jews. This distinction constitutes one standard of canonical judgment or evaluation as Josephus perceives it. The works that were written after the "failure of the exact succession of the prophets" are not canonical, and though Josephus draws upon apocryphal works he does not grant them the same credit as the "laws and the allied documents." (Also, his own historical writings make no claim to canonicity.) Finally, in contrast to Quintilian, it is precisely the idea of canonical judgment that has meaning for Josephus: exclusion, as well as inclusion, makes the Old Testament a canon of scriptures and not a literature of authors.

Compared to the sacred canon of the Jews, the informality of the classical canon is apparent. Even in a society in which (compared to ours today) literature and literary, or rhetorical,

education held a highly valued place, the weakness of canonical claims must be felt, as Quintilian felt them. In its most intimate connection with Roman life, literature was at most propadeutic, never definitive of the shape of society itself. The Aeneid, for example, cannot prompt the authoritative and legalistic interpretation that the Torah can, because it is a late reflection or retelling of the Roman myth of origin, not a binding revelation. It seeks to relate the "translatio" of Aeneas and the Trojans only in a fictive sense; the difference in factuality, which Josephus comments upon in comparing the scriptures to Greek literature, is readily apparent if one compares the "translatio" of the Jews from Egypt to Canaan and what is revealed to them in the Sinai with that of Aeneas and what is revealed to him by contact with his ancestors and Venus. The former is constitutive and defining, for it proposes the very laws by which Jewish society was to be organized; the latter is reflective, a transumption that glorifies the reign of Augustus.

The divergent approaches to canonical authority that separate Quintilian and Josephus, who write at the same time and in the same city, but from radically different perspectives, resemble the divergent approaches to canon that distinguish contemporary literary criticism and biblical scholarship. For the literary critic, the canon remains debatable and the question of its authority is ignored; too, the prospect of the

past does not offer clean Levantine lines of canonical arrangement, but "a woody Theatre/ Of stateliest view" in which the critic still must learn to distinguish the hyssop from the cedar. When the idea of canon emerges in literary criticism, it tends to do so in the form of the perennial question, "what is a classic?" in which the critic is guided by Virgil towards an answer. Obviously, such a question needs to be asked, as Sainte-Beuve, T.S. Eliot, and Frank Kermode have shown in their different ways. But even if the classic--i.e., the Aeneid--is placed within a social or imperial setting--Virgil, for instance, as poet of the Roman Empire--the classic, as the title defines it, remains solitary, and questions about its authority as part of a collection of works like it remain largely unasked. It seems to me much more valuable to consider the classic in the context of other classics, as part of a canon. As understood by biblical scholars, from whom we may borrow a few ideas, canon in its collective nature implies what the lone classic cannot: the authority of a literature in its relation to society. This is the particular value of approaching the idea of canon from the side of biblical scholarship. There, the question "what is a canon?" is fundamental, and it leads immediately to deliberation on the function and collective authority of scripture.

From the first, canon has been a basic issue among bib-

lical scholars for the simple reason that their primary texts come canonically bound and shaped. The book of Isaiah does not get handed down to posterity as an individual work, but always as a component of a larger body, specifically, the Septuagint, the Masorah, the Dead Sea scrolls, or one of the other versions. This circumstance helps to emphasize the fact that canon is not merely a category to which biblical books belong or a fence erected to protect them from change; it is also a part of their significance. Canonicity, however, is not an easy form of meaning to decipher. It is impossible to consider the differing orders, contents, and numbers of books found in the numerous versions of the Old Testament, not to mention the extra-biblical evidence about canon in rabbinic and patristic writings, without wondering, first, which canon has prior claims to our attention, and second, what process it is that results in a sense of canon (explicit or implicit) that is so vital. The first question cannot really be answered outside the context of faith, but the second may, possibly, be answered historically.

In Jewish sources, the word "canon," which is Greek, does not appear; a work that is canonical in the Protestant Old Testament is said, in rabbinic literature, to defile the hands, a phrase that describes the effect of handling sacred books.[13] In spite of a difference in Jewish and Christian definitions of canon (which is discussed below), the concept

is common to both traditions and their modern scholarship.[14] In the church canon carried at first the sense it had in Greek ethics, that of a measure or a rule.[15] Paul uses the word in this sense at II Corinthians 10:13-16 and Galatians 6:16. The extension of meaning to describe books which are themselves suitable as "regula fidei" took place as the young church matured. By the time biblical scholarship had made a formal start in the works of Origen and Jerome, the idea of "canonical" books had solidified; "the first application of the noun to the collection of holy scriptures appears in the last part of the fourth century and continued in common use from the time of Jerome."[16] (Note in this conjunction that it is canon as a list of books that is the extended meaning, or, as Pfeiffer has it, "a modern catechresis.")[17]

While the linguistic evidence about canon permits agreement among modern scholars, the historical process through which a canonical body of scriptures was defined does not. This diversity of opinion, however, has come about merely within the last century or so, for it was only after the nineteenth-century atomization of the biblical narrative that the issue of canon emerged in all its complexity. Until that time, the supposed factual authenticity of the Bible had justified a simplified version of the process of canon-formation. When the biblical story is accepted as history, it provides a bare outline for

a theory of the authorship of the books and the process of their canonization (especially at II Kings 22-23 and Nehemiah 8:1-6). Additional details were supplied in the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries by two rabbis, David Kimhi and Elias Levita, who concluded that the scriptures had been canonized and divided into a tripartite structure (Torah, Prophets, and Hagiographa) by Ezra, Haggai, Zecharaiah, and Malachi--the Men of the Great Assembly.[18] Though the tripartite structure of scripture (evolving over time, not imposed in council) has been accepted by some modern scholars, the canonizing activity of Ezra and the Great Assembly has not.

In place of this theory, there arose an alternative historical model that developed during the mid-nineteenth century, mainly in Germany. This model suggests that canonization proceeded in three separate stages according to the relative antiquity of each division of scripture. Support for such a view came primarily from internal evidence for the chronology of each biblical book, from the chronological disjunctions between the divisions of scripture, and from external evidence provided by events like the Samaritan schism. Briefly, the theory was this: the Pentateuch (Torah) achieved canonicity by the end of the fifth century B.C., the Prophets were canonized in the third century B.C., and the Hagiographa received its warrant at the Council of Jamnia near the end of the first century A.D. With slight

modifications this is the history that appears in late-nineteenth-century handbooks on canon and in the sections on canon in the familiar propadeutic genre "Introduction to the Old Testament" up to the middle of the twentieth century.[19] This conventional history is also the first to incorporate evidence provided by the analysis of the Pentateuch into Jahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomic, and Priestly traditions, which were individually subject to a process of canon-formation before they were edited together.

Practically every detail of this history has come under sharp criticism in the last thirty or forty years. The assumption that the Pentateuch and Prophets were canonized two centuries apart, the date of the Samaritan schism, the nature of the Council of Jamnia--all have been questioned by twentieth-century Jewish and Christian scholars. The effect of this criticism has not been to create a new consensus; instead, scholars conflict over the most basic matters. Partly, this is due to the nature of the biblical and extra-biblical evidence; Sid Leiman has called it "intractable; its yield of historical information consists of more lacunae than facts."[20] One scholarly impasse concerns the activity of the Council of Jamnia (or Jabneh). On the one hand, Jack Lewis, Leiman, and others stress the fact that the rabbinical school that gathered at Jabneh at the end of the first century A.D. made no authoritative pronounce-

ments concerning canon and discussed only the inspiration of Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes.[21] On the other hand, a scholar as committed to the critical value of canon for modern theology as James Sanders still maintains simply that "the authority of the supposed council of Jamnia is remarkable indeed."[22] If the Council of Jamnia is remarkable in any way, it is for its persistence in the scholarship. For the most part, those who have rejected the dates and places supplied by the conventional history of canonization have sought themselves to introduce new dates and places for canonical activity, based on more plausible interpretations of "intractable" evidence. There is little agreement among them.[23]

What strikes the non-specialist reader most strongly after surveying the literature on this subject is the overwhelming desire of twentieth-century scholars and their rabbinic and patristic predecessors to fix on a date, place, or editor with which to associate the final closing of the canon. For centuries, the study of canon-formation has been defined by an attempt to say when it ended. This desire obviously expresses an unwillingness to interpret the process of canonization as something that cannot be definitively treated in such a historical manner. There are of course sound doctrinal reasons for seeking a historical conclusion to canon-formation; it is more than merely interesting to know, for example, what Jewish canon prevailed

during Jesus' lifetime. Only recently have modern scholars, especially James Sanders and Brevard Childs, begun to relinquish the hunt for information about the date of closing and the shape of the canon in order to search instead for knowledge about its functions. The result has been renewed emphasis on canonizing as a process, not as the product of "the Jamnia mentality."[24] As Childs remarks in his Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture, "the formation of the canon was not a late extrinsic validation of a corpus of writings, but involved a series of decisions deeply affecting the shape of the books."[25] A further turn away from the conventional approach to canon came when Childs perceived that the very absence of concrete historical data about canonization has meaning: "basic to the canonical process is that those responsible for the actual editing of the text did their best to obscure their own identity. Thus the actual process by which the text was reworked lies in almost total obscurity. Its presence is detected by the effect on the text."[26] In other words, the editors of the canon edited out all historical record of their activity. Such a theory throws us back entirely on the characteristics and function of canon without recourse to the actual history of canon-formation.

Perhaps the best place to begin a survey of the characteristics of canon and its functions is the passage from Joseph-

us' Contra Apionem quoted above. The virtue of this work for a study of canon lies both in its date, circa 95 A.D., and in the rhetorical stress natural to Josephus' defensive purpose. Because of his polemical intentions, the typical features of the canon appear prominently. His most striking point concerns the textual fixity of the scriptures: "although such long ages have now passed, no one has ventured either to add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable...." Though one must distinguish, as Childs does, between the historical development of the text of scripture and the historical development of the canon, it seems evident that the community in which a scriptural tradition emerges would seek to curtail certain types of development--corruption of the text and unwarranted expansion of the canon--after a certain point. Absolute fixity of the text assures the nominal purity of the canon, and no effort towards that end was spared by the men whom Robert Gordis called

> these anonymous guardians of the text, who counted the letters of Scripture, determined the middle letter and the middle verse of the Torah, established the middle letter of the Bible as a whole, compiled extensive lists of rare and unique Biblical forms, listed the number of occurrences of thousands of Biblical words and usages--all in order to help protect it from tampering and prevent scribes from

introducing changes into the accepted text....[27]

The sole function of these proto-Masoretes and the Masoretes was to hand down an authoritative text (the Masorah) in an unsullied form.[28] Their devotion to the text was so scrupulous it led Milton to remark that in comparison with Jewish scriptures, the New Testament had been given to "wayward and uncertain guardians...."[29]

Fixity of text reflects an important characteristic of any canonical book: its inspiration. Josephus remarks that "it is an instinct with every Jew, from the day of his birth, to regard [the Scriptures] as the decrees of God...." Clearly, the decrees of God are to be treasured, not least, perhaps, in the way they are transmitted to later generations. In spite of its apparent doctrinal necessity, the assumption that the scriptural canon consists solely of inspired literature is subject to some differences of opinion. Josephus' observation that scriptures are the decrees of God is too broad for the later rabbinic tradition; in the Tosefta (a supplement to Mishnah), for example, a distinction is made between two categories of canonical books: "R. Simeon b. Menasia (170-200) says: The Song of Songs defiles the hands because it was composed under divine inspiration. Ecclesiastes does not defile the hands because it is only the wisdom of Solomon."[30] Leiman, who cites this passage, argues on the basis of such evidence that both inspired

and uninspired works may be canonical, but only the first are sacred and defile the hands.[31] This admission of degree in the canon is accepted by neither the Protestant nor the Catholic church, even though the latter accepts works as canonical which are considered apocryphal in the Protestant Old Testament and in Judaism. The general distinction between biblical and apocryphal works is equivalent to that stated by R. Simeon b. Menasia above, though it is not, of course, framed in terms of defiling the hands. In The City of God, for instance, Augustine solves his puzzlement over the exclusion of some prophetic works from the canon by the same contrast of divine and human sanction: "The reason for this circumstance, I confess, is hidden from me, except that I think that even those men to whom the Holy Spirit certainly revealed matters that properly fell within the scope of religious authority may have written sometimes as men, thanks to historical research, and sometimes as prophets, by divine inspiration...."[32] Translation too may be inspired, as the early legends concerning the Septuagint attest. Augustine says that even the discrepancies between the Hebrew text and the Greek of the Septuagint can be reconciled if one assumes that God has chosen separate, but supplementary vehicles for his word.[33]

One effect of insisting on the divine inspiration of the canonical work is that it tends to close off the historical period in which canonical texts can be produced. God is not

perceived to be continuously active on earth; his spirit dwelled among men only for a specific time, which, for the Jews, ended after Artaxerxes I. Josephus does not discuss the dates at which the biblical books were composed, but he is careful to mention the fact that the history of the Jews from Artaxerxes to his own time does not deserve credit equal to the earlier history "because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets." There is nothing exceptional in this remark; the opinion that the spirit of prophecy had fled Israel during the Persian period was commonly held in Jewish antiquity.[34] The value of such an historical delimitation lies in the fact that it marks off a specific period of revelation and thus provides a relatively sure means of distinguishing canonical from non-canonical books. The Jewish scriptures exclude Ecclesiasticus and I and II Maccabees precisely because they were composed after the era of Artaxerxes I. Like fixing the text, the limitation of canonicity to works produced during a specific revelatory epoch in history serves to seal off the revelation itself, to maintain its purity, and it insures an increase in the sort of veneration that accrues around the traditions of antiquity. This pattern of sealing off the revelation is also visible in the history of the New Testament. When the canon is closed, "'Primitive Christianity' finally belongs to the past, and may not be extended. This is the determining and delimiting principle behind the new Canon."[35]

Who, as men, however, were to judge infallibly of the distinction between man and prophet, between mere history and sacred revelation? If inspiration could not always be judged certain on an experiential basis, at least the use that was made of inspired texts could be. Here one passes from a level of unverifiable assertions about the divine inspiration of a canonical text to the human level of its practical use within a religious community. Discussion of this matter by ancients and moderns alike tends to reach a single conclusion: the chief attribute of a canonical text--that which above all determines its canonicity--is its normative use within a religious community. This attribute exceeds inspiration in importance: "the fact that any utterance, literary composition, or collection of writings is recognised as divinely inspired does not necessarily imply that there is accorded to it the kind of authority which may properly be regarded as canonical. It is when a document is accepted as normative for the religious life of a community that the idea of canonicity emerges."[36] As Sid Leiman argues, we need not define the meaning of normative too strictly; "the cultic and liturgical use of a book was not the essential factor which determined its canonical status"; it was enough if a work served as "an authoritative guide for religious practice or doctrine...."[37]

If a work is normative within a religious community, that

community has essentially given historical form to what Josephus called "the decrees of God." In a sense, one could describe such a community as a factual projection of divine, canonical laws, much the way a Utopia in literature portrays a fictive projection of normative laws. A standard of purity measures how well a community upholds these laws or how near it lives in time or place to the original revelation. In determining the extent of normative usage, certain historical periods and traditions may thus possess special authority. In the Old Testament, for example, it is clearly the community at Jerusalem, not at Qumran, which is deemed normative for Judaism; Augustine bases his criterion for canonicity on "the authority of the greater number of catholic Churches, among which are those which have deserved to have apostolic seats and to receive epistles."[38]

The authority of a canonical text cannot, of course, be limited only to the community that participated in the original revelation, otherwise the tradition of the Sinai event would have died with the tribes that gathered at the foot of the mount. Like original sin and the covenant, the canon must be binding for all generations, partly because of its legal content. No society hands down laws that apply only to the men that enact them; "Laws are authoritative for all generations." And since "the Israelite notion of canonicity begins with the appearance

of canonical laws," "the decrees of God" must obviously be sufficient for posterity.[39] Were this not true, the very need for a canon itself would not exist. Just as the laws serve to project the will of God into socially ordered form, so the canon serves to project laws into the future. The canon must be normative not only for the first generation subject to it, but also for all subsequent generations. In effect, canonicity pre-empts the future, for if one has the word of God at hand, one need not wait for the test of time. It is, in fact, this binding relation between the original community of faith and all later ones that demonstrates the validity and strength of canon. The canon not only "assigns a special quality to this particular segment of human history,"[40] in which the revelatory experience at the heart of scripture is undergone, it also hands down "the authoritative tradition in a form which [is] compatible to function as scripture for a generation which had not participated in the original events of revelation."[41]

Of course, the motives that lead to the beginning of canon-formation need not be identical to the motives that result in its closing. If the crisis of divine irruption within history inspires the opening of the canon, a crisis of an entirely different and more human sort may necessitate its closing. Actually, the history of canon-formation can be seen as a sequence of crises in the synagogue or church, crises that led to

a final closing of its doors. This is less visible in the canonization of the Torah and the Prophets, which were canonized early, than it is in the canonization of the Hagiographa. Several scholars have emphasized that Judaism is a religion of the book--of the canon--because of the dispersion of the Jews and the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70.[42] The supposed authority of the Council of Jamnia is largely predicated on the desire to understand the destruction of the Temple as the event that initiated a final consideration of the Hagiographa. Such is James Sanders' point of view: "there is abundant indirect evidence for the convening, at the end of the first century A.D., of a group of rabbis who felt constrained by the compelling events of the day, largely the threat of disintegration due to the loss of Jerusalem and her religious symbols, to make decisions regarding the contents of the Hagiographa."[43] Another theory argues that the Hagiographa was closed under pressure of the Christian heresy, just as the New Testament canon was closed in response to the Gnostic heresy and the Marcionic canon. Thus the question of canon is carried down from the mount--whether Sinai or Olives--to the plains, where it is settled in conflict between sects, between Samaritan, Essene, Saducee, and Pharisee. The need to safeguard the purity of revelation does not arise within a wholly devout and homogeneous community; canonicity emerges when the community fractures or undergoes a crisis.

It thus follows "that canonicity is inseparable from conflicting authority-claims, that those claims are about the right to provide a normative version of the tradition, and that the emergence of Christianity is intelligible only within the formulation and resolution of such claims."[44]

Contemporary biblical scholars, and especially those who have developed what is called "canonical criticism," divide over the primary function of a canon within a religious community. To schematize the argument somewhat, the debate focuses on two different canonical functions. In Torah and Canon and a series of articles James Sanders has argued that the biblical canon served to define and to safeguard the identity of the Jews throughout the recurring crises in their history. "Whatever else canon does," he writes, "it serves to engage the two questions: who am I, or we, and what are we to do?...Canon functions, for the most part, to provide indications of the identity as well as the life-style of the on-going community which reads it."[45] Opposing Sanders, Brevard Childs argues that this gives too "existential" a bias to canonical function and that the canon must instead be regarded as a testament to the covenant between God and Israel. The disagreement between Sanders and Childs is perhaps best understood in terms of the relation between canon and history. For Sanders the Jews confront their identity within history. For Childs, on the other hand, "Scripture bears wit-

ness to God's activity in history on Israel's behalf, but history per se is not a medium of revelation which is commensurate with a canon."[46] That is, "revelatory history" achieves its meaningful shape only in the final form provided by the canon; as a consequence, no separate, secular history of the Jews exists from the biblical period. Again, the non-specialist reader tends to gloss over these difficulties. It does seem that if the covenant between God and Israel is the source of identity for Israel and Judaism--a source that is preserved in the canon--then the conflict largely disappears, for the canon must preserve as the same thing the testament of the covenant and the "existential" source of Jewish identity. Far more important than this dispute is the extent to which Sanders and Childs--who agree on practically everything else--have advanced the understanding of the function of canon; each has considerably deepened our awareness of the way a canon acquires its authority and exerts it over time.

In Torah and Canon Sanders initially emphasizes a traditional characteristic of canon: stability; this is essentially what Josephus stressed by commenting on the fixity of the canonical text. If the principal task of a canon is to define the identity of a religious community, then it must before all else be stable, liable to repetition from generation to generation.[47] It is this almost Kierkegaardian function, this "circular memory," as

Barthes says,[48] that lies at the heart of any community endowed with a canon. The community seeks both its identity and its stability within a canon, because the canon "can give its survival power to the community that recites it."[49] Still, the limitations of stability in a canon are immediately apparent. If a canon gradually evolves with the community--to provide in repetition its identity--what happens when that identity is fractured or destroyed as it was for the Jews in 587 B.C. at the beginning of the Babylonian captivity? The canon may then come to represent a fixed image of a previous society, from which later generations have been forced to depart.

Clearly, if a canon is to be vital, whether as an existential source of identity or as a testament to a covenant formed centuries ago, it must also be adaptable. This is the opposite side of its stability. As Childs puts it, "it is constitutive of the canon to seek to transmit the tradition in such a way as to prevent its being moored in the past."[50] A tradition that <u>is</u> moored in the past can communicate nothing, cannot be normative, cannot in fact be canonical. At the point that it becomes divorced from the present, it becomes the testament of a dead religion. In one sense the canon and the religious community emerge as partners in the struggle to keep religion alive, to keep its values strong. Here one must pause to consider the distinction between canon and tradition implied in Childs' remark:

canon is the validation of tradition, which otherwise is not handed down in an authoritative fashion. In this sense, canonicity serves to mediate between ancient tradition and the present religious community. As Sanders argues, "only the traditional can become canonical,"[51] but only that tradition which demonstrates its ability to adapt to the needs of the community that preserves it is capable of attaining canonicity.

If stability and adaptability--repetition and change--are inherent features of a canon, how are they related? That question is perhaps more readily answered if one perceives stability and adaptability as characteristics too of the community that embraces a canon. Stability and adaptability can only be related by the adaptive efforts of the community for which the canon exists. That is, a community successively reinterprets the canon in order to maintain what, after all, must be a constant relation between the community and its source of identity. Only at one or two points in Israel's history--e.g., the period of the Josianic reforms after 621 B.C.--has a community reinterpreted itself on the basis of what in that case was a newly discovered element of the canon--the Deuteronomic code.[52] And even in that extreme case, society and the canon were together radically altered to suit the new (but presumably ancient) canonical element. A new canon arose and society transformed itself in accordance to it. Ordinarily, however, the canon is almost im-

perceptibly carried forward--"contemporized"[53]--and its validity maintained by a hermeneutical and evaluative effort on the part of the religious community. This applies initially to the actual process by which the Old Testament canon as we know it was shaped over time. "Essential to understanding the growth of the canon," Childs writes, "is to see this interaction between a developing corpus of authoritative literature and the community which treasured it. The authoritative Word gave the community its form and content in obedience to the divine imperative, yet conversely the reception of the authoritative tradition by its hearers gave shape to the same writings through a historical and theological process of selecting, collecting, and ordering."[54] In other words, the Old Testament as it stands today is the product of profound hermeneutical activity--which Childs argues is visible only in its effect on the shape of the text--and which, as Sanders puts it, "is the midterm between canon's stability and its adaptability."[55]

In the introduction to Torah and Canon Sanders remarks that "canonical criticism does not assume that we inherit all of ancient Israel's important sacral literature."[56] What does survive of that literature survives for a purpose, and what has disappeared has not merely been hidden by history, it has been intentionally suppressed. Only works that met the needs of the primitive Israelite and Judaistic communities attained canonical

shape. The hermeneutical activity of these early generations before the canon was closed is thus primarily evaluative in nature. It selects the traditions of greatest value, preserves and shapes them, and abandons all the rest. The difference between the hermeneutical activity of these communities before the canon was closed and those that followed its closing lay in the fact that the effect of the former was felt in the text itself while that of the latter was not.

The question immediately arises, however: once the canon has been shaped and closed, what becomes of the hermeneutical activity required to maintain the balance between a canon and its community? Adaptability seems to be the most prominent feature of the canon during the period of its formation whereas stability seems most important after the canon has been closed. In fact, when the canon is closed, only one type of interpretative activity ends: that which transforms the text. Here, one might consider a specifically literary analogy; the period of canon-formation is like the actual process of composition, and the hermeneutical activity that shapes the canon resembles the creative and revising effort of the writer. But other sorts of interpretative activities continue after the work on the canon has been completed, and these must, for the survival of the community, be roughly equivalent in authority to the sort that transforms the text; more accurately, the interpretative editing of the tradition

is transformed rather than suspended. Reinterpretation of a tradition continues throughout the life of a religious community, but one period of that process is set aside and endowed with special authority, or canonized.

While the closing of the canon may end the possibility of hermeneutical and evaluative transformation of the text, it opens the possibility of exegesis, which cannot proceed without the stability offered by a canon. Such a consequence of canonization was noticed by R.M. Grant: "The gradual formation of a canon thus made necessary an attempt to provide authoritative exegesis of its contents. Such exegesis did not arise earlier, it would appear, because there was no real canon in existence."[57] If, as Sanders asserts, hermeneutics is the midpoint between stability and adaptability, one might also argue that canonization is the midpoint between hermeneutics and exegesis. The hermeneutical and evaluative activity of a community selects and shapes the canon, which then provides a stable base for exegesis, the interpretative activity of the generations that follow the closing of the canon.

Whatever else canonization may be it is a centering, an establishment of authority. Recalling Childs' remarks about the difference between canon and tradition, we may restate the fact that canon validates or authorizes tradition. For Sanders, canon necessarily implies a fixing of authority. "By canon,"

he writes, "we mean here not a story or a tradition, which had been stabilized and set for all time; that is only a secondary and late characteristic of canon. Rather, we mean the seat or reference of authority."[58] One might paraphrase the argument thus far by saying that hermeneutics shapes authority and authority prepares the way for exegesis. At this point, Childs' ongoing objection to Sanders becomes valid. At the heart of this process there must be an extrinsic source of authority on which the interpretative effort of the community may act: that source is the covenant.

However, in the later phases of canon-formation--just at the point when the canon is closed--an extremely interesting development takes place. As I remarked above, canon provides the foundation for exegesis. What is more, the canon actually yields some of its authority to exegesis. That is to say, it is the nature of canonical authority to pass in part from the canon to subsequent interpretations of it. This occurs because interpretation of the canon is required to keep a religious community in a constant relation to its source as it evolves over time. One could argue, in other words, that a central attribute of any canon is the interpretative activity it inspires, whether it transforms the text or establishes authoritative exegesis. A canon cannot exist without the interpretative activity that shapes it, evaluatively, in the first place, and explicates it in the

second.

The historical evidence for this shift in authority is important. In Judaism it led to a rapidly compounding exegetical effort that produced a second canon of exegesis (this is not to be confused with the uninspired works that belong to the scriptural canon). As Childs observes in his Introduction, "when Israel later reinterpreted its scriptures to address changing needs, it did so in the form of the targum, that is to say, commentary, which was set apart sharply from the received sacred text of scripture."[59] This process continued with the development of Mishnah and with the Babylonian Talmud. The establishment of a second, exegetical canon immediately led to new, authoritative exegetical work.[60] In Catholicism, the transferral of authority from canon to interpretation can be seen in the strength of patristic exegesis and the emergence of a strong church, which, eventually, "was not able to hear the Old Testament on its own terms, but increasingly the canonical text was subject to the dominance of ecclesiastical tradition."[61] Rather than create an external body of authoritative interpretation, the Protestant church insisted on the authority of the divine spirit operating within man. Milton may speak on its behalf: "Nowadays the external authority for our faith, in other words, the scriptures, is of very considerable importance and, generally speaking, it is the authority of which we first have experience. The preeminent

and supreme authority, however, is the authority of the Spirit, which is internal, and the individual possession of each man."[62] Here one may note the correspondence between the characteristic authority claimed by the Catholic and Protestant churches and their differing views on the clarity of scripture. The Catholic church, referring all exegetical authority to itself, argues that the scriptures are difficult to understand; the Protestant church, referring authority to the internal spirit in each man, insists that the Bible is lucid in every detail. As Milton says, "the scriptures are, both in themselves and through God's illumination, absolutely clear."[63]

The idea of canon as an investiture of authority and as the source of interpretative activity suggests that the old-fashioned search for the end-point of canon-formation is hopelessly short-sighted. If canon is anything more than a list of books, if it serves any function, it is one that appears in a vital, determinative relation to society. Canon in this sense has nothing to do with a list of biblical books; it <u>does</u> have to do with the way divine law is projected into history and given a social form, with the way a society relates back to its source in scripture, and also with the way a society meets the problems of its own development. Canon thus becomes a functional appropriation of a tradition which is itself constitutive of a community. Tradition or the text is the fixed element in this

relation; interpretative and evaluative activity on the part of the community keeps a closed canon in a constitutive relation to the form and the beliefs of the community. Here one may take a step farther towards a description of canon and call it a functional bond between a society and its literature. Again, canon is not a list of works; it is that which gives authority to the founding or shaping tradition, and is thus itself an evaluative form of interpretation. The authority of canon is finally the authority educed by interpretative activity, as Peter Ackroyd observed: "authority rests in the interaction between text and reader, text and expositor, in the creative moment which such an interaction provides."[64] In a society of readers or believers, authority belongs to a collection of such texts, to a canon, and then also to the body of exegetical work that develops around it.

In its most general aspect, canonization is an evaluative intercession on behalf of a tradition or a text. It places or registers the placement of a work at the center of a community, which comes to exist in a form authorized by the canon. The intended result of canonizing a work is to make it a permanent cynosure, to give it an abiding presence in the minds of men. There is a sense of simultaneity here, of reciprocal immediacy, in the way that a canon and a community come to define each other. This is, perhaps, the final mystery about canon. An attempt to consider one part of this relation without the other effectively

destroys the authoritative, interpretative link between them and in which each consists. Here one confronts an interesting historical problem; the adjudication of responsibility in determining the canonical status of biblical works. Augustine may conclude, with perfect sincerity, that "I believe the Gospel itself only upon the authority of the Catholic Church."[65] The Protestant church does not follow him into this particular polemical corner. Calvin objects to his statement on the grounds that it presupposes human ratification of what is, after all, a divinely inspired text. How can man presume to ratify or validate what is the word of God? Canon may be an intercession on behalf of a text, but it is an intercession of a peculiar nature: it is tautological. The Protestants have a firm grip on this when they deny validation of canon by any other authority than the internal spirit, which, in a certain sense, precedes the authority of canon. In any case, man can only canonize what presents itself as the word of God; that is, he proclaims the canonicity of what is manifestly canonical. Thus, there is a peculiar belatedness in the end-points of canon-formation or attempts by a church to proclaim the nature of its canon; a work must have achieved normative status within a community, hence declared its inspiration, to be canonical; and the external validation of this fact--as at the Council of Trent, which proclaimed a canon for the Catholic church in 1546--comes hopelessly behind the time. Thus, canon-

formation appears at its end-point in a peculiarly satisfying tautology: only the work that proclaims its canonicity may be canonized.

END NOTES. CHAPTER I.

I have tried to keep these notes as brief as possible. Due to the proliferation of biblical handbooks, encyclopaedias, dictionaries, introductions, and editions, numerous repetitive citations could have been brought to bear on nearly every single point in this chapter. As anyone who has worked with biblical scholarship knows, it is the custom to give exhaustive references. Instead, I have cited only the works that have been most useful to me, here and in the List of Works Consulted.

1. Matthew Arnold, "Literature and Science," The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, edited by R.H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960-1977), vol. X, p. 56.

2. Rudolf Pfeiffer, History of Classical Scholarship from the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 133.

3. Quintilian, Institutio Oratoria, X, i, 54, as cited by Pfeiffer, History of Classical Scholarship, p. 204.

4. Pfeiffer, History of Classical Scholarship, pp. 203-204.

5. Ibid., p. 206.

6. Ibid., p. 207.

7. See Ernst Robert Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 256,

n. 24. See also Pfeiffer, History of Classical Scholarship, p. 207.

8. See, for instance, Harold Bloom, A Map of Misreading (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 34-35.

9. Quintilian, The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian (London: William Heinemann, 1920-1922), I, iv, 3.

10. Quintilian does this at X, i, 45: "Paucos enim qui sunt eminentissimi excerpere in animo est. Facile est autem studiosis, qui sint his simillimi, iudicare; ne quisquam queratur omissos forte quos ipse valde probet."

11. Josephus, Contra Apionem, in "The Life" and "Against Apion" (London: William Heinemann, 1926), I, 38-42.

12. Pfeiffer, History of Classical Scholarship, p. 206.

13. For the best explanation of why sacred books defile the hands, see Sid Z. Leiman, The Canonization of Hebrew Scriptures (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1976), pp. 115 ff.

14. See Solomon Zeitlin, "An Historical Study of the Canonization of Hebrew Scriptures," in The Canon and Masorah of the Hebrew Bible, edited by Sid Z. Leiman (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1974), p. 164.

15. See Pfeiffer, History of Classical Scholarship, p. 207, for the use of "canon" in Greek ethics.

16. Brevard Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 50.

17. Pfeiffer, History of Classical Scholarship, p. 207.

18. Leiman, The Canonization of Hebrew Scriptures, pp. 196-197, n. 589.

19. See ibid., p. 13 and passim, and Brevard Childs, Introduction, pp. 52-54.

20. Leiman, The Canonization of Hebrew Scriptures, p. 126.

21. See Jack P. Lewis, "What Do We Mean by Jabneh?," in The Canon and Masorah of the Hebrew Bible, edited by Sid Z. Leiman (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1974), pp. 254-261, and Joseph Blenkinsopp, Prophecy and Canon (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), p. 3.

22. James A. Sanders, "Adaptable for Life: The Nature and Function of Canon," in Magnalia Dei: Essays on the Bible and Archeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), p. 533.

23. For a summary of recent interpretations, see Childs, Introduction, pp. 54-57.

24. Sanders, "Adaptable for Life," p. 533.

25. Childs, Introduction, p. 59.

26. Ibid., p. 78.

27. Robert K. Gordis, The Biblical Text in the Making ([New York]: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1971), p. xiv.

28. For the Proto-Masoretes, Masoretes, and their texts, see the articles reprinted in "The Masorah" section of The Canon and

Masorah of the Hebrew Bible, edited by Sid Z. Leiman (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1974), and also Gordis, The Biblical Text in the Making, pp. xl-xlii.

29. John Milton, The Complete Prose Works of John Milton, volume six, edited by Maurice Kelley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 589.

30. Leiman, The Canonization of Hebrew Scriptures, p. 106.

31. Ibid., p. 15.

32. Augustine, The City of God Against the Pagans (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966-1972), XVIII, xxxviii.

33. Ibid., XVIII, xliii.

34. Zeitlin, "An Historical Study of the Canonization of Hebrew Scriptures," p. 145.

35. H. von Campenhausen, The Formation of the Christian Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p. 259.

36. R.W. Anderson, "Canonical and Non-Canonical," in The Cambridge History of the Bible, volume one, edited by P.R. Ackroyd and C.F. Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 117.

37. Leiman, The Canonization of Hebrew Scriptures, p. 16.

38. Augustine, On Christian Doctrine (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1958), II, viii, 12.

39. Leiman, The Canonization of Hebrew Scriptures, p. 24.

40. Childs, Introduction, p. 75.

41. Ibid., p. 60.

42. See, for instance, R.W. Anderson, "Canonical and Non-Canonical," p. 132. In a radically different context, Derrida makes this same point; see "Edmond Jabès and the Question of the Book," in Writing and Difference (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

43. Sanders, "Adaptable for Life," p. 533.

44. Joseph Blenkinsopp, Prophecy and Canon, p. 15.

45. Sanders, "Adaptable for Life," p. 537.

46. Childs, Introduction, p. 76.

47. See Sanders, "Adaptable for Life," p. 534.

48. Roland Barthes, The Pleasures of the Text (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 36.

49. Sanders, "Adaptable for Life," p. 540.

50. Childs, Introduction, p. 79.

51. Sanders, "Adaptable for Life," p. 542.

52. Childs, Introduction, pp. 62 ff.

53. Sanders, "Adaptable for Life," p. 534.

54. Childs, Introduction, pp. 58-59.

55. Sanders, "Biblical Criticism and the Bible as Canon," Union Seminary Quarterly Review 32 (1977): 163.

56. Sanders, Torah and Canon (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), pp. xviii-xix.

57. R.M. Grant, "The New Testament Canon," in The Cambridge History of the Bible, volume one, edited by P.R. Ackroyd and

C.F. Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 297. See also Campenhausen, The Formation of the Christian Bible, p. 113.

58. Sanders, Torah and Canon, p. 56.

59. Childs, Introduction, p. 59.

60. See John Bowker, The Targums and Rabbinic Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 66.

61. Childs, Introduction, p. 42.

62. Milton, Complete Prose Works, VI, p. 587.

63. Ibid., p. 578.

64. P.R. Ackroyd, "Original Text and Canonical Text," Union Seminary Quarterly Review 32 (1977), p. 172.

65. Augustine, Contra Epistolam Manichei (Migne, PL, XLII, 176), as quoted by Arnold in God and the Bible, The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, edited by R.H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960-1977), VII, pp. 255-256.

CHAPTER II

MATTHEW ARNOLD

AND THE CANONICAL IDEA

The functions and characteristics of canon described in the previous chapter have developed in a sacred or theological context and cannot be transported into a secular setting without a loss of some sort. When the condition of religious belief is stripped from the idea of canon, there is an immediate reduction of force or authority, of the sort occasioned by moving from the world of Josephus to the world of Quintilian. Certain canonical functions are simply no longer valid in a secular setting, the testament to a covenant, for one. Others become highly debatable: to what extent, for instance, does a canon provide a source of identity for later generations of readers? This is a question answered in one fashion by Harold Bloom, whose thoughts on canon-formation I shall discuss in my third chapter. Some of the canonical functions described above do exist in secular literature, but only in the half-light of metaphor. Fixity of text remains valid, of course, and we have handed responsibility for it to a new group of Masoretes, the textual editors, though their activity does not necessarily imply that the texts they establish are canonical. Whatever poets claim, we understand the inspiration of a canonical text metaphorically or psychologically. The sufficiency of a canon for future generations, as well as its stability and adaptability, we largely

leave for future generations to decide. After all, the canons of great critics may be influential but they hardly pre-empt the future the way a sacred canon must. And, finally, the nature of literary authority as it stands in relation to society is itself still an open question.

These are all problems worth examining, but for the rest of this chapter I wish to concentrate on two aspects of canon I have not discounted here: canon as a functional bond between society and literature, and the cluster of ideas that concerns the evaluative, hermeneutical shaping of canon and the conveyance of its authority to exegesis and other interpretative activity. To me, these are of great interest and can be illustrated in certain critical theories in such a way as to help explain the function of the canonical idea in literary criticism. Leaving aside the relation between society and literature momentarily (it will be picked up at the end of this chapter on Matthew Arnold), it is worth mentioning here that in secular literature, where the canon remains open, one cannot break down the history of canon-formation into separate, sequential stages--the shaping of the canon, in an evaluative sense, the passing into canonical rigidity or stability, and the development of exegesis--as one can, more or less, in the history of biblical literature. When the canon remains open, or at least open-ended, as it does in secular literature, these processes overlap in a confusing man-

ner. Canon-formation is a process undergone by each new generation and each new critic; what we need to know is, to what degree do previous canons exert their influence over us? The matter of authoritative exegesis or critical encrustation as an index of canonical status is far more vexed. How can one hope to separate "authoritative" exegesis from the mass of interpretative exercises released by the critical explosion of the last sixty or seventy years? Is critical writing a guide to canonical status at all, and if so, what kinds? A classic of criticism, like Lives of the Poets or The Sacred Wood? Two columns of citations in the CBEL or the existence of a newsletter? Such a problem is suggested by Frank Kermode's view of secular canonicity. Discussing Henry Green's Party-Going in The Genesis of Secrecy, he says, "It is not yet part of the secular canon; that is, it has not been guaranteed to be of such value that every effort of exegesis is justified without argument...."[1] This is a perfectly sensible approach to canon, yet one must ask, who justifies these unlimited efforts of exegesis? Kermode makes a mute appeal to scholarly consensus, i.e., normative usage, but within what critical or scholarly communities are we to seek this unanimity? Is it still possible to speak positively of such a community? Kermode's example also brings up the still greater dilemma of deciding which contemporary authors are to be admitted to a tentative canon of moderns. This is canon-formation in

earnest. Each of these stages and functions of canon-formation develops concurrently in an open-ended, secular canon, and each casts its influence on a discussion of the subject. Evaluative shaping blends with critical encrustation, and the before and after of canon-formation seem to occur as one.

To begin sorting through this troop of canons being conceived and killed off, I wish to look at the canonical idea in the criticism of Matthew Arnold, who is, in so many ways, the great predecessor of contemporary criticism, the Aristophanes of Byzantium to latter-day Quintilians who set him aside as one of the "veteres grammatici." For a study of canon, Arnold has several obvious advantages; his interest in the relation between literature and society offers useful analogies to the same relation considered as a function of canon, and he is concerned, perhaps notoriously so, with poetic rank. Furthermore, ideas linked with canon can be found in solution everywhere in his works, but they crystallize in his religious writings, especially Literature and Dogma (1873) and God and the Bible (1875). In these two books, the issue arises in its technical sense.

As much as he recognized its necessity, Arnold deeply distrusted criticism that applied itself to such questions as the history of canon-formation. His animosity extended to all "preliminary" investigations, whether they preceded a study of

Homer or Isaiah. He advised the translator of the Iliad to stay clear of such quandaries as "whether Homer ever existed; whether the poet of the Iliad be one or many; whether the Iliad be one poem or an Achilleis and an Iliad stuck together...."[2] Similarly, he sought a form of biblical criticism that excluded "those questions as to the exact date, the real authorship, the first publication, the rank of priority, of the Gospels...."[3] The search for facts like these must be subordinate to the task of demonstrating the moral benefit of the Bible to its readers; for such dubious questions, too, one can only attain "plausible" answers: "they cannot be really settled, the data are insufficient."[4] The biblical critics of Germany (not to mention Arnold's chief English adversaries, Bishop Colenso and R.W. Cassels, the author of Supernatural Religion) were flawed in this respect, for they "make too much of a business of such inquiries, give their whole life and thoughts too exclusively to them, and treat them as if they were of paramount importance."[5] Still, for a time during the writing of Literature and Dogma and God and the Bible it was Arnold's task to master these technical details, to take up the preliminaries in order to pass on to a more important argument. As his definitive editor, R.H. Super, notes, Arnold's skill in this was formidable.[6]

Dependent as he was upon professional biblical scholars for his conclusions, Arnold's technical account of the process

of canon-formation closely reflects the mid-nineteenth-century state of learned opinion on the subject. Not surprisingly, he was exceptionally careful in weeding through the piles of scholarship available to him. Spinoza's Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, for one, was a great aid to discrimination: "I have had to read masses of [German biblical critics]," Arnold wrote to T.H. Huxley, "and they would have drowned me if it had not been for the corks I had brought from the study of Spinoza."[7] Arnold disliked the German scholars of Tübingen and their English counterparts for their faulty reasoning and their lack of literary tact, but also because they practiced "negative" criticism of the Bible, which he perceived as wholly destructive in intent. Of one such work, Supernatural Religion, he wrote, "it has the fault of leaving the reader, when he closes it, with the feeling that the Bible stands before him like a fair tree all stripped, torn, and defaced, not at all like a tree whose leaves are for the healing of the nations."[8] His criterion of "positive" biblical criticism was met primarily by Edouard Reuss, in whose Histoire du canon des Saintes-Ecritures (second edition, 1863) he found "les résultats de l'érudition moderne...traités avec le sentiment qu'il s'agit non seulement d'abattre les erreurs traditionelles, mais de tirer de la Bible plus de fruit encore que par le passé."[9] Arnold depended heavily on Reuss, as Super's annotations to God and the Bible demonstrate.

For the most part, Arnold is less concerned with the Old Testament in his religious writings than with the New Testament, but in the third section of the chapter entitled "The Bible-Canon" in God and the Bible he provides a short summary of the history of the canon of the Old Testament, which depends primarily on the evidence provided by the Apocrypha and the Old Testament itself. Arnold begins by pointing out the three-fold division of the Old Testament, which is mentioned in Luke 24:44 and in the Prologue to Ecclesiasticus; he then describes the gathering of canonical books as it is set forth in II Maccabees 2:13. There, it is written that Nehemiah, "founding a library, brought together in addition the things concerning the kings and prophets, and David's things, and letters of kings about offerings."[10] This constituted the "second instalment of Scriptures," the Prophets. (Elsewhere, in Isaiah of Jerusalem, Arnold remarks that "Ezra edited the sacred books" of this category.)[11] He cites II Maccabees 2:14 for the accumulation of the third "instalment" of scriptures, and Nehemiah 1-8, II Kings 22-23, and II Chronicles 34:14-32 as evidence for the formation and canonization of the Pentateuch, which began with the discovery of the book of the law (Deuteronomy) in the Temple.

In God and the Bible and several other works Arnold describes most of the functions and characteristics of a sacred canon elaborated in the first chapter of this dissertation.

These are not all developed in relation to the Old Testament; many come up in the course of his discussion of the New Testament canon, particularly the Gospels. In terms of what it tells us about his attitude towards canon, however, this difference is nearly inconsequential; what characterizes the New Testament canon as canon generally fits the Old Testament canon too. One of the insufficiencies of data marked by Arnold was the uncertainty about the date at which the New Testament canon was closed; "no man can point to any exact moment and manner in which our body of New Testament Scriptures received its authority."[12] In spite of this lack of evidence, Arnold is still able to determine when the Gospels began to be quoted in the manner of canonical scriptures, and he speaks with some assurance of the date of closing for parts of the Old Testament. But like some modern biblical scholars, he stresses the significance of our ignorance more than the "plausible" gains of our reasoning. What we don't know about the scriptural canon--for instance, the authorship of the four Gospels--may be as illuminating as what we do; in Arnold's opinion, we are as likely to be misled by our knowledge as by our ignorance in these preliminary matters.

According to Arnold, external circumstances played a large part in hastening the settlement of the Old and New Testament canons. At one point, he observes, the apocryphal books stood a good chance of being admitted into the Hebrew canon; "undoubt-

edly, if Christianity had not come when it did, and if the Jewish state had endured, the best of them would have been (and with good reason) admitted. But with Christianity came the end of the Jewish state, the destruction of Jerusalem; and the door was shut."[13] Though not attributable to a single cause, the closing of the New Testament canon was in some ways more cataclysmic in its implications: "the whole discussion died out, not because the matter was sifted and settled and a perfect Canon of Scripture deliberately formed; it died out as mediaeval ignorance deepened, and because there was no longer knowledge or criticism enough left in the world to keep such a discussion alive."[14]

As for direct human agency in determining the canon of scriptures, the facts derived from Arnold's reading seem to run up against his own instincts. For the Old Testament, he wrote, it was "the Temple-hierarchy whose sanction made the books canonical."[15] More ambiguously, canonicity in the New Testament depended on "consent" and consent in turn rested upon "the known or presumed authenticity of books as proceeding from apostles or apostolic men, from the Apostles of Christ themselves or from their personal followers."[16] Upon whom, however, did the responsibility of consent really rest? Arnold, of course, rejects Augustine's claim (quoted above) that it was the Catholic Church.[17] He recognizes that a canonical book must be normative for religious practice, but, interestingly, he perceives a broad base

for this welling-up of consent. "The final admission of a Gospel to canonicity," he concludes, "proves that it has long been in men's hands [my emphasis], and long been attributed to a venerable authority; that it has had time to gain their affections and to establish its superiority over competing accounts."[18] Man's affections for scripture are deeply important in Arnold's account of canon-formation. A book is normative, for Arnold, not only if it can be shown to meet the standards of a temple-hierarchy or an episcopacy, but if it has gained a place in the hearts of the laity. Thus, when he comes to discuss the actual text of a canonical book, he subordinates all other considerations to the affections created by its familiar language. He never explicitly alludes to the fixity of a canonical text, as Josephus does; Arnold says, instead, that "we are so constituted by nature that our enjoyment of a text greatly depends on our having... a sense of security."[19] This sense is established by familiarity. In 1872, when Arnold was preparing his version of chapters forty through sixty-six of Isaiah for publication as A Bible-Reading for Schools (later revised as Isaiah XL-LXVI), he carefully judged possible improvements in the translation by their effects on the reader's sense of security: "The English version has created certain sentiments in the reader's mind, and these sentiments must not be disturbed, if the new version is to have the power of the old."[20] Here, I feel, in this sense of security and these

affections for the familiar language of scripture, are to be found the grounds of consent, which, in Arnold's view, entail canonicity.

Prior to the point at which a book can receive consent and canonicity, it passes through a period of evaluative shaping--hermeneutical shaping, as it is called by Brevard Childs--in which additions are made, traditions are selected and edited together, and the book is honed into its final shape. Arnold acknowledges this sort of evaluative activity at two points: one in which he recounts the development of Torah, the other in which he describes the Gospel according to John just before it attained canonicity. In Torah, evaluative shaping is visible primarily in the vestiges of earlier works that survive in it: "To that collection many an old book had given up its treasures and then itself vanished for ever. Many voices were blended there; unknown voices, speaking out of the early dawn."[21] About the fourth Gospel, Arnold speaks more assuredly, because he devoted most attention to that work and because its history is somewhat less obscure than Torah's. "For at least fifty years," he writes, "the Johannine Gospel remained, like our other three Gospels, liable to changes, interpolations, additions; until at last, like them, towards the end of the second century, by ever increasing use and veneration, it passed into the settled state of Holy Scripture."[22] Arnold does not say much about this process of

evaluative shaping in his religious writings, but we shall see numerous instances of it in his secular criticism.

For Arnold, the growth of a work towards canonicity appeared to be a growth in authority; he speaks of books "acquiring" and "receiving" the authority of use and affection and also, presumably, of official sanction.[23] And, of course, when canonicity was attained, it conferred sufficiency for later generations upon canonical works, as Israel in canonizing Torah had done: it "formulated, with authentic voice and for ever, the religion of Israel as a religion in which ideas of moral order and of right were paramount."[24] Though the entire discussion of canon-formation is a mere preliminary to Arnold's main argument in Literature and Dogma and God and the Bible, he was acutely aware of the poetry in the process by which a nation drew a book close to its heart. Something of his own feeling for scripture comes out in the way he describes the hallowing of Psalms by Israel:

> So powerfully did the inmost chords of its being vibrate to them, so entirely were they the very truth it was born to and sought to find utterance for, that it adopted them, made them its standards, the documents of that most profound and authentic expression of the nation's consciousness, its religion. Instead of remaining literature and philosophy, isolated voices of sublime poets and reform-

> ing free-thinkers, these glorifications of righteousness became Jewish religion, matters to be read in the synagogue every Sabbath-day.[25]

As I have said, discussion of the biblical canon forms only a minor part of Arnold's concern with religion in the 1870s and 1880s. At a time when attention to the text of the Bible and doubts as to its supernatural claims were, at the very least, distracting the English people from its persistent moral truths, Arnold's purpose in writing Literature and Dogma and a sequel to it in God and the Bible was this: "to re-assure those who feel attachment to Christianity, to the Bible, but who recognise the growing discredit befalling miracles and the supernatural. Such persons," he wrote in the Preface to the Popular Edition (1883) of Literature and Dogma, "are to be re-assured, not by disguising or extenuating the discredit which has befallen miracles and the supernatural, but by insisting on the natural truth of Christianity."[26] As always, Arnold wished to draw his readers away from inessentials that caused doubt and to restore to them the essentials that made for faith. In doing so, he stated an underlying principle for his biblical criticism: its ultimate goal was to allow the reader "to enjoy the Bible and to turn it to his benefit."[27] This purpose applies equally to his secular literary criticism, where the need to avoid being caught up in preliminaries

and inessential controversies is just as strong. To illustrate the importance of "benefit" in God and the Bible, Arnold turns to the Bible's only possible counterpart in the secular canon, Homer. "In dealing even with Homer, we say, this [obligation to benefit] is found true, and very needful to be borne in mind;--with an object where yet the main interest is properly intellectual. How much more does it hold true of the Bible! where the main interest is properly not intellectual, but practical."[28]

But the practical effect of the Bible in England had already diminished considerably by the time Arnold addressed the problem in the 1870s. Popular and learned religion alike had made too much of one aspect of the canon--its inspiration--and as faith in that supernatural quality and the miracles it proclaimed had failed, another aspect of the canon began to fail with it. What Arnold witnessed and what he attempted to redress in his own way was the collapse of a normative relation between a canonical literature and its community, the very fundament of canonicity, historically. In effect, the Bible was in danger of becoming a lapsed canon, the testament not of a dead religion, certainly, but of a highly ineffectual one, divided as it was between a dry, metaphysical wing and a fanatical, popular one. Between these two sects and the ravages of liberal biblical criticism, the masses were losing the Bible; the ground of affectionate consent to the canon had begun to erode under doubts about the

miracles it contained. Arnold watched a canonical text recede from the intimate social connections that had made it canonical in the first place and had preserved its canonicity for centuries. Again and again, in stating his purpose in Literature and Dogma and God and the Bible, he returns to the possibility of restoring an authoritative relation between the biblical canon and the "lapsed masses."[29] In the "Introduction" to God and the Bible he claims that "this, then, has been our object: to find sure and safe grounds for the continued use and authority of the Bible."[30] In "The Bible-Canon," from the same work, he states that "our book is addressed to those inclined to doubt the Bible-testimony, and to attribute to its documents and assertions not too much authority, but too little."[31] And, finally, in "Our 'Masses' and the Bible" from Literature and Dogma, he says: "now, then let us go to the masses with what Israel really did say, instead of what our popular and our learned religion may choose to make him say."[32]

The fault clearly lay with both forms of Christianity prevalent in England at the time, Puritanism and Anglicanism, and if popular, Puritan religion were the greater culprit of the two, learned, Anglican religion had contributed its share to the demise of the canonical relation between the Bible and the people. I have already mentioned Arnold's objections to the "negative" biblical criticism of men like C.F. Baur of Tübingen, R.W. Cas-

sels, and more contemptible lights like Bishop Colenso. Theirs was, as he said, "a mechanical criticism," which for "negative purposes...is particularly useful."[33] The failing in this form of biblical criticism was one of logical rigidity and a perpetual desire to see the Gospels as "Tendenz-Schriften"--"writings to serve an aim and bent of their several authors...."[34] Destructive liberal criticism, which had but faint praise for the religious truths of the Bible, was bad enough in itself, but its path had been smoothed by another sort of critical fallacy in conservative theologians: a predilection dating from the early history of the Church to treat the language of the Bible as if it were scientific in nature. With this understanding, orthodox theologians had constructed a metaphysical edifice which Arnold begins to undermine in the "Introduction" to Literature and Dogma by quoting a few representative samples of their absurdities. "Everyone, again," he writes, "remembers the Bishops of Winchester and Gloucester making in Convocation their remarkable effort 'to do something,' as they said, 'for the honour of Our Lord's Godhead,' and to mark their sense of 'that infinite separation for time and for eternity which is involved in rejecting the Godhead of the Eternal Son.'"[35] Such metaphysical leaps from the plain sense of scripture were, as Arnold says with fond sarcasm, "blunders committed, out of their very excess of talent, by the athletes of logic."[36] When men with such predispositions

turned to the Bible, they added to their already sufficient intellectual sins one further error: "our orthodox criticism does not, in fact, seek to see the thing as it really is, but it holds a brief for that view which is most convenient to the traditional theology current amongst us."[37]

Though difficult in practice, Arnold's remedy for these mistakes of learned religion--whether liberal or orthodox--is simple in theory: recognize biblical language for what it is, not scientific, but literary. Arnold attempts to rescue the authority of the Bible by interpreting its language as the poetry of morality touched with emotion. Analyzing what the Biblical authors meant by God (who was called by English theologians "an infinite and eternal substance, and at the same time a person, the great first cause, the moral and intelligent governor of the universe"),[38] he begins by observing that "in truth, the word 'God' is used in most cases as by no means a term of science or exact knowledge, but a term of poetry and eloquence, a term <u>thrown out</u>, so to speak, at a not fully grasped object of the speaker's consciousness, a <u>literary</u> term, in short...."[39] (Arnold's own expression for God, based on Israel's, is "the <u>not ourselves</u> which makes for righteousness.")[40] To the literary language of which the Bible is constructed, one must apply a criticism which is itself <u>literary</u>, rather than one that pretends to be scientific in its assertions about God. Arnold main-

tained no illusions about the difficulty of the task he proposed. This literary criticism of the Bible, he writes, "is extremely difficult. It calls into play the highest requisites for the study of letters; great and wide acquaintance with the history of the human mind, knowledge of the manner in which men have thought, of their way of using words and of what they mean by them, delicacy of perception and quick tact, and besides all these, a favourable moment and the 'Zeit-Geist.'"[41] Given such prerequisites for good biblical criticism, he naturally reserves his praise for the few critics who, like Bishop Lowth, have possessed at least some of these qualities. And in naming an ideal tribunal to which to submit questions about the arrangement of the Biblical text, he stipulates that "the judges constituting the tribunal ought not to be the professors of the theological faculties of Germany, but Germans like Lessing, Herder, and Goethe," in other words, men of supreme literary critical abilities.[42]

If these requirements for biblical criticism have not been met by the orthodox products of Oxford and Cambridge, Arnold asks, is it any wonder that the Puritans--the authors of popular, dissenting religion in England--should have failed so signally as biblical critics? Arnold objects to Puritan interpreters of the Bible because they argue from such a narrow cultural base, from a dependence on one book alone, the Bible, which is, in itself,

insufficient preparation in letters; "the homo unius libri, the man of no range in his reading, must almost inevitably misunderstand the Bible, cannot treat it largely enough, must be inclined to treat it all alike, and to press every word."[43] The popular interpreter of the Bible suffers, in short, from a lack of tact and, more important, a lack of experience in literature. Arnold often quoted Richard Hooker to demonstrate the inadequate foundation for the bibliolatry of the Puritans: "'For the most part, even such as are readiest to cite for one thing five hundred sentences of Scripture, what warrant have they that any one of them doth mean the thing for which it is alleged?'"[44] Though different in kind, the interpretative sins of Puritan, Anglican, and liberal are similar in degree, as Arnold points out in a remarkable analogy between sacred and secular literature in Literature and Dogma:

> It is as if some simple and saving doctrines, essential for men to know, were enshrined in Shakespeare's Hamlet or in Newton's Principia (though the Gospels are really a far more complex and difficult object of criticism than either); and a host of second-rate critics, and official critics, and what is called 'the popular mind' as well, threw themselves upon Hamlet and the Principia, with the notion that they could and should extract

> from these documents, and impose on us for our belief, not only the saving doctrines enshrined there, but also the right literary and scientific criticism of the entire documents.[45]

Expounding the errors of popular religion, Arnold caught hold of one critical fallacy that relates specifically to the canonical idea in his biblical and literary criticism. The homo unius libri tends to treat the Bible, as he says, "all alike, and to press every word." This he calls the equipollence of the Bible, a doctrine which states that the Bible is of equal authority in all its parts. This is not only a historical feature of Protestantism as it developed after Luther, it is also typical of what befalls a canon when its authority begins to fade, as had happened to the Bible in England. The gradients in value between the books of the Bible level off as its truth is rejected. In other words, when the authority of a canon collapses it becomes equipollent in its uselessness. Protestants and Jews, however, believed in a strong version of equipollence based on the canonical feature of inspiration, a feature Arnold considered extremely harmful.[46]

> Our popular theology supposes that the Old Testament writers were miraculously inspired, and could make no mistakes; that the New Testament writers were miraculously inspired, and could make no mis-

> akes; and that there this miraculous inspiration stopped, and all writers on religion have been liable to make mistakes ever since. It is as if a hand had been put out of the sky presenting us with the Bible, and the rules of criticism which apply to other books did not apply to the Bible.[47]

For Arnold, this is one of those beliefs for which one can find no verification and had better do without if it threatens the ground of faith. The doctrine of "plenary inspiration,"[48] as he called it, can serve only one good purpose and that is to remind a reader how far above him the biblical authors genuinely were. But it can have only a vitiating effect in practical religion, an effect that begins, in Arnold's opinion, with St. Paul, who sometimes "uses the Jewish Scriptures in a Jew's arbitrary and uncritical fashion, as if they had a talismanic character...."[49] (Here one recalls Josephus on "the decrees of God.")

To treat the Bible as if it were equipollent was clearly an error in reasoning and in literary tact, for to do so was to ignore the context, "the general drift of Scripture," and the possibility that differences in authority between passages might obtain. Yet, though equipollence had been officially recognized by the Jews and had come to be doctrine in the popular theology of England, it had not always prevailed, as a review of the evidence of canon-formation immediately reveals. With an historical

example at hand, Arnold pillories a notorious offender against his critical principles:

> And yet there was a time when Jews knew well the vast difference there is between books like Esther, Chronicles, or Daniel [all admitted late to the canon], and books like Genesis or Isaiah. There was a time when Christians knew well the vast difference between the First Epistle of Peter and the so-called Second Epistle, or between the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistles to the Romans and to the Corinthians. This, indeed, is what makes the religious watchword of the British and Foreign School Society: The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible! so ingeniously (one must say) absurd; it is treating the Bible as Mahometans treat the Koran, as if it were a talisman all of one piece, and with all its sentences equipollent.[50]

In fact, Arnold believed that equipollence was a result of the increasing authority of the early Church after Jerome and the "general break-up then befalling Europe," in which "learning and criticism...languished and died nearly out."[51] What had made it the watchword of popular English theology, however, was Protestantism, which authorized the notion "that our actual New Testament intrinsically possessed this character of a Canon,

the notion of its having from the first been one sure and sacred whole as it stands, a whole with all its parts equipollent...."[52]

Again, the remedy for this particular critical bêtise is Arnold's old one of culture--"knowing the best that has been thought and known in the world;" for the tact learned through wide reading gives us the power "to estimate the proportion and relation in what we read."[53] Arnold's biblical and secular criticism rests firmly on the idea of seeing things as they really are, and, as I shall show, for Arnold this almost invariably means discovering proportion and relation. To combat the deadening effect of equipollence, one must reintroduce the notion of degree, reinstate the gradients between books. As Arnold is quick to point out, the idea of degree in the canon has a historical warrant; I have already quoted his comments on early Jewish awareness of the differences between Esther and Isaiah. In fact, he observes that, deriving as it does from the Greek word for measure or rule, the term "canon" itself implies degree, i.e., proportion and relation; "the very expressions, Canon of Scripture, Canonical Books, recall a time when degrees of value were still felt, and all parts of the Bible did not stand on the same footing, and were not taken equally."[54] For Arnold as for Josephus, exclusion is as important as inclusion.

Arnold has recourse more than once to the history of the primitive church in order to support his attack on equipollence,

but his most important evidence against it comes from the history of the primitive (so to speak) Protestant church, that is, from Luther. Arnold's estimate of Luther was at best ambivalent; he was after all the founder, with Calvin, of the form of Christianity that had degenerated into the popular English theology that Arnold despised so much--"The Dissidence of Dissent and the Protestantism of the Protestant religion."[55] But Arnold also saw another side to Luther, freed from the later, historical developments of his original revelation, which he described in his article on Ernest Renan's La Réforme intellectuelle et morale... (1872): "That sense of personal responsibility which is the foundation of all true religion, which possessed Luther, which possessed also the great saints of Catholicism, but which Luther alone managed to convey to the popular mind, earning thereby--little as we owe him for the theological doctrines he imagined to be his great boon to us--a most true title to our regard...."[56] As a theologian, Luther may have given Arnold little to be grateful for, but as a biblical critic, Arnold found much that was attractive in him, especially his notion of a canon within a canon. (This idea has been developed in modern biblical scholarship by G. Ernest Wright.)[57] A canon within a canon was exactly what Arnold created by emphasizing the differing degrees of value among the biblical books. As he remarks in the Preface to the First Edition of Literature and Dogma, Luther and Calvin returned

to the practice of the primitive church when they perceived through "the witness of the Spirit" "a difference in rank and genuineness among the Bible books."[58] In particular, Luther used a very free hand in choosing among the books of the New Testament, but he announced a canon with which Arnold could fully concur.

> And he picks out, as the kernel and marrow of the New Testament, the Fourth Gospel and the First Epistle by the author of this Gospel, St. Paul's Epistles, --in especial those to the Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians,--and the First Epistle of St. Peter. Now, the common complaint against Luther is on the score of his audacity in thus venturing to make a table of precedence for the equally inspired books of the New Testament. Yet in this he was quite right, and was but following the method of Jesus, if the <u>good news</u> conveyed in the whole New Testament is, as it is, something definite, and all parts do not convey it equally.[59]

Arnold displays no hesitation in employing Luther's practice of selecting a canon within a canon. Indeed, it would hardly be saying too much to claim that far from being just a "Review of Objections to 'Literature and Dogma'" (as it was originally called), <u>God and the Bible</u> is primarily a brilliant excursion

on Luther's observation that the Gospel according to John is "the true head-gospel."[60] Furthermore, Arnold carries Luther's precedent into his battle with the Puritans themselves. In St. Paul and Protestantism (1870), he carefully detaches what is central to St. Paul's message from what is peripheral; for instance, in the first eleven chapters of the Epistle to the Romans he distinguishes between "primary," "sub-primary," and "secondary" verses according to their doctrinal importance and truth to the spirit of St. Paul.[61] As Puritanism developed, Arnold claimed, it obscured the proportions between Luther's original biblical observations; it first insisted on the equipollence of the Bible, and then, on the premise of that false criticism, it placed its emphasis on the wrong passages of St. Paul: "What in St. Paul is secondary and subordinate, Puritanism has made primary and essential...."[62] And where does Arnold receive the authority to make such a judgment? From precisely the same source he drew upon in Literature and Dogma, culture: "Now it is simply from experience of the human spirit and its productions, from observing as widely as we can the manner in which men have thought, their way of using words and what they mean by them, and from reasoning upon this observation and experience, that we conclude the constructions theologians put upon the Bible to be false, and ours to be the truer one."[63]

Arnold draws no line of distinction between the goals and principles of biblical criticism and those of secular literary criticism. According to him, the only major differences between the objects of these two disciplines are that the Bible is a more complex text, its authors are farther above us, and the beneficial consequences of understanding it rightly are greater. Each demands the same requirement in a critic: culture. One apparently superficial difference between biblical and secular literature does exist, however. Biblical literature comes in the form of an authoritative, rigid canon; secular literature does not. As far as I know, the word "canon" appears only in Arnold's religious writings; he never uses it in his literary criticism. This does not mean that features associated with canon, as elaborated in the first section of this essay and by Arnold himself, do not appear in his literary and social essays. In fact, ideas closely linked with the notion of a canon within a canon and the assignment of degrees of value prevail throughout his writings. By exploring these ideas, I hope to show not only the consistent practice of canonical evaluation in Arnold's works, but also to clear the ground for a discussion of its survival and use in modern criticism.

As I have said above, Arnold detaches what is essential from what is inessential in the Epistles of St. Paul by creating a canon within a canon. For "detach," let me substitute the

word "disengage," a word that crops up frequently, with the activity it suggests, in the whole range of Arnold's writings, biblical, literary, and social. After watching him disengage parts from wholes, and, more importantly, wholes from confusing backgrounds throughout his work, one begins to suspect that disengagement has the force of a first critical principle with Arnold, that it is an initial stage in his persistent attempt to see things as they really are. I have shown how the selection of a canon within a canon clarified the errors of Puritanism for Arnold. The process of evaluative selection, closely akin to the evaluative shaping of the biblical canon before it was closed, is essentially disengagement, the separating of matters of first from matters of secondary importance, just as the vital parts of the canon had been set apart from those that were no longer vital during the early history of Judaism. In St. Paul and Protestantism Arnold disengages furiously. On the first page he announces the need to consider the ideas of Paul "disengaged from the elaborate misconceptions with which Protestantism has overlaid them...."[64] He also attributes the same critical practice, in a more abstract sense, to Paul himself. The apostle died, he writes, "and men's familiar fancies of bargain and appeasement, from which, by a prodigy of religious insight, Paul had been able to disengage the death of Jesus, fastened on it [the death of Jesus] and made it their own."[65] This mis-

taken apprehension of Paul--the false idea of literal sacrifice and atonement that men had thrust upon his words--thus became one of the "speculative accretions"[66] that encumbered Protestantism and from which Arnold tried to free it.

On a more literal and practical level, one notices several other instances of disengagement in which Arnold does not detach mere arguments, but works or parts of works themselves. Perhaps the most arresting example of this is one that occurs in his essay "A Psychological Parallel," which was published in the Contemporary Review for November 1876 and collected in Last Essays on Church and Religion (1877). Having constructed an analogy between the popular idea of Christianity and a belief in witchcraft, Arnold seeks to balance his discussion at the end of the essay. This he does by isolating the words of Christ and giving them a form to which, as he says, one might affix the title "Christ's religion."

> It is but a series of well-known sayings of Jesus himself, as the Gospels deliver them to us. But by putting them together in the following way, and by connecting them, we enable ourselves, I think, to understand better both what Jesus himself meant, and how his disciples come with ease,--taking the sayings singly and interpreting them by the light of their preconceptions,--to mistake them.[67]

This is pursuit with a vengeance of a canon within a canon.

On a specifically secular level, two exercises in disengagement must be noted, both the direct offshoot of the classic labor of disengagement, anthologizing. Arnold's essays on Wordsworth and Byron introduce selected editions of these poets, published in 1879 and 1881 respectively. In part, each essay defends Arnold's selections from the canon of the poet's works. Neither man's work is perfect as it stands, of course. Describing Wordsworth's career, for instance, Arnold remarks that after 1808 only a "mass of inferior work remains, work done before and after this golden prime [1798-1808], imbedding the first-rate work and clogging it, obstructing our approach to it, chilling, not unfrequently, the high-wrought mood with which we leave it. To be recognised far and wide as a great poet, to be possible and receivable as a classic, Wordsworth needs to be relieved of a great deal of the poetical baggage which now encumbers him."[68] In "Byron," Arnold alludes again to his effort to "relieve" Wordsworth of his baggage; "I esteem Wordsworth's poetry so highly...that I could not rest satisfied until I had fulfilled, on Wordsworth's behalf, a long-cherished desire;--had disengaged, to the best of my power, his good work from the inferior work joined with it, and had placed before the public the body of his good work by itself."[69] That is, he had proposed Wordsworth, lean and stripped of unworthiness, as a "receivable" classic, as

part of the canon. Similarly, he announces his intention to do the same for Byron, in one of the few passages in which Arnold sounds like the despicable Mr. Roebuck: "To separate, from the mass of poetry which Byron poured forth, all this higher portion, so superior to the mass, and still so considerable in quantity, and to present it in one body by itself, is to do a service, I believe, to Byron's reputation, and to the poetic glory of our country."[70]

But the finest example of disengagement in Arnold's writings, and the one that most clearly reveals the theoretical underpinnings of the practice and its relation to the canonical idea, is again a religious one, Arnold's versions of Isaiah, chapters one to thirty-nine, and of Deutero-Isaiah, chapters forty to sixty-six. As Arnold confessed in 1883, "from no poetry and literature...have I, for my own part, received so much delight and stimulus as from Homer and Isaiah."[71] For proof of this, one need only turn to the lectures printed as On Translating Homer and his two essays on Isaiah, which might as well have been called On Translating Isaiah. Arnold's first essay on the prophet, A Bible-Reading for Schools (1872), served as an introduction to the Babylonian chapters (40-66) (it was revised as Isaiah XL-LXVI); in 1883 he also published Isaiah of Jerusalem, which includes an introduction and the first thirty-nine chapters of the book in the Authorized Version. (These

chapters are centered in Jerusalem and antedate the Babylonian chapters by nearly two centuries.)

As Arnold points out in both of his essays on the subject, confusion results from trying to read the entire book of Isaiah as the product of a single prophetic author; each section is more intelligible and more aesthetically pleasing if separated from the whole. In the later essay, he writes, "we have to detach from Isaiah of Jersalem the great prophecy of restoration which fills the last twenty-seven chapters. We have to disengage from him, and to read in connexion with the restoration prophecy, several shorter single prophecies which are intermingled with Israel's prophecies in the first thirty-nine chapters."[72] Similarly, more than a decade earlier, he had written that Isaiah XL-LXVI was intended to "give us what is wanted,--this admirable and self-contained portion of the Bible, detached to stand as a great literary whole."[73]

I wish to draw attention to that last phrase, "a great literary whole." To Arnold's thinking, disengagement can do no good unless what it detaches is capable of standing by itself. Behind the idea of disengagement, to which he refers in his work on Isaiah several times, there lies what is in fact a common-sensical theory about the way we perceive literature and the ways we judge the constituents of a canon. As its title implies, A Bible-Reading for Schools bears a slightly pedagogical

flavor; still, revising it in a larger format for more mature readers in 1875, Arnold remarked that "it has been found useful by many who are not school-children...."[74] Among the changes he made for Isaiah XL-LXVI, Arnold excised several paragraphs that have specifically to do with the state of literary education in England. One such passage explains the triumph of scientific teaching in terms of the superiority of its textbooks. Proponents of the natural sciences, he writes, are "able to produce their own well-planned text-books for physics, and then to point to the literary text-books now in use in schools for the people, and to say to the friends of letters: 'And this is what you have to offer! this is what you make such a fuss over!'"[75]

Arnold believed the major flaw of literary text-books to be the very worst sort of disengagement, fragmentation compounded with confusion. "A succession of pieces," he remarks, "not in general well-chosen, fragmentary, presented without any order or plan, and very ill-comprehended by the pupil, is what our schools for the people give as letters; and the effect wrought by letters in these schools may be said, therefore, to be absolutely null."[76] The power of literature can hardly be brought to bear on the people where confusion prevails to begin with and where the reader is given no chance to experience a single, rounded, literary work, whether it is complete in itself or must be disengaged to form a whole. Arnold's literary criticism is end-

lessly relational in nature; it brings works into an evaluative relation with each other, and literature itself, he argues, serves a relational function in our lives: "Following our instinct for intellect and knowledge, we acquire pieces of knowledge; and presently, in the generality of men, there arises the desire to relate these pieces of knowledge to our sense for conduct, to our sense for beauty....Now in this desire lies, I think, the strength of that hold which letters have upon us."[77] Clearly, as Arnold would argue, fragmentary, ill-arranged pieces of belletristic knowledge are no good in this respect; they teach us nothing about the power of literature and its ability to serve our instincts for conduct and beauty. What is wanted is the experience of great literary wholes, themselves disengaged from whatever will distract or confuse the reader. "It is through the apprehension, either of all literature,--the entire history of the human spirit,--or of a single great literature, or of a single great literary work, as a connected whole, that the real power of letters makes itself felt."[78]

Wisely, Arnold recognized that "the people" have had preparation for only one great literature, the Bible, which, with all its wealth, presents extraordinary problems to the untutored reader; "its mass has never been grappled with, and separated, and had clear and connected wholes taken from it and arranged so that learners can use them, as the literature of Greece

and Rome has."[79] Before such a literature can serve a pedagogical and social function--and a canonical function in fostering a bond between society and literature--it must be made the product of evaluative shaping through disengagement and freed of its baggage in order to stand as a "great literary whole," experience of which is the "first stage in feeling" the power of letters.[80] Disengagement thus becomes the freeing of literary wholes for the purpose of making their relational and canonical functions possible.

The task of disengagement is a critical labor in itself and at the same time a preparation for future critical labors. It requires the tact of wide experience in letters to disencumber a poet's gold from his dross, but in doing so, and in placing these single great works next to those of another author--in short, preparing a canon--one establishes a basis for further critical activity. In "The Study of Poetry," Arnold points to such a tentative canon, Thomas Ward's anthology, The English Poets, and remarks: "A collection like the present, with its succession of celebrated names and celebrated poems, offers a good opportunity to us for resolutely endeavouring to make our estimates of poetry real."[81] In such a relational context, the opportunity of estimating the real proportions of one work to another is greater than anywhere else. In essence, disengagement is closely allied to Arnold's oft-repeated claim that criticism

"obeys an instinct prompting it to try to know the best that is known and thought in the world, irrespectively of practice, politics, and everything of the kind; and to value knowledge and thought as they approach this best, without the intrusion of any other considerations whatever."[82] In this quotation, Arnold proposes two analogous forms of disengagement, both of which lie at the very heart of his criticism. The first, which I have discussed, sets aside "the best that is known and thought in the world" as a proportional standard of excellence, a canon; the second, which I shall discuss more fully in the next chapter, disengages the critic himself from the "region of immediate practice in the political, social, humanitarian sphere...."[83] Disengagement of the critic creates what is all-important for Arnold: a form of criticism that shows its disinterestedness "by keeping aloof from what is called 'the practical view of things;' by resolutely following the law of its own nature, which is to be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches."[84]

T.S. Eliot has categorized Matthew Arnold as an "exhaustive critic," one of those who "review the past of our literature, and set the poets and the poems in a new order."[85] Insofar as we find a canonical function prevalent in Arnold's criticism, it dwells, I believe, in his practice of shaping the tradition of English literature in an evaluative, relational, or comparative manner. Like the Jews and like all other critics of

their own vital traditions, Arnold evaluates, and then preserves or jettisons according to his best light. Again, like all critics, he performs the task that David Hume describes so well in his essay, "Of the Standard of Taste":

> It is impossible to continue in the practice of contemplating any order of beauty, without being frequently obliged to form comparisons between the several species and degrees of excellence, and estimating their proportion to each other....By comparison alone we fix the epithets of praise or blame, and learn how to assign the due degree of each.[86]

Arnold is not naive about the critic's obligation to form comparisons. For Northrop Frye, who would abandon the entire evaluative enterprise, there is only illegitimate evaluation, but for Arnold there are illegitimate and legitimate varieties. The former are the offshoots of what he calls the "historical" estimate--overrating a poet for his role in the development of a nation's literature--and the "personal" estimate--the result of "personal affinities, likings, and circumstances...."[87] Arnold holds no brief for either of these fallacies, particularly the latter. In his essay "A French Critic on Milton" (1877), he alludes with approbation to what Edmond Scherer says about the opinions of Milton uttered by Macaulay and Voltaire: "Such judgments, M. Scherer truly says, are not judgments at all. They

merely express a personal sensation of like or dislike."[88] Hence, if not worthless, they are valuable only for what they tell us about the minds of Macaulay and Voltaire, not what they tell us about the rank of Milton. The distinction between a personal estimate and a "judgment" is that the latter is founded on wide experience of letters and concerns itself with proportional relations between works, the true ground for all decisions regarding the status of a work. "It is only experience," Arnold writes in "Bishop Butler and the Zeit-Geist" (1876), "which assures us that even the poetry and artistic form of certain epochs has not, in fact, been improved upon, and is, therefore, classical."[89]

As Arnold would be the first to claim, the differences between "historical," "personal," and "real" estimates can be hard to discern in practice, for the authority of experience is not always certain. Because this is true, the critic's obligation to form comparisons must be fulfilled with a healthy measure of diffidence. One must judge with caution. Arnold takes his license as a judge of literature from many sources, but perhaps most openly from Samuel Johnson. In the introduction to The Six Chief Lives from Johnson's "Lives of the Poets" (another canon within a canon), which was published in 1878, he quotes a passage from Johnson's "Life of Pope" that concerns evaluation: "'Judgment is forced upon us by experience. He that reads many

books must compare one opinion or one style with another; and when he compares, must necessarily distinguish, reject, and prefer.'" To which Arnold adds: "Nothing could be better. The aim and end of education through letters is to get this experience."[90] Still, his most extended comment on the subject is shot through with hesitation about critical judgment. At one point in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1864), he attempts to adjudicate the relations between judgment and knowledge or experience. The result is highly tentative.

> Again, judging is often spoken of as the critic's one business, and so in some sense it is; but the judgment which almost insensibly forms itself in a fair and clear mind, along with fresh knowledge, is the valuable one; and thus knowledge, and ever fresh knowledge, must be the critic's great concern for himself. And it is by communicating fresh knowledge, and letting his own judgment pass along with it,--but insensibly, and in the second place, not the first, as a sort of companion and clue, not as an abstract lawgiver,--that the critic will generally do most good to his readers. Sometimes, no doubt, for the sake of establishing an author's place in literature, and his relation to a central standard (and if this is not done, how are we to get at our

> best in the world?) criticism may have to deal with a subject-matter so familiar that fresh knowledge is out of the question, and then it must be all judgment; an enunciation and detailed application of principles. Here the great safeguard is never to let oneself become abstract, always to retain an intimate and lively consciousness of the truth of what one is saying, and, the moment this fails us, to be sure that something is wrong. Still under all circumstances, this mere judgment and application of principles is, in itself, not the most satisfactory work to the critic; like mathematics, it is tautological, and cannot well give us, like fresh learning, the sense of creative activity.[91]

Nowhere else does Arnold describe so explicitly the central premise of his critical methods. He wrote "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" to demonstrate, in part, that critical power is nearly as valuable as creative power; hence, his statement at the end of this quotation that fresh learning gives the critic a sense of creative activity. The whole purport of this passage, however, is to assert what Arnold reiterates throughout his writings: that judgment must be subordinate to experience--what he calls here "knowledge, and ever fresh knowledge." Mere judgment is tautological; that is, it entails only

the application of already established principles to a familiar author, the canonizing of what is perhaps already canonical. Still, Arnold does not suggest here or elsewhere that judgment is an unnecessary companion of knowledge. Experience is worthless without discrimination, and the critic's role must always include the right to evaluate. In a somewhat overstated form, he says exactly this in "The Bishop and the Philosopher" (1863), the essay on Bishop Colenso that opened Arnold's series of religious writings: "Literary criticism's most important function is to try books as to the influence which they are calculated to have upon the general culture of single nations or of the world at large."[92]

If Arnold is sometimes ambivalent in theory about the importance of judgment or evaluation, he is almost never so in practice. A survey of his critical writings yields a virtual cornucopia of evaluative statements and canons that arise from them, a few examples of which follow. They are all rather sweeping in their scope. In his essay on Joubert (1864), in which he compares Joubert and Coleridge, he distinguishes between two general classes of men: those whose "criticism of life" is "permanently acceptable to mankind" and those whose criticism of life is only "transitorily acceptable."[93] In "Emerson" (1884), he concludes that "not with the Miltons and Grays, not with the Platos and Spinozas, not with the Swifts and Voltaires, not with the Montaignes and

Addisons, can we rank Emerson."[94] Emerson is not to despair, however, for as "Wordsworth's poetry is, in my judgment, the most important work done in verse, in our language, during the present century, so Emerson's Essays are, I think, the most important work done in prose."[95] Finally, in "Bishop Butler and the Zeit-Geist," he spends a good part of the essay debating whether Butler has the true spirit of saintliness, that is, whether he might, in another sense, be canonized.

Evaluation is carried on in this manner throughout Arnold's works, and he creates numerous (and generally harmonious) canons as a result. In Literature and Dogma, for example, he lists a canon of English divines, Hooker, Butler, Barrow, and Wilson, as well as a canon of spirits fit to consort with Goethe: Shakespeare, Voltaire, Cicero, and Plato.[96] And as a final example, near the end of his life in an essay on Sainte-Beuve (1886), Arnold praises the "excellence almost ideal" that shone in the works of certain men and erects a canon of great spirits whom Sainte-Beuve will join.

> So Homer speaks for the human race, and with an excellence which is ideal, in epic narration; Plato in the treatment at once beautiful and profound of philosophical questions; Shakespeare in the presentation of human character; Voltaire in light verse and ironical discussion. A list of perfect ones,

> indeed, each in his own line! and we may almost venture to add to their number, in his line of literary criticism, Sainte-Beuve.[97]

The instances of comparative evaluation most generally known in Arnold's works are, of course, his touchstones. He explained their function in "The Study of Poetry," but they had been a basic feature in his criticism long before, as John Eells has shown.[98] Though they are not great literary wholes, Arnold claims (correctly, if somewhat vaguely) that his touchstones bear the accent of "the very highest poetical quality."[99] Despite the evident inadequacies of the theory, touchstones nonetheless perform a vital, canonical function in Arnold's criticism: they serve as measures or rules (i.e., canons, etymologically) by which to judge the admissibility of other works as "receivable classics." They are canons not in a static, but in a dynamic, evaluative sense. As such, Arnold claims, they assist the reader in sifting "personal" and "historical" estimates of poetry from "real" estimates. Whatever one may conclude about the validity of touchstones as a critical tool, T.S. Eliot's praise of Arnold remains true: "you cannot read his essay on The Study of Poetry without being convinced by the felicity of his quotations: to be able to quote as Arnold could is the best evidence of taste."[100]

Implicit in the theory of touchstones and in all of Arnold's criticism is the assumption that only works of the highest quality

may serve as the canons (or measures) of culture: "the best that has been known and thought in the world." As he says in "The Study of Poetry," "we must accustom ourselves to a high standard and to a strict judgment."[101] Arnold's insistence on this sort of standard derives from his sense of the ethical purpose of poetry, and also from his consciousness of a defect in the English race, to whom "an inadequate sense for perfection of work is a real danger...."[102] This is a message Arnold never tires of repeating, though it is nowhere as firmly buttressed by its sociological implications as in Culture and Anarchy; "We have most of us little idea of a high standard to choose our guides by, of a great and profound spirit which is an authority while inferior spirits are none."[103] What Arnold proposes as a solution to this defect is virtually a canon of "great and profound spirits," whom one may imitate in one sense or another. In "The Study of Poetry," he puts forward exactly that idea:

> So high is that benefit, the benefit of clearly feeling and of deeply enjoying the really excellent, the truly classic in poetry, that we do well, I say, to set it fixedly before our minds as our object in studying poets and poetry, and to make the desire of attaining it the one principle to which, as the Imitation says, whatever we may read or come to know, we always return. Cum multa legeris et cog-

noveris, ad unum semper oportet redire principium.[104]

Here the classic and the canonical conflate, as they must, in the idea of imitation, for the secular classic offers the possibility of literary imitation, and the sacred canon offers the possibility of ethical imitation, e.g., Imitatio Christi. For Arnold, the two meanings converge in such a way as to give added significance to T.S. Eliot's note on him in the Introduction to The Sacred Wood (1920): "Arnold, it must be admitted, gives us often the impression of seeing the masters, whom he quotes, as canonical literature, rather than as masters."[105] This is exactly right, for Arnold's criticism--with its foundation of "the best that is known or thought in the world," its desire for a high standard and a strict judgment, its obsession with evaluation--perpetually addresses the canonical function of the relation between literature and society, a relation which, in its secular and biblical form, had begun to collapse in Arnold's day. Only once, in his Preface to Poems (1853), does Arnold consider the relation between poets and their masters, which is the relation of most importance to Eliot. Nowhere else does he write a criticism for poets, as Eliot does almost everywhere. For him, the great things in literature are canonical works, not magisterial authors.

In "The Literary Influence of Academies" (1864), Arnold sets out the analogical grounds for the connection between ethics

and his high standard of culture. Significantly, it comes from Cicero's De Officiis:

> Out of the four great parts, says Cicero, of the honestum, or good, which forms the matter on which officium, or human duty, finds employment, one is the fixing of a modus and an ordo, a measure and an order, to fashion and wholesomely constrain our action, in order to lift it above the level it keeps if left to itself, and to bring it nearer to perfection.[106]

In literary terms, "measure" and "order" are patently canons (rules or measures) that provide a standard of opposition to anarchy in man, in society, and in literature. These three repositories of anarchy are closely linked in Arnold's mind, and Culture and Anarchy explains the effects of all three. I alluded above to Arnold's consciousness of a defect in the English race; in Culture and Anarchy he quotes Martin Scriblerus, who minces no words, to this effect: "'The taste of the bathos is implanted by nature itself in the soul of man; till, perverted by custom or example, he is taught, or rather compelled, to relish the sublime.'" Upon which, Arnold comments, "But with us everything seems directed to prevent any such perversion of us by custom or example as might compel us to relish the sublime; by all means we are encouraged to keep our natural taste for the bathos unimpaired."[107] The inevitable consequences of the taste for

bathos in man himself are Barbarians, Philistines, and the Populace, the constitutents of English society; in national life, the absence of a State--"the nation in its collective and corporate character, entrusted with stringent powers for the general advantage, and controlling individual wills in the name of an interest wider than that of individuals";[108] and in letters, "the hideous anarchy which is modern English literature."[109] It is a depressing prospect all around: "Everywhere we see the beginnings of confusion, and we want a clue to some sound order and authority."[110]

Arnold naturally provided several clues to the means of establishing appropriate order in society, letters, and man himself. Best known is his faint envy of the French Academy expressed in "The Literary Influence of Academies," an envy he reiterated several times and carefully repudiated in the Preface to Culture and Anarchy. There he remarks that evident flaws in the English mind give a pretty good indication of what sort of Academy the English would be capable of creating: "For the very same culture and free inward play of thought which shows how the Corinthian style, or the whimsies about One Primeval Language, are generated and strengthened in the absence of an Academy, showsus, too, how little any Academy, such as we should be likely to get, would cure them."[111] Similarly, he rejects the possibility of instituting authority in "right reason" because the English

are unaccustomed, ethically and aesthetically, to such a standard; the tendencies that Arnold attempts to thwart resist such an authority. "Now, it is clear," he writes, "that the very absence of any powerful authority amongst us, and the prevalent doctrine of the duty and happiness of doing as one likes, and asserting our personal liberty, must tend to prevent the erection of any very strict standard of excellence, the belief in any very paramount authority of right reason, the recognition of our best self as anything very recondite and hard to come at."[112]

Arnold is far better at defining the need for authority than he is at fixing on its source. The State, the Academy, right reason, the best self--all pose problems, and only the last receives a qualified assent. Though he hesitates in naming the seat of authority so badly required in the midst of confusion and anarchy, he knows where it is located: at the center. The center is naturally opposed to provinciality, its cohesion is opposed to fragmentation, its authority to anarchy. The Academy is called "a certain ideal centre of correct information, taste, and intelligence...."[113] Arnold calls Sainte-Beuve a "perfect critic--a critic of measure, not exuberant; of the centre, not provincial...."[114] More interestingly, he also experiments with the notion of a historical center: "Many of us," he observes in Isaiah XL-LXVI, "have a kind of centre-point in the far past to which we make things converge, from which our thoughts of his-

tory instinctively start and to which they return...."[115] Arnold's search for a center of authority inevitably extends into literature too, and the center he finds there is a canon, to which he gives the name "points de repère" and which performs the canonical function of serving as a virtual source of identity, as the biblical canon had for the Jews. Appropriately, this idea is developed in Arnold's introduction to his edition of six of Johnson's Lives of the Poets, which constitute "points de repère" themselves. There, he remarks that he would like to "fix a certain series of works to serve as what the French, taking an expression from the builder's business, call points de repère,--points which stand as so many natural centres, and by returning to which we can always find our way again...."[116] A clearer statement of the need for and the function of a canon within secular literature one could not ask for.

Before I conclude these remarks on Arnold, it is necessary to say a word or two about the way he perceives the relation between literature and society, which, as I have often said, is a canonical relation. Arnold states his case very clearly. The creative genius belongs to an elite; for this reason, it is a good thing that men can be creative in other ways than by "producing great works of literature or art; if it were not so, all but a very few men would be shut out from the true happiness

of all men."[117] Arnold exacerbates the elitist elevation of creative genius by insisting that we focus our attention on the great artist almost alone, that to enjoy the work of a classic author we must "appreciate the wide difference between it and all work which has not the same high character."[118] Arnold is thus one of the true followers of what Eliot calls the "perpetual heresy of English culture": "to believe that only the first-order mind, the Genius, the Great Man, matters...."[119] Whether this is heresy or not, it allows Arnold to make clear-cut distinctions between popular and "higher" literature and to lament with Renan that "'All ages...have had their inferior literature; but the great danger of our time is that this inferior literature tends more and more to get the upper place.'"[120] Arnold's devotion to "great" literature is extreme, for he is content to discuss minor literature only if the "stimulus" of a classic has been "in a great measure disengaged" by familiarity.[121]

Theories that contain favorite Arnoldian words like "order," "measure," and "standard," or implicit desires for canons and authority, are inevitably denounced as oppressive or, at the very least, elitist in modern criticism.[122] Certainly, Arnold's theory of culture, insofar as it seeks an authority in a high standard and defends the position of genius remote from the populace, may be labeled elitist. After all, he maintains few illusions about the natural ability of the mass of mankind. Discussing

the Gospel reports of Jesus, he says, for instance, "half of what any great spirit says is sure to be misapprehended by his hearers...."[123] On a more ordinary level, he makes equally dogmatic statements. In what is surely one of Arnold's least flexible and most deterministic remarks, he observes, without counting the size of each population, that "a Puritan is a Puritan, and a man of feeling is a man of feeling."[124] Unquestionably, the Puritans (Barbarians, Philistines, and Populace, too) outnumber the men of feeling by a vast majority. Again, in "Numbers; or The Majority and the Remnant" (1884), which he gave as a lecture in America, Arnold asserts the unsoundness of the majority and the fact that only a remnant may be saved in any sense, and then pins his hopes of cultural salvation on the remnant. "'Many are called, few chosen.'"[125]

All this looks bad for Arnold and very elitist. But borrowing the idea from Isaiah that "the remnant shall return," he stresses the point that this is not a fixed remnant, not a Calvinist church of the elect; instead, it is a population capable of being expanded. This was the eloquent consolation he offered his American audiences at the end of his lecture, "Numbers," which must have tasted of ashes to them. "And you are fifty millions and growing apace. What a remnant yours may be, surely! A remnant of how great numbers, how mighty strength, how irresistible efficacy!"[126] But Arnold never suggests that the remnant can swell into a majority; the great artists and persons of true

culture are too few and too far above the mass. What he does claim, however, is that in literature the remnant, the canonical elite, may, and in fact must, benefit the majority. In complete opposition to his apparent elitism, Arnold asserts the need for balance, and the only balance of any worth is that which derives, in the microcosm of man himself, from "a harmonious expansion of all the powers which make the beauty and worth of human nature...."[127] In the macrocosm of society, the same sort of balance must prevail:

> And because men are all members of one great whole, and the sympathy which is in human nature will not allow one member to be indifferent to the rest or to have a perfect welfare independent of the rest, the expansion of our humanity, to suit the idea of perfection which culture forms, must be a general expansion. Perfection, as culture conceives it, is not possible while the individual remains isolated.[128]

That is, the relation between the best that has been thought and known in the world and the unthinking, unknowing mass, between the elite genius and the common man, between the remnant and the majority must be a beneficial one, in which no single element is allowed to develop out of proportion to the others. Arnold proposes the central paradox of all canons: that an elite group of works must function in a non-elitist manner, must express their

canonicity by operating normatively within the mass of society. As Arnold sees it, the goal of culture is perfection, and perfection itself has a beneficial purpose: "It seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, where they may use ideas, as [culture] uses them itself, freely,--nourished, and not bound by them." As he says in Culture and Anarchy, "the men of culture are the true apostles of equality."[129] To put this in other words, equality seeks to make the benefits of the cultured elite, of genius, available to all, not to reduce the level of culture to that of the mass, or to seek equality in mediocrity. Arnold proposes equality among all men and women, but not among poems.

Finally, I must record Arnold's own predictions about his theory of culture, of the effect of the canons of culture on a society of Philistines. Inevitably, they inject a dash of skepticism into his writings. In a religious context, he is occasionally capable of great optimism, of the sort he expresses in St. Paul and Protestantism: "Mankind...must needs draw, however slowly, towards its perfection; and our only real perfection is our totality."[130] This is not an unusual note for Arnold, but in a secular context he can sound it only in an ironic fashion, one that echoes not merely the "hideous anarchy which is modern English literature" but also the hideous anarchy of modern life.

Such a note he sounds in the Preface to Essays in Criticism (1865), when he facetiously apologizes for being a spot of brightness in an otherwise dim landscape: "My vivacity is but the last sparkle of flame before we are all in the dark, the last glimpse of colour before we all go into drab,--the drab of the earnest, practical, austerely literal future."[131]

END NOTES. CHAPTER II.

All references to Arnold's works in this chapter come from R.H. Super's splendid edition of The Complete Prose Works, as cited in the List of Works Consulted. I have adopted a short form of citation in which I list first the title of Arnold's work, then the collection in which Arnold published it if it is an article, and finally the volume and page number of Super's edition.

1. Frank Kermode, The Genesis of Secrecy (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 5.
2. On Translating Homer (Super, I), p. 100.
3. Literature and Dogma (Super, VI), p. 266.
4. Ibid., p. 266.
5. God and the Bible (Super, VII), p. 243.
6. Ibid., p. 439.
7. Ibid., p. 440.
8. Ibid., p. 148.
9. Ibid., p. 440.
10. Ibid., p. 246. This is italicized in Arnold's text.
11. Isaiah of Jerusalem (Super, X), p. 118.
12. God and the Bible (Super, VII), p. 253.
13. Ibid., p. 251.

14. Literature and Dogma (Super, VI), p. 160.

15. God and the Bible (Super, VII), p. 250.

16. Ibid., p. 257.

17. See ibid., pp. 255-256.

18. Ibid., p. 360.

19. Isaiah of Jerusalem (Super, X), p. 123.

20. Isaiah XL-LXVI (Super, VII), p. 58.

21. God and the Bible (Super, VII), p. 247.

22. Ibid., p. 291.

23. Ibid., p. 253.

24. Ibid., p. 219.

25. Ibid., p. 214.

26. Literature and Dogma (Super, VI), pp. 142-143.

27. God and the Bible (Super, VII), p. 239. This is italicized in Arnold's text.

28. Ibid., p. 240.

29. Literature and Dogma (Super, VI), p. 148.

30. God and the Bible (Super, VII), p. 146.

31. Ibid., pp. 240-241.

32. Literature and Dogma (Super, VI), p. 370.

33. God and the Bible (Super, VII), p. 203.

34. Ibid., p. 278.

35. Literature and Dogma (Super, VI), p. 166.

36. Ibid., p. 169.

37. God and the Bible (Super, VII), p. 243.

38. Literature and Dogma (Super, VI), p. 172.

39. Ibid., p. 171.

40. Ibid., p. 189.

41. Ibid., p. 276.

42. God and the Bible (Super, VII), p. 333.

43. Literature and Dogma (Super, VI), p. 152.

44. St. Paul and Protestantism (Super, VI), p. 102.

45. Literature and Dogma (Super, VI), p. 277.

46. Arnold claimed that because the Catholics had a talismanic church, they did not need a talismanic Bible. See ibid., p. 161.

47. Ibid., p. 249.

48. Ibid., p. 326.

49. St. Paul and Protestantism (Super, VI), p. 22.

50. Literature and Dogma (Super, VI), pp. 159-160.

51. God and the Bible (Super, VII), p. 255.

52. Ibid., p. 256.

53. Literature and Dogma (Super, VI), p. 153.

54. Ibid., p. 160.

55. Culture and Anarchy (Super, V), p. 101.

56. "Renan's 'La Réforme intellectuelle et morale...,'" (Super, VII), pp. 44-45.

57. See, for instance, chapter seven of The Old Testament and Theology (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

58. Literature and Dogma (Super, VI), p. 161.

59. Ibid., p. 354.

60. God and the Bible (Super, VII), p. 242.

61. St. Paul and Protestantism (Super, VI), p. 57.

62. Ibid., p. 8.

63. Literature and Dogma (Super, VI), p. 376.

64. St. Paul and Protestantism (Super, VI), p. 5.

65. Ibid., p. 70.

66. Ibid., p. 104.

67. "A Psychological Parallel," Last Essays on Church and Religion (Super, VIII), p. 143.

68. "Wordsworth," Essays in Criticism, Second Series (Super, IX), p. 42.

69. "Byron," Essays in Criticism, Second Series (Super, IX), p. 220.

70. Ibid., p. 234.

71. Isaiah of Jerusalem (Super, X), p. 102.

72. Ibid., pp. 121-122.

73. Isaiah XL-LXVI (Super, VII), p. 66.

74. Ibid., p. 52.

75. Variant to Isaiah XL-LXVI (Super, VII), p. 500.

76. Ibid., pp. 500-501.

77. "Literature and Science," Discourses in America (Super, X), p. 62.

78. Variant to Isaiah XL-LXVI (Super, VII), p. 501.

79. Ibid., p. 504.

80. Ibid., p. 504.

81. "The Study of Poetry," Essays in Criticism, Second Series (Super, IX), pp. 187-188.

82. "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," Essays in Criticism (Super, III), p. 268.

83. Ibid., p. 275.

84. Ibid., p. 270.

85. T.S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1934), p. 108.

86. David Hume, Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects (Edinburgh: Bell, Bradfute, and Blackwood, 1825), I, p. 234.

87. "The Study of Poetry" (Super, IX), p. 164.

88. "A French Critic on Milton," Mixed Essays (Super, VIII), p. 175.

89. "Bishop Butler and the Zeit-Geist," Last Essays on Church and Religion (Super, VIII), pp. 11-12.

90. "Johnson's Lives of the Poets" (Super, VIII), p. 311.

91. "The Function of Criticism" (Super, III), p. 283.

92. "The Bishop and the Philosopher," Essays in Criticism (Super, III), p. 41.

93. "Joubert," Essays in Criticism (Super, III), p. 209.

94. "Emerson," Discourses in America (Super, X), p. 176.

95. Ibid., p. 182.

96. Literature and Dogma (Super, VI), pp. 155 and 158.

97. "Sainte-Beuve" (Super, XI), p. 119.

98. John Eells, Jr., The Touchstones of Matthew Arnold (New York: Bookman Associates, 1955), passim.

99. "The Study of Poetry" (Super, IX), p. 170.

100. T.S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, p. 118.

101. "The Study of Poetry" (Super, IX), p. 162.

102. "Milton" (Super, XI), p. 330.

103. Culture and Anarchy (Super, V), p. 148.

104. "The Study of Poetry" (Super, IX), p. 166.

105. T.S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1920), p. xvi.

106. "The Literary Influence of Academies," Essays in Criticism (Super, III), pp. 235-236.

107. Culture and Anarchy (Super, V), p. 147.

108. Ibid., p. 117.

109. "'Tractatus Theologico-Politicus'" (Super, III), p. 64.

110. Culture and Anarchy (Super, V), p. 175.

111. Ibid., p. 234.

112. Ibid., pp. 146-147.

113. Ibid., p. 147.

114. "Sainte-Beuve" (Super, XI), p. 115.

115. Isaiah XL-LXVI (Super, VII), p. 71.

116. "Johnson's Lives of the Poets" (Super, VIII), pp. 307-308.

117. "The Function of Criticism" (Super, III), p. 260.

118. "The Study of Poetry" (Super, IX), p. 165.

119. T.S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood, p. xiv.

120. "The Literary Influence of Academies" (Super, III), p. 235. See also "Numbers," Discourses in America (Super, X), p. 159.

121. "Joubert" (Super, III), p. 183.

122. See, for instance, the discussions of this attitude in Gerald Graff's Literature Against Itself (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 66-67 (where he cites Barthes), and Denis Donoghue's Ferocious Alphabets (Boston: Little, Brown, 1981), pp. 96 ff. (where he cites Lévi-Strauss).

123. God and the Bible (Super, VII), pp. 334-335.

124. St. Paul and Protestantism (Super, VI), p. 25.

125. "Numbers," Discourses in America (Super, X), p. 144.

126. Ibid., p. 163.

127. Culture and Anarchy (Super, V), p. 94.

128. Ibid., p. 94.

129. Ibid., p. 113.

130. St. Paul and Protestantism (Super, VI), p. 126.

131. "Preface" to Essays in Criticism (Super, III), p. 287.

CHAPTER III

CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM AND CANONICAL CHOICE

In A Map of Misreading Harold Bloom observes that "the dialectic of fresh canon-formation joining itself to a gradual ideological reversal endures into the current decade."[1] The revolutionary (or revisionist) attitude of romanticism survives in all recent canon-formation, Bloom says, whether the impulse behind it is rebellion or right-wing consolidation. As a new poetical or critical school comes to the fore, it brings with it a new canon or a readjustment of the old canon as one of its defensive weapons. Wordsworth, and Arnold following him, exemplify the romantic use of canon to define a new approach to tradition. Without altogether acceding to Bloom's assumption that this is a feature of all contemporary canon-formation, one must admit that his statement adequately, if somewhat obscurely, describes the most prominent canonizing poets and critics of the twentieth century. T.S. Eliot, for instance, is clearly a poet-critic whose canon was shaped, first, by his personal poetical development and, second, by specific religious and political tendencies; his canon overtly announces an "ideological reversal" of the previous generation's canon. One could find numerous examples of critics and poets similarly impelled by these two reasons to turn the idea of canon into a poetical trenching-tool. Harold Bloom would ask whether the first motive does not always prevail in

canon-formation; Northrop Frye would ask the same of the second.

Eliot is an unusually successful, if otherwise typical, example of the poet as canonizer. As I remarked in the previous chapter, he would reject that particular role, preferring instead to think of himself as a proclaimer of poetic masters. But the effect of Eliot's early essays, in conjunction with his verse, was a canonizing one, the results of which, like those of all revisionist canons, have been satirized by Northrop Frye as a "stock-market" approach to poetic tradition, in which, for example, Donne's prospects soar while Milton's and Shelley's tumble.[2] Despite the consequences of the essays in The Sacred Wood (1920) and elsewhere, Eliot's canon--like Pound's in the "Exhibit" section of The ABC of Reading (1934)--is mainly polemical, justifying a specific kind of verse, and does not, as canon, acquire a theoretical life of its own, the way the notion of canon does in Arnold's biblical writings and criticism. The closest Eliot comes to developing a theory about the values and the validity of canon-formation is, of course, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." But even in that influential essay, he takes a view of tradition too broad to be called a theory of canon-formation, though some of the implications of his essay have been incorporated in such a theory by Frye. The kind of approach to canon-formation that includes Eliot and Pound (or Wordsworth and Coleridge) is the sort desired by Geoffrey Hartman in Criticism in the Wilder-

ness: "We do not possess a careful study of theories of criticism in the light of their text-milieu: how theory depends on a canon, on a limited group of texts, often culture-specific or national."[3] Studying the relation between a critic and his conscious or unconscious canon is not what I intend to do in the final chapter of this dissertation. What I mean to discuss is a pair of critics who have made the process of canon-formation itself a significant issue, about whom Hartman's question may certainly be asked, but who, unlike most of the critics he then goes on to name (Derrida, Barthes, Heidegger), concern themselves consciously and discursively with canon-formation: they are Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom. Between them, they, like Quintilian and Josephus, typify the extremes of contemporary reaction to the idea of a canon.

As far as the matter has been discussed, what is and has been at issue in the mid and late twentieth century is not which literary canon or canons shall be selected, but whether and why we should select one at all. Distrust of canons and the order they imply has accompanied general distrust of ideology in criticism; Matthew Arnold's rule of disinterestedness in the critic, which meant for him avoidance of obviously biased political or social involvement, has been reinterpreted to mean avoidance of any ideological tainting and the concomitant technique of using literature as a weapon in theoretical warfare. Frankly, nowadays no one

knows how to choose evaluatively an order of literary works without incurring the double charge of having, first, evaluated and, second, created an order. As numerous critics have pointed out, order is a synonym for oppression in today's critical climate.[4] Similarly, evaluation is regarded warily as the subtle tool of critics with ulterior motives, political, religious, or just "concerned." Examples of such suspicion are not hard to find, and they range across the entire spectrum of scholarly and critical opinion. For instance, Walter Jackson Bate, commenting on the use of "classical" as an evaluative standard, observes, "the classical so often proves a Trojan Horse when more restricted movements in the arts try to embrace and incorporate it for authority."[5] In a similar vein, though from a radically different perspective, Roland Barthes remarks in The Pleasures of the Text, "If I agree to judge a text according to pleasure, I cannot go on to say: this one is good, that bad. No awards, no 'critiques,' for this always implies a tactical aim, a social usage, and frequently an extenuating image-reservoir."[6] The consensus is that any kind of evaluation threatens to undermine the autonomy of literature. The most famous and reasoned attack on the hidden motives of evaluation, hence of canon-formation, and the sharpest assault on the canonizing spirit is, of course, by Northrop Frye.

In his essay "Ghostlier Demarcations: The Sweet Science of Northrop Frye," Geoffrey Hartman notices that "the feature

of [Frye's] system that has caused most protest is precisely his relegation of certain kinds of value judgments to the history of taste and his resolute exclusion of them from criticism."[7] Evaluation of literary works is at all times a touchy issue, and the way in which Frye swaggered into position on the topic in Anatomy of Criticism has been met by equally swaggering responses, supportive or antagonistic, from a number of critics, among them Hartman, Murray Krieger, W.K. Wimsatt, E.D. Hirsch, and, most recently, Frank Lentricchia.[8] Reaction to Frye, as to virtually any theorist these days, has included the deferential and the abusive. Still, evaluation is a vital matter as far as canon-formation is concerned. As "rule" or "measure," etymologically, a canon serves as a standard of evaluation; as a list of works, it compiles books which have met some standard. Unavoidably, the evolution of all canons, religious or secular, implies a process of inclusion and exclusion, of selection. Simply, without selection, based on an evaluative standard of some sort, a canon cannot come into existence. To take the biblical canon as an example, evaluation was a partial function of precanonical hermeneutics, which at one stage of biblical development determined whether a text should receive the final metastasis of canonization. Whether one considers a canon of biblical works, poems, linguistically acceptable writings, or even "right-minded" doctrines, an evaluative gesture, a selection

lies at the heart of each.

Frye's explicit comments on the subject of value judgments or evaluation begin, more or less, with an early essay whose title, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," echoes his preoccupation with Arnold and his canonizing gestures; this essay was later adapted as part of the "Polemical Introduction" to Anatomy of Criticism. In "The Function of Criticism..." Frye makes a statement that would seem like a concession to his later adversaries: "I do not deny the ultimate importance of the value-judgment. I would even consider the suggestion that the value-judgment is precisely what distinguishes the social from the natural sciences. But the more important it is, the more careful we should be about getting it solidly established."[9] This passage did not survive in Anatomy of Criticism, for there Frye offers a more categorical rejection of evaluation. And as the years have passed away in this debate, his attitude has hardened, naturally, harried as he has been on the subject, until it reached what might be called the final fortification of his essay, "On Value Judgments" (1968), from which there is virtually no appeal.

At the same time, Frye's argument against evaluation has grown more sophisticated. Initially, his opponent was merely the determinist critic whose failing was a priori evaluation. This adversary was and is real enough, but the object of Frye's

more strident remarks sometimes seems to be only a critic well-camouflaged in straw, particularly in "On Value Judgments" where Frye takes on "those who try to subordinate knowledge to value judgments," as if this were an earnest splinter-group within the profession.[10] By the date of The Critical Path (1971), easily Frye's finest statement of his views on the critic's relation to himself, his subject, and his society, the argument had become interwoven with a complex and often ambiguous theory about the tensions between the "myth of concern" and the "myth of freedom." Frye had become, in Bloom's doubly-accusing words, "the Arnold of our day."[11]

With that remark, Bloom censures Frye's "barren moralizing,"[12] but he points up incidentally a major theme in all of Frye's writings. The obvious opponent in the "Polemical Introduction" to Anatomy of Criticism is T.S. Eliot, the Anglo-Catholic, Royalist, Classical evaluator. But close behind Eliot stands Arnold, and the greater part of Frye's critical premises, as well as his polemical starting-points, can be found in Arnold's criticism. I do not mean to carry this comparison any further, merely to notice Frye's extraordinary ambiguity towards his predecessor. Like Arnold, Frye develops a theory of criticism which is "a total attitude to experience;"[13] however different that attitude may turn out to be, Arnold is his master in this respect and in championing the function of criti-

cism. But Arnold is also the most convenient example of a number of critical failings, most of them having to do with evaluation. As I trace Frye's objections to evaluative criticism, Arnold's utility as a scapegoat and as a model will become apparent. For the moment it is enough to observe that he provides Frye with the criterion of disinterestedness, which Frye then employs in a ruthless fashion.

Briefly, Frye enumerates three different fallacies related to evaluation, each of which turns upon the necessity of disinterestedness. The first, called the determinist fallacy in Anatomy of Criticism and the centrifugal fallacy in The Critical Path, characterizes the attempt to evaluate literature according to a standard which does not come from literature itself. Frye's metaphor for this fallacy is a color-filter, in fact a whole spectrum of color-filters used by determinist critics, "whether Marxist, Thomist, liberal-humanist, neo-Classical, Freudian, Jungian, or existentialist...."[14] Instead of taking its bearings from within literature itself, criticism of this sort, Frye objects, takes its values from and finds its home in a discipline which is not literary. And, Frye observes, the only possible virtue of determinist criticism, like looking at the world upside down, is its novelty: "All that the disinterested critic can do with such a color-filter is to murmur politely that it shows things in a new light and is indeed a most stimulating contri-

bution to criticism."[15] This is clearly the politeness of embarrassment.

In Frye's pseudo-scientific system, the opposite of a fallacy called centrifugal must be centripetal, of course; instead of turning outward to peripheral norms external to literature, the critic turns inwards and makes his own reading the standard of judgment. The centripetal fallacy centers on the critic's direct contact with literature; it is an attempt to render judgments of literary works primarily by commenting on the quality of one's experience of them. But, as Frye remarks, "experience as such is never adequate. We are always reading Paradise Lost with a hangover or seeing King Lear with an incompetent Cordelia or disliking a novel because some scene in it connects with something suppressed in our memories...."[16] Any evaluation based on such inadequate "pre-critical experience" evidently toys with subjectivism of an irreducible sort, for centripetal criticism judges not the poem itself but the reader's experience of it. In his desire to take up the neutral and objective standpoint of science or mathematics (his persistent metaphor for the posture of good criticism), Frye carefully severs true criticism from any attempt to depict the nature of one's own direct contact with literature. The difference between the two is the difference between scientific observation or mathematical proof and autobiography. As he explains in "On Value Judgments," "the sense of value is an individual,

unpredictable, variable, incommunicable, indemonstrable, and mainly intuitive reaction to knowledge. In knowledge the context of the work of literature is literature; in value judgment, the context of the work of literature is the reader's experience."[17] Frye's "archetypal" criticism seeks a middle path; it tries to avoid alliance with a non-literary ideology, while at the same time it also tries to avoid the centripetal fallacy, which is remarkably like the "personal estimate" of poetry rejected by Arnold. This, Frye observes, "leads to an evaluating criticism which imposes the critic's own values, derived from the prejudices and anxieties of his own time, on the whole literature of the past."[18] The inevitable consequence of the centripetal critic's approach, Frye would argue, is "choosing a canon out of literature and so making a single gigantic allegory of his own anxieties."[19]

The final fallacy concerned with values, which Frye calls "rhetorical," stems from the survival in evaluative language of the notion of decorum and the division of styles into high, middle, and low. Such a division suggests the social framework on which it was based, and with it comes a narrowly disguised discrimination allied only with social, not literary values. Frye's example of the rhetorical fallacy is Arnold's touchstones, from "The Study of Poetry." "The invariable mark of this fallacy," Frye says, "is the selected tradition, illustrated with great

clarity in Arnold's 'touchstone' theory, where we proceed from the intuition of value represented by the touchstone to a system of ranking poets in classes."[20] What is peculiar to the rhetorical fallacy, Frye would argue, is its insistence on creating a hierarchy; it provides not only an order, but a comparative order. Frye's theory naturally leads him to suspect evaluative hierarchies because they implicitly depend on analogies to non-literary systems of values.[21] Like Bate and Barthes, whom I quoted earlier, Frye too sees something lurking within "selected traditions"; for him it is an "ultra-critical joker."[22] Evaluative ranking and the selected tradition must both be resisted by the disinterested critic, whose subject, he claims, has no inherent hierarchical properties. The sure alternative to an aristocratic structure has always been an egalitarian one, and Frye proposes a social analogy as a means of eradicating this type of evaluative ranking. As Geoffrey Hartman says, "Frye is part of a single modern movement to democratize criticism and demystify the muse."[23] In defense of this movement, Frye appeals again to Arnold, this time in a positive way: "criticism, if it is not to reject half the facts of literary experience, obviously has to look at art from the standpoint of an ideally classless society. Arnold points this out when he says that 'culture seeks to do away with classes.'"[24]

Frye's quotation from Arnold--"culture seeks to do away

with classes"--turns upon a misinterpretation of Arnold and a metaphorical shifting of the burden of meaning. Arnold is quite explicit about the fact that, indeed, a classless society would in some ways be ideal; he is also terribly skeptical about man's chances of ever achieving this state. More to the point, he nowhere suggests that culture itself is classless; again, ideally, it ought to offer its benefits--which are "total" for Arnold, too--to all people, irrespective of rank. But the creators and the creations that belong to "art" step naturally into a most far-reaching and restrictive hierarchy. Great works of literature, Arnold argues, can be produced only by "a very few men"; the same limitation applies in a lesser degree to great criticism. When Frye urges us to "look at art from the standpoint of an ideally classless society," he proposes a paradox; he asks us to pretend we dwell in a society in which no values are created by distinctions between classes and to contemplate an order of art which, in Arnold's rational view, is virtually pyramidal in its value structure. Frye presses upon us a Utopian task: with Imlac, Nekayah, and Pekuah we leave the Happy Valley, although a democratic one, to visit the tombs at Giza. Like the travellers, we must also eventually return to Abyssinia.

In an oblique way, Frye asks us, in fact, not to look at art as if we belonged to a classless society, but as if art itself were a classless society, one in which no values arose out

of social or aesthetic distinctions. Frye adopts this rather circuitous means of saying a simple thing because his definition of value requires it. For him, values, like faith and mythology, depend almost entirely on social acceptance; there can be no other source for them. Thus, Frye's arguments about these three forms of social expression take a fundamentally similar shape. In The Secular Scripture (1976) he defines "serious" belief in a social mythology as "essentially a statement of a desire to attach oneself to, or live in or among, a specific kind of community."[25] Obviously, a society is capable of advocating any myth that serves its purposes. Furthermore, when society puts forward its particular myth, it does so primarily "to prevent anyone from questioning it."[26] This argument applies equally to the maintaining even of literary values, for there again the pressure of society is felt: "value judgments carry with them, as part of their penumbra, so to speak, a sense of social acceptance."[27] Clearly, since values at all levels of intensity--literary, social, religious--have their origin and find their confirmation in society, it is necessary, in order for Frye to view literature in an unprejudiced, unranking manner, to postulate a society in which hierarchical values are not upheld at all; it is necessary to dream of a classless society in order to perceive a classless order of literature. Behind this entire argument lies the assumption that no values can arise from or be validated

by literature itself alone.

For Frye, canons, hierarchies, and value judgments are all indices of the same critical failing: adherence to a norm that lies outside literature, whether in the anxieties of the critic or the anxieties of society. This kind of pre-critical alliance effectively turns literature into propaganda for one's "myth of concern." By that phrase Frye means the complex of values, usually contained in "a fully developed or encyclopaedic myth,"[28] that is vital to the structure of a society, and that a society upholds in its institutions. The active myth of concern for Europe and America is the biblical myth, as it has developed within the Church, the main characteristic of which is its universal scope and application: "The encyclopaedic form of the Bible, stretching from creation to apocalypse, makes it particularly well fitted to provide a mythical framework for a culture, and the form itself illustrates the encyclopaedic inner drive of all developed mythologies."[29] The relationship of literature and criticism to this all-encompassing structure of ideas, images, and beliefs must be diffident at best. The distinguishing characteristic of the literary or critical attitude, for Frye, is its freedom, which stands in opposition to the authoritative pressure exerted by society on behalf of its myth of concern. "Literature," he writes in The Critical Path, "is the embodiment of a language, not of belief or thought: it will say anything, and therefore

in a sense it says nothing. It provides the technical resources for formulating the myths of concern, but does not itself formulate: for formulation we must turn from literature back to the myths of concern themselves."[30] In Frye's opinion, the poet is freed by the very limited nature of his own concern: "Poetry is a vehicle for morality, truth, and beauty, but the poet does not aim at these things, but only at inner verbal strength. The poet qua poet intends only to write a poem...."[31]

The critic's necessary refuge from the anxious conservatism of concern lies in adherence to what Frye calls the "myth of freedom." This is the "liberal" element in society; its models are scientific and mathematical; and it depends upon our ability to percieve "nature as an impersonal order."[32] Most important of all, the myth of freedom opposes to the "temporal authority" of society a different sort of authority, that "of the rational argument, the accurate measurement, the repeatable experiment, the compelling imagination."[33] Freedom does not, in Frye's opinion, receive institutional status, primarily because it can only be constituted individually. What Frye proposes in his theory of concern and freedom is to make the familiar tension between an individual and his society into a model for the critic's relation to all institutional forms of authority. Society seeks to absorb the individual within its sphere of concern. Simultaneously, the individual tries to escape to a realm which, in

Frye's system, belongs virtually to a pastoral epiphany:

> Concern by itself can never be entirely free from the clattering of anxiety, the fear of heresy, the hysteria of intolerance and violence. It is the basis of all community, but in itself it cannot distinguish a community from a mob. Above it is individual life, and only the individual is capable of happiness. The basis of happiness is a sense of freedom or unimpeded movement in society, a detachment that does not withdraw; and the basis of that sense of independence is consciousness.[34]

The critic who lapses from this rigorous consciousness falls, like Satan, into the providential machinery of a system larger than he is. This may, of course, be witting or unwitting, but the consequences are the same in either case, a plummeting outward into the centrifugal fallacy and its ideological Pandaemonium. In contrast, the criticisms of the true critic "are those of the myth of freedom, depending on evidence and verification wherever they come into the picture."[35] The false alternative to this scientific method is nothing more, for Frye, than the substitution of evaluation for knowledge, and the rapid growth of hierarchical structures, which in turn produce canons. The evolution of faith demonstrates this process: "the more genuinely concerned faith is," he writes, "the more quickly

a hierarchy is established in it, in which 'essential' beliefs are retained and less essential ones regarded as expendable."[36] Whenever society appropriates the products of culture, either to define its past or to predict its future, the same event takes place: selection begins, traditions awake, and canons crystallize. Frye's example of a critic who makes literature the basis of a future society and who evaluates accordingly is, of course, Matthew Arnold, and his use of Arnold here is again made possible only by a relatively conventional misinterpretation of his thoughts about the connection between poetry and religion.[37] "When we read 'in poetry the distinction between excellent and inferior... is of paramount importance...because of the high destinies of poetry,' we begin to get a clue. We see that Arnold is trying to create a new scriptural canon out of poetry to serve as a guide for those social principles which he wants culture to take over from religion."[38] No matter what the critic's intention, when he meddles with social or extra-literary affiliations, the result is the same: a lapse into biased canonizing.

Frye admits the validity of the idea of canon in only two cases: first, when it is used to describe the body of a poet's works, and, second, when it names the central set of myths that lies at the heart of a society's concern. He uses the first admissible sense mainly when he talks about Blake's poetry in Fearful Symmetry (1947). There, he remarks that "certain struc-

tural principles"[39] become visible when we perceive Blake's work as a single canon; he even ventures an extended comment on such a notion:

> This idea of an individual canon, apart altogether from the choice between good and bad poems which every poet makes, is neither peculiar to Blake nor a mark of egomania. If a man of genius spends all his life perfecting works of art, it is hardly far-fetched to see his life's work as itself a larger work of art with everything he has produced integral to it, as Balzac was not simply a man who wrote novels, but a man whose novels constitute a Comédie Humaine.[40]

This quotation clearly foreshadows Frye's later comments on the subject; he sets aside the poet's distinctions between good and bad and discovers structural principles only within a canon that includes all of a writer's work and excludes none of it.

Frye's other admissible use of canon, even as it explains his sense of the development of the Bible, paradoxically constitutes his most complex and fundamental argument against any use of canonical selection within secular literary criticism. For Frye, canon in this sense applies to the metastasis of a group of mythical stories that come to define a society's "concern." One of his major points, repeated in Fearful Symmetry, Anatomy of Criticism, The Critical Path, The Secular Scripture, his newest

work, The Great Code, and elsewhere, is that myths tend to cohere. As they do so, they blend together to form a loosely-structured but continuous narrative, which eventually absorbs and contains all the essential values of a society. As Frye puts it in The Secular Scripture, "myths stick together to form a mythology, a large interconnected body of narrative that covers all the religious and historical revelation that its society is concerned with or concerned about."[41] The question answered by such a mythological structure is the one traditionally addressed by any religious canon: who are we, and "what must we do to be saved?"[42] Frye distinguishes between religious versions of this syncretistic process, which create myth, and secular versions, which create romance, but the difference between them is only the canonical position and function of myth in society. Frye's prime example of mythological cohesion and the centering of authority in a canon is, of course, the Bible. It is also the place where his argument collapses, as I shall show momentarily.

For Frye, sacred scripture is myth in its "encyclopaedic form," and he argues his best case for the Bible as such in his first book, Fearful Symmetry. There, he writes:

> The basis of the Bible is, like that of the epic, religious and historical saga concerned with anthropomorphic gods and theomorphic men, part of it legendary history and part prophetic vision. But the

> Bible is neither a single work of art like the Iliad, nor an expanded one like the Mahabharata: it is the historical product of a visionary tradition. It records a continuous reshaping of the earlier and more primitive visions, and as it goes on it becomes more explicitly prophetic, until the confused legends of an obscure people take the form of the full cyclic vision of fall, redemption and apocalypse.[43]

Frye's enthusiasm for the scope of the Bible extends also to its generic inclusiveness. Earlier in the same work, he notices that the Bible "takes in, in one immense sweep, the entire world of experience from the creation to the final vision of the City of God, embracing heroic saga, prophetic vision, legend, symbolism, the Gospel of Jesus, poetry and oratory on the way."[44]

To object to Frye's argument in the simplest terms, it would be sufficient to say that he utterly ignores the manner in which the Bible developed and that he has an overwhelming tendency to read it from Revelations backwards rather than from Genesis forwards. Frye advocates a kind of biblical criticism which replaces a historical fact with an assumed intention, and omits the most salient details of biblical development. His higher criticism would be

> a purely literary criticism which would see the

> Bible, not as the scrapbook of corruptions, glosses, redactions, insertions, conflations, misplacings, and misunderstandings revealed by the analytic critic, but as the typological unity which all these things were originally intended to help construct....
> A genuine higher criticism of the Bible, therefore, would be a synthetizing process which would start with the assumption that the Bible is a definitive myth, a single archetypal structure extending from creation to apocalypse.[45]

Much as one may desire a synthetic view of the Bible, Frye's biblical criticism plainly begins with a question-begging assumption, that the Bible was intended to be an all-encompassing account of redemptive time and that its growth demonstrates such a single purpose. A far cry from his call for verification in criticism, Frye's theory, like swift Camilla, "Flies o'er th'unbending Corn, and skims along the Main." In his search for typological unity Frye ignores the fact that the Bible consists of fragmentary history, extraordinary narrative disruptions, ignores also the important fact that canonical development, as interpolation (midrash) or otherwise, does not always tend in a single direction. Also, Frye is less interested in the early historical and prophetic modes of the Bible than he is in what, in the Old Testament, are essentially late and generally conceded to be inferior addi-

tions to the canon, additions that reflect an apocalyptic tendency in late Judaism which became an important part of early Christianity, whose own Apocalypse, however, does not appear in the earliest canonical lists.[46] Put simply, Frye prefers the imagistic richness of Revelations and other apocalyptic writings to the primacy of the Pentateuch and the Gospels.

To a certain extent, Frye does take account of the editorial and authorial processes involved in biblical canon-formation, but he neglects to consider the lesson embodied in a sentence like this: "we cannot trace any part of the Bible back to a time when it was not being edited, redacted, conflated, glossed, and expurgated."[47] For Frye the result of this exceedingly awkward and uncertain series of textual manipulations is a single, encyclopaedic myth with an "inner drive" of its own to complete the cycle of myth from creation to revelation. The Bible becomes an authorless text, an editorless canon, which reveals its own cohesive compulsion over time. Furthermore, Frye neglects early and very basic distinctions between canonical and apocryphal authority in his search for typological unity: "Thus the great Hebraic myths of the creation, deluge, and exodus expanded to include the legends of the Judges and the prophets Elijah and Elisha. A later process of expansion took in the folktalkes of Jonah, Ruth, Tobit, Esther, Judith, and Susanna."[48] The fact that the early Jews observed a radical difference in the

value and authority of these books is of no concern to Frye. He obliterates the notion of canon; in his desire to read the Bible as one book he forgets that historically it is many books, too.[49] This is an error typical of Frye's system. Finally, he does not discuss the Bible in itself at all; he discusses the entire history of Christian doctrine and the encyclopaedic myth it has made of these stories. Using typological tools borrowed from St. Augustine and sharpened by Blake, he interprets the Old Testament, without the New, as merely an hereditary tyranny; with the New Testament comes "the freedom to read the Old Testament mentally instead of corporeally, as the allegorical poem of a great civilization, not as the collected legal and historical superstitions of petty barbarians."[50] It seems to me that at this point Frye's notions of concern and freedom have crossed themselves.

One final objection I wish to bring against Frye at this point; it is a criticism developed by a more skilled biblical critic, Matthew Arnold. As I have shown in some detail in the previous chapter, Arnold attacked the popular Puritanism of his day for its facile belief in the "equipollence" of the Bible, that is, its belief that every word, every chapter, every book of the Bible was of equal doctrinal authority. Though I do not mean to accuse Frye of facility or putting unfair doctrinal pressure upon the Bible, I do wish to suggest that he sees the Bible

as fundamentally equipollent. In the commanding sweep of a phrase like "the full cyclic vision of fall, redemption, and apocalypse,"[51] which is altogether typical of his remarks on the Bible, there is no room for details about the differences in doctrinal, aesthetic, or imagistic value between books or for observing such subtleties as apparent conflicts within the Bible itself. Equipollence lies behind a statement like this: "The Bible is the world's greatest work of art and therefore has primary claim to the title of God's Word."[52] It also lies behind this: "if the Bible is to be regarded as inspired in any sense, sacred or secular, its editorial and redacting processes must be regarded as inspired too."[53] As Arnold had shown nearly a century earlier, the doctrines of "plenary inspiration" and equipollence are vitally linked.

Frye's approach to the Bible is just one version of his approach to the entire cosmos of words, what Frank Lentricchia has called the logical conclusion of the "neo-Kantian aestheticist movement": "the privileging of the entire canon of all literary objects as the literary universe...."[54] Speaking of Blake and the timeless vision of God which sees "this world of time and space as a single creature in eternity and infinity, fallen and redeemed," Frye announces an explicit connection between the universe of words and the Bible, in terms which are a rationalized and academic version of Blake's more prophetic

voice: "In this world the Word of God is the aggregate of works of inspired art, the Scripture written by the Holy Spirit which spoke by the prophets. Properly interpreted, all works of art are phases of that archetypal vision."[55] By "properly interpreted," one must understand "interpreted by Blake"; in any case, Frye takes this view of art and scripture over from him, whose shadow walks at home in all of Frye's works, and makes it the premise upon which his archetypal criticism rests. His initial assumption about art, based on Blake and augmented further by his sweeping view of the Bible, is that a "total coherence"[56] underlies it, a coherence which makes art, like the Bible, not a disparate and selected group of works linked in a multitude of ways, but a single, universal work which is the voice of God in man.

This argument essentially carries over the doctrines of equipollence and plenary inspiration from Frye's biblical criticism and converts the entire edifice of literary culture into an inspired work. Advancing this theory in his early essay, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," Frye attempts to place himself in a line of critics who have perceived something similar.

> One could collect remarks by the dozen from various critics, many of them quite misleading, to show that they are dimly aware, on some level of consciousness,

> of the possibility of a critical progress toward a total comprehension of literature which no critical history gives any hint of. When Mr. Eliot says that the whole tradition of Western poetry from Homer down ought to exist simultaneously in the poet's mind, the adverb suggests a transcending by criticism of the tyranny of historical categories. I even think that the consolidation of literature by criticism into the verbal universe was one of the things that Matthew Arnold meant by culture. To begin this process seems to me the function of criticism at the present time.[57]

The difference between Arnold and Eliot and Frye, however, lies in the conclusions they draw from their theories. Within the literary orders of Arnold and Eliot, evaluation is a distinct, if not always cherished possibility, and the notion of a selected tradition or canon is a viable means of defining the historical course of literary strength. For Frye, gifted with the vision of "total coherence," neither alternative is possible. The whole and the structural bonds within the whole always prevail.

Frye understands literature to be what Robert Langbaum has called "a kind of continuing bible,"[58] in his own words, "a total form." The result of such a position is that no part of the form may be rejected and no part elevated in importance, for, indeed,

there is no available criterion for defining importance in such a structuralist vision. The archetypal critic is obliged to tolerate all components of the total form; he is doomed or freed (depending on his view) to approach the "total acceptance of the data of literature...."[59] Criticism must demonstrate progress towards universality, towards an appreciation of that all-inclusive form. "On the ethical level," Frye writes, "we can see that every increase of appreciation has been right, and every decrease wrong: that criticism has no business to react against things, but should show a steady advance toward undiscriminating catholicity."[60] But even Frye has doubts about what it would mean to carry such a dictum out of the world of theory and into the realm of practical experience, hence the value of his rejection of the centripetal fallacy: "To bring my own view that criticism as knowledge should constantly progress and reject nothing into direct experience would mean that the latter should progress toward a general stupor of satisfaction with everything written, which is not quite what I have in mind."[61] "Undiscriminating catholicity," even Frye admits, is possible only from an orbital view, where the traces of man's hand upon the earth have been washed away by the atmospheric tint.

In Frye's structuralist account of literature, where every work reflects every other work, the only possible canon that can exist is a canon of symbols, the repeated elements, or

conventions that make literature possible. But this canon, too, is wholly inclusive; it explains the operation of every work of literature. As Frye remarks in the "Polemical Introduction" to Anatomy of Criticism, "total literary history gives us a glimpse of the possibility of seeing literature as a complication of a relatively restricted and simple group of formulas that can be studied in primitive culture."[62] The critic as anthropologist is bound by the rules of his profession not to reject or to make distinctions of better or worse, only to observe. Frye's fullest statement of the levelling effect of archetypal criticism sets this principle out dogmatically, if beautifully:

> In the world of order and hierarchy there are literary hierarchies too, the order of 'classics' and 'masterpieces.' Genuine humanism is not a return to this order, but an imaginative recreation of it: we admire them and do something else, as Hopkins says. Homer and Shakespeare, both of whom have minstrels and jongleurs among their characters, do not lose their importance in our experience when the wandering tribes of folktale and anecdote, of popular story and ballad and nursery rhyme, find a home there too. The mythological universe is not an ordered hierarchy but an interpenetrating world, where every unit of verbal experience is a monad

reflecting all the others.[63]

In this humane vision of a heterogeneous literary utopia, where no kings rule, Frye creates another version of the social and cultural epiphany to which, by virtue of his detachment, he is so close at all times. For Frye, in sum, literature is "the vision of a decisive act of spiritual freedom, the vision of the recreation of man."[64] It is also nothing less than "the canon of man's word."[65]

Frye's argument--developed across the whole span of his works--is compelling and, in its own peculiar way, moving for anyone concerned with the fate of criticism. What then is wrong with it? To begin with, for all his desire to establish a practical criticism, Frye gives us no sense of praxis, no way in which we can actually move through texts to take up the stand he has recommended. His advice on the subject of how to get theoretically aloft can be found in the opening pages of Anatomy of Criticism; there he observes that "the first thing the literary critic has to do is to read literature; to make an inductive survey of his own field and let his critical principles shape themselves solely out of his knowledge of that field."[66] In itself, this is only common sense. Some important questions remain, however, when one considers this axiom in the light of Frye's theory. How do we as critics or readers begin an in-

ductive survey of a total form? How have we always begun? How does one choose any single work to start with, and doesn't that choice almost inevitably take place within a selected tradition? How, in an epiphanic vision of literary unity where the whole form is primary, can one choose any individual work, without taking the end of a thread that could become or has belonged to a canon?

Frye's vision of "total coherence" does not allow one the ability to make a choice of texts; to take an analogy from his biblical criticism, here again he reads from Revelations--the end--backward, rather than from Genesis--the beginning--forward. Put another way, his rejection of the selected tradition and evaluation needlessly complicates the possibility of making the necessary operative choice of a work, a choice that allows one to begin the task of criticism. The critic must always begin by choosing a text but, to read Frye literally, cannot choose from within literature. To urge us to "make an inductive survey" of our fields is merely to wave a hand in the direction of this problem. Every critic, even one as wide-ranging as Frye, begins his work with an evaluative gesture (Frye's was towards Blake), when he decides upon one work or author instead of another out of the seemingly numberless possibilities at hand. On the simplest level, his choice states that <u>this</u> work is worth spending time on. No modern critic, except Harold Bloom, would claim that a canon was the desired end of his labors. But by choice of

text alone, a critical act, even one by Frye, acquires an evaluative force and a bearing on what others perceive as the canon, reinforces or adjusts it in some way, as Eliot claimed, even if it does not address itself specifically to that task, even if it consciously seeks to avoid that end. Selection is a certain source of canonical authority, however preliminary to a subsequent, more reasoned authority. The critic cannot refuse to choose.

Choice is not only a methodological necessity, it is also in keeping with the nature of the texts that come into the critic's view. This raises my second objection to Frye's theory. He argues that the way we know (not experience) literature should resemble the way a scientist knows the objects under his observation. This--and the way Frye handles his own textual choices--fails to consider the issue of selection in a different sense. Literature is not an impersonal order of natural objects. What we choose to study and write about has been chosen before, it comes with a history of prior selection, and this influences our choice and our perception of the chosen text. Inevitably, we select from a universe of texts most of which are remarkable for having been selected for one purpose or another by many before us, a universe of works which is already marked, already evaluated, and which comes to us, however we may wish to neglect it, with a foreshadowing of canonical authority. Inductive sur-

veys, conceived in the way Frye proposes, belong to the laboratory; most critics, including Frye, must choose their texts in a more septic, but vital world.

Admittedly, my point about the pre-critical necessity of choice, the critic's obligation to select from what is invariably a selected tradition, is a simple, even a naive one. But it is the point on which my argument against Frye (and Bloom) turns. The function of canon in literary criticism is not what Frye would make it, an ideologically criminal act of manipulation; instead, its main function is largely pre-critical, operative in the time before we reach Frye's lofty altitude of "knowledge." It assists us in directing our critical choices; it provides a clue to follow out of the abyss of texts and a hierarchy to break up the levelling action of Frye's structuralist overview. I do not mean to advocate a rigid conception of canon, nor a determinist approach, nor to obliterate Frye's vision of the ballad-monger who lay down with the bard. I merely mean to propose the validity of a notion of canon which suggests that as critics we seldom make a choice of text without some awareness of the canonical consequences of our act. We are generally alert to reputations. After all, the history of taste belongs to the post-canonical exegetical effort. Canon, in this more flexible sense, precedes our choices; we are not bound by it, we are enabled by it; it opens the possibility of choice and gives it meaning.

Frye would admit that for a sense of critical freedom we must be able to choose; he is content, however, to exchange the wish for the deed. Attempting to avoid the fallacies of non-literary alliance and bondage to the myth of concern, Frye proposes a freedom which leaves us too free, awash in his oceanic "total form." Fearing adherence to extra-literary norms, he fails to recognize that canon, in the sense that I am using the word, means adherence to literature and choice within it.

All this has its practical consequences in his criticism. One of the most distinctive features of Frye's books is their range of citation. They seemingly draw upon examples from the ends of the literary universe, especially in Anatomy of Criticism. Moreover, with the exception of a remark or two about "sub-standard" poetry, Frye does try to undermine the traditional hierarchies and bring popular and classical literature to bear on the same problems. His breadth of allusion does not merely support whatever immediate point he might be making about the theory of modes, the myths of concern and freedom, etc.; it also sets out to prove an ancillary point: that there really is such a thing as a "canon of man's word" which demonstrates "total coherence." Syncretistic in itself, Frye's criticism proposes itself as a demonstration of that point. His wide-ranging references accumulate breathlessly because they must display the universality of his system. Could Anatomy of Criticism have

been written with a dramatically reduced reading list? I think so, but to allude less comprehensively and admit fewer works would be to allow the appearance of selection to creep into a system that banished it at the outset. Frye cannot validate his theory, based as it is on a rejection of evaluation and selected tradition, unless it becomes truly encyclopaedic, completely all-encompassing, or unless it takes on a work that is universal in itself, like the Bible.

Choice, selected traditions, evaluation, canon-formation are all facts of literary experience, however sordid from a "scientific" point of view. By separating knowledge from experience and creating the illusion of universality, Frye seeks to avoid these embarrassments, to free himself from the history of literary criticism. But from our first experience of literature to our last we confront it in canonical shape, or, if the work is new, in ways that implicitly raise the question of canonicity. Better to embrace the value-laden, canonically inflected, authoritatively conflicting literary universe as it stands, shaped and reshaped by our predecessors and ourselves, than to confront it in a way that cannot account for how we meet it from the first to the last. Better to understand canon-formation as a value that affects our interpretation of literature than to reject it out of hand. Frye leaves us no choice, because he wants us to choose all of literature, something a single lifetime will not admit.

What we need then is an examination of the dialectic of choice, which has been part of Harold Bloom's task since he began his work on a theory of influence in 1973. More than any other critic, Bloom has made canon-formation and the process of selecting traditions a fundamental part of his critical theory. The subject opens for him in a rather sketchy manner in The Anxiety of Influence (1973), but by Agon, nine years later, he finds himself avowedly "measuring the canon." He sets out to understand literary history as nothing more than the process of canon-formation, and he eventually takes on the role of canonizer.[67] Frye has said that the critic who chooses a canon turns literature into "a single gigantic allegory of his own anxieties."[68] I am sure Harold Bloom would agree and point to himself for proof.

The similarities between Bloom and Frye have been noticed by several critics, and they are worth remarking.[69] To begin with, one can say of Frye, as Denis Donoghue has said of Bloom, "his true precursor is Blake."[70] Each bases his criticism on the problem of poetic origins, attempting to answer Frye's question, "what [is it] that makes possible the creation of new works of literature out of earlier ones."[71] Both claim critical interest only in the poet as poet, that is, the poetry-making drive within the poet, separate from all other elements of his humanity. Both study poetry as part of a vital and indissoluble web, what Frye calls "total form" and what Bloom means when he says, in Kab-

balah and Criticism (1975), "A single text has only part of a meaning; it is itself a synecdoche for a larger whole including other texts."[72] Frye even suggests the possibility of a theory of misreading, though one less radical than Bloom's; in The Secular Scripture he observes that the reviving of tradition proceeds "through a process of absorption followed by misunderstanding, that is, establishing a new context."[73] And finally, both men are absolutely convinced of the central position of a criticism which is fundamentally practical in nature, and which, as Bloom says, "must belong to poetry...."[74]

These similarities are more than offset by profound differences, each of which affects their views of canon-formation. Bloom proposes for himself "the enrichment of rhetorical criticism,"[75] the most contemned of critical modes in Frye. Similarly, Bloom considers elitism, as does Frye, to be the inevitable result of any tradition; but for Bloom it is necessary, while for Frye it is fatal. A disagreement of more importance concerns the use of direct literary experience in criticism. As we have seen, Frye separates experience and knowledge; in Anatomy of Criticism, for instance, he writes, "the reading of literature should, like prayer in the Gospels, step out of the talking world of criticism into the private and secret presence of literature. Otherwise the reading will not be a genuine literary experience, but a mere reflection of critical conventions, mem-

ries, and prejudices."[76] To Bloom, this is largely preposterous nonsense, for reading, in Frye's sense, "is impossible because the received text is already a received interpretation, is already a value interpreted into a poem."[77] The two disagree most sharply over the relations between the poets in Elysium and their effect on the present. For Frye, as I have said, the society of dead poets comes to resemble a literary utopia in which the new writer owes a benign homage to the past: "a poet who looks directly at his greatest predecessors and visualizes his own work as a concretion of a literary tradition...is thereby doing what he can to lead culture back to the Golden Age."[78] For Bloom, a poet cannot even look "directly at his greatest predecessors," nor can the literary past be summarized as a utopian simultaneity of writers, to which the new writer attaches himself, as if, to borrow E.M. Forster's image of novelists seated in the Reading-Room of the British Museum, the addition of every new writer forced all the others to move over one chair. "I confess," Bloom writes, "that I no longer understand this simultaneity, except as a fiction that Frye, like Eliot, passes upon himself."[79]

I do not intend to examine the details of Bloom's theory of influence any more than I have examined Frye's theory of modes, symbols, myths, and genres, merely to observe how it affects his numerous remarks on canon-formation. Suffice it to say here that Bloom wishes to de-idealize the notion of tradition, of which

canon-formation is a part. As opposed to the benign (or "apostolic") view of literary inheritance suggested by Eliot and Frye, Bloom offers an interpretation that is much harsher and more dynamic. Perhaps the best summary of his outlook appears in Kabbalah and Criticism, which is also his finest work.

> 'Influence,' substituting for 'tradition,' shows us that we are nurtured by distortion, and not by apostolic succession. 'Influence' exposes and de-idealizes 'tradition,' not by appearing as a cunning distortion of 'tradition,' but by showing us that all 'tradition' is indistinguishable from making mistakes about anteriority....Every strong poet caricatures tradition and every strong poet is then necessarily mis-read by the tradition that he fosters.[80]

In the relations between strong poets, by which Bloom always also means strong critics, in all relations between past and present, the only available mode of connection is revisionism, a defensive gesture in itself, the various permutations of which are based, in Bloom's opinion, on the dynamics of Freudian psychology and Kabbalistic models of interpretation.

As one form of the relation between past and present, canon-formation too is revisionistic. It performs the difficult function of adjudicating the defensive warfare between poems, a delicate task because "poems fight for survival in a state of

poems, which by definition has been, is now, and is always going to be badly overpopulated....A new poem is not unlike a small child placed with a lot of other small children in a small playroom, with a limited number of toys, and no adult supervision whatever."[81] Canonization provides a belated, revisionistic form of adult supervision, without possessing any more authority than the children themselves. Attempting to understand this process, Bloom examines the history of canon-formation in A Map of Misreading (1975) and Poetry and Repression (1976). His descriptions of the development of Alexandrian and Biblical canon-formation, a development I discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, are absolutely conventional, the biblical account especially so in that it repeats traditional errors about end-point canonization.[82] Having surveyed the past, Bloom draws only two conclusions from the history of his canonizing predecessors. First, "for the two centuries after Goethe we still could not know what was canonical or not," because canon-formation "has become a part of Romantic tradition" and is now a weapon in twentieth-century ideological reversals. Second, "we are Alexandrians still," and, I might add, uneasy Alexandrians.[83]

As an alternative to conventional historical accounts of the process of canon-formation, Bloom offers a version that accomodates the defensive nature of our reading, poetry-writing, and criticism. He says in Kabbalah and Criticism that poems are

"apotropaic litanies, systems of defensive tropes and troping defenses,"[84] and the same phrases characterize the act of canonizing. If poems are defensive tropes, Bloom suggests, then canonization--a very special gesture towards a poem--is but a further trope, serving the same purpose: defense against the anterior strength of a poem. "All canonizing of literary texts," he writes, "is a self-contradictory process, for by canonizing a text you are troping upon it, which means that you are misreading it. Canonization is the most extreme version of what Nietzsche called Interpretation, or the exercise of the Will-to-Power <u>over</u> texts."[85] For Bloom, it is no less dangerous an act than writing a poem or a critical work; it places the reader or writer and the meaning of the text in some jeopardy. Canon-formation inevitably requires the mistaking of what has been canonized. He suggests that canonization exists in the "interplay" between two formulae, one in which the text precedes and shapes every reader, and the other in which the reader sees only himself in the text.[86] This is, as Frye said, the allegory of one's anxieties, but it is also the allegory of the shadow that every text casts upon every inevitably belated reader.

While one assesses the connection between these two formulae in canonizing a work, one also takes a toll on the present meaning of the work itself. By declaring, as the Jews and Christians did, that a work shall be sufficient for all subsequent gene-

rations, something to be proved in the future, one also, Bloom claims, exhausts the meaning of that work for the present moment. To fill the future one must empty the present. His examples for this are the conclusions of Malachi and Revelations, the last books of the Old and New Testaments, respectively.[87]

> The issue is authority, as it always is in all questions of canon-formation, and it is worth noting that both Malachi and St. John base their authority on the supposedly immediate future, on a First or a Second Coming of a reality that they seek to introject. Proleptic representation is the inevitable rhetorical resource of all canonizing discourse, which means that all canonizing must be done at the expense of the presence of the present moment. When you declare a contemporary work a permanent, classic achievement, you make it suffer an astonishing, apparent, immediate loss in meaning.[88]

In this passage, Bloom manages to reconcile the two prevalent attitudes towards canonization in the twentieth-century: the view that canonization kills, expressed, for instance, by Heidegger, and the view that canonization, the setting of one monument among all other monuments, bestows life, a theory perhaps best expressed by Eliot.[89] For Bloom, it does both; it takes back from the present what it gives to the future.

Bloom accepts canon-formation as an inevitable, even fundamental activity among readers and poets, hence, unlike Frye, he does not much concern himself about whether it is good or bad. But in recent elaborations of his argument, his use of the word "canonical" as an epithet has become more ambivalent. In Poetry and Repression, for example, we confront a distinction between "weak, unproductive, canonical misreadings" and "my own, antithetical, strong misreading...."[90] By drawing this distinction, Bloom creates the paradox of a canonizer who flees canonical readings. It becomes evident that by "canonical" misreadings, Bloom means the kind that attempt to reduce the work to solely its own meaning, to cut off the synecdochal relation with other works, and to prohibit the fruitful analogies of Bloom's own antithetical misreadings. In other words, a canonical misreading (for Bloom all strong readings are misreadings) occupies the same relation to the text that Fleckno does to Shadwell in Dryden's poem: tautological. In contrast, Bloom implies that his antithetical readings are at worst, analogical and productive, and at best, strong, his ultimate word of praise. In Bloom's work, the difference between analogy and tautology is the difference between antithetical and canonical criticism.

A further ambiguity takes over his most recent discussion of the canonical ambitions of poems. To simplify considerably, every new poet (ephebe), for Bloom, makes a raid on the

anterior authority of a past poet (precursor), seeking to attain a similar authority himself. Every poem by a strong poet is inherently ambitious; it grapples with a strong adversary and tries to create a position of strength with regard to all subsequent poems. To put it in Bloom's terms, every strong poet, who is inevitably belated because his precursor is anterior to him, seeks anteriority himself, that is, to become a precursor, too. Also, every strong poem seeks to be sufficient for the future, or canonical. There are two versions of this canonical desire, Bloom suggests, both characteristic of strong poems. "I want to distinguish now...," he writes in Agon, "between strong poems that are implicitly canonical, like [Ashbery's] Tapestry, and those whose designs upon the canon are explicit, like Wet Casements."[91] The value of this distinction can only be guessed at, since Bloom himself does not really expound it. It seems that a poem which is explicitly canonical in intention wrestles openly with its precursor (since for Bloom canonization cannot be understood outside the limits of this struggle); it visibly displays its strength. In doing so, it attempts to draw the reader away from the simpler, weaker, and now outmoded (and belated) precursor; "Longinus on the Sublime and Shelley defending poetry both make the crucial point that strong, canonical, Sublime poetry exists in order to compel the reader to abandon easier literary pleasures for more difficult satisfactions...."[92]

A poem whose aspirations to canonicity are implicit, like Keats's odes, presumably makes the same claims, but in a less overt manner. However, what "explicit designs upon the canon" really seems to mean is that a poem having such designs conforms more readily to Bloom's interpretative grid of tropes and defenses, which itself explicitly concerns the canonical ratio between poets. Hence, as always, strength wins out in Bloom and engenders a stronger criticism: "the implicitly canonical Tapestry yields to merely rhetorical criticism, while Wet Casements requires a more antithetical [i.e., Bloomian] mode of interpretation"[93]

For Bloom, all strong poems desire canonicity, and that desire becomes a part of them. It is an aspect of what he calls a "self-canonizing" element in poetry, which has existed since poetry began.

> I am going to suggest the antithetical formula that a contemporary American poem, to have any hope of permanence, necessarily builds the canonical ambition, process and agon directly into its own text, as Hesiod, Pindar, Milton, Pope, Wordsworth, and Whitman did also, as indeed all the poetic survivors have done.[94]

No strong poem can desire what Bloom thinks of as weak canonization, the merely tautological fixity of text that produces perfect copies and weak misreadings. No, strong poems desire the

more dangerous status of strong canonization, the kind that threatens to exhaust them and has been performed by "the Academy of Ezra, the Church, the universities, or most of all by strong critics from Dr. Samuel Johnson to the present day."[95] Just as canonization is an attempt to ward off the strength of a poem, to trope the trope, self-canonization, "self-election," by a poem seeks to exert its own strength, as Bloom's "true law of canonization" proclaims: "in a strong reader's struggle to master a poet's trope, strong poetry will impose itself, because that imposition, that usurpation of mental space, is the proof of trope, the testing of power by power."[96] In other words, canonicity can only be demonstrated by its effects, another version of the tautology I described at the end of my first chapter: only what is already canonical can be canonized. For Bloom the canonical poem is the one strong enough to go on "electing its successors."[97]

> A strong poem, which alone can become canonical for more than a single generation, can be defined as a text that must engender strong misreadings, both as other poems and as literary criticism. Texts that have single, reductive, simplistic meanings are themselves already necessarily weak misreadings of anterior texts. When a strong misreading has demonstrated its fecundity by producing other strong

> misreadings across several generations, then we can and must accept its canonical status.[98]

Bloom's thoughts on canon-formation are fascinating, and they radically oppose the sterility of Frye's mathematical approach to literature. In doing so, however, they also introduce peculiar problems of their own. Bloom's entire theory of poetry enjoys a natural chronological bias, which partly upends the problem of canon-formation. He is unceasingly interested in the status of the ephebe, but only marginally so in the strange condition of the precursor. Certainly, in wondering about canon-formation we inevitably wonder about how we are affected by our canonical precursors; that is, we naturally define the problem, as Bloom does, by looking backwards. Some of the values implied in this act may be suggested by considering for a moment Bloom's most interesting example of the strong poet as ephebe: Satan in Paradise Lost.[99] God is his precursor, a fact that makes Satan, who tries to steal the reader away from the simple pleasures of God to the more "difficult satisfactions" of Satanic poetry, something of a hero. Bloom, after all, subscribes to Shelley's opinion of Satan, and God as precursor excites practically no interest in him. In fact, we cannot know if an ephebe is canonical, Bloom suggests, until we see whether he has become a precursor, by which time our attention has shifted to his elected

ephebe. All poets for Bloom are at once precursors and ephebes; as ephebes, they have genuine vitality; as precursors their strength is only visible in the struggles of their successors. In the peculiar dialectic of God and Satan, Bloom is interested only in how Satan reacts to God (for Christ's relation to God is tautological), never in the nature of God's authority. To recall the etymology of influence, as Bloom so often does, he always considers the ways in which the stars affect us, never the power that enables them to do so. The question of authority, which is not merely anteriority, as Bloom suggests, is voided, though it is essential for a full treatment of canon-formation.[100]

The example of Satan as ephebe suggests a more radical deformity in Bloom's theory, as far as it concerns canon-formation. He proposes, as I have said, to "de-idealize" tradition and the relations between poets. That he certainly does; he harrows Frye's literary Elysium. But in expounding his opinion that "every poet is a being caught in a dialectical relationship ...with another poet or poets,"[101] he romanticizes--with his peculiar brand of romantic agony for doing so--the struggle between poets. What was, in Frye's hands, an Elysian field has become, in Bloom's, a field of honor, in which strong poets valiantly tilt with each other. No matter that Bloom seems as depressed about this Freudian conflict as he can be; it is still a glorious pitched battle of strength against strength, a fray which en-

compasses all strong newcomers and honors the victors. Bloom does not idealize tradition; he romanticizes it.

Doing so, he also introduces the flaw of a priori canonization, which fundamentally destoys the usefulness of his theory, as it concerns canon-formation. At the heart of his books is a circular argument: a strong poem is one that engenders other strong poems or strong criticism. Bloom repeatedly announces his insistence on strength; in his first book on influence, The Anxiety of Influence, this emphasis and the inherent romanticism of his theory are declared: "My concern is only with strong poets, major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death. Weaker talents idealize; figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves."[102] Bloom's distinction between strong and weak poems is virtually an epistemological one; we know strong poems in a way that differs from the way we know weak poems. The former inspire antithetical misreadings, while the latter inspire canonical misreadings. This effectively pre-empts the question of canon-formation in all its complexity, for it asks only, how do strong poets wrest canonicity from other strong poets? Bloom fails to concern himself with the fact that in literature strong and weak poems, like strong and weak poets, must coexist. Whatever their differences, it is not possible to portray a strong poet as strong poet and a weak poet as weak poet.

I faulted Frye for the fact that his emphasis on the "total form" of all literature and contempt for selected traditions precluded the pre-critical, canonical necessity of choice. Bloom's theory is liable to the same accusation. The canonical poem, for Bloom, elects its successors; this too is an a priori, binding affiliation. "No poet, I amend that to no strong poet, can choose his precursor, any more than any person can choose his father."[103] Recalling that by "strong poet" Bloom also means strong critic, one realizes that the possibility of choice has been entirely voided. One does not choose, one is chosen. Bloom's world is a strange place, where writers fight for survival, but cannot choose their first opponents, cannot even know whether they themselves are strong or weak until they have elected their second, later opponents. The effect of this, again, is tautological: we cannot choose our own canon until it has chosen us. Any evaluative authority disappears, and even the possibility of canon-formation as a human function becomes disputable.

Bloom's attempt to step into the mêlée as canonizer, to propose Ammons, Ashbery, and others as members of the fracas, reveals a final perversity in his account of canon-formation. It is entirely an affair of individuals. Conforming to the primarily individualistic concern of Freudian psychology, Bloom never attempts to place the act of canon-formation within a community of any sort. Poets struggle with each other, critics

struggle with poets, and though Bloom laments that "our mutual sense of canonical standards has undergone a remarkable dimming, a fading into the light of a common garishness,"[104] he gives us no hint of who "we" may be, how we could communicate with each other on such questions, or, since all decisions have been pre-empted by the "self-canonization" of poems, what we might talk about. In keeping with his romantic despair, Bloom traps the issue of canon-formation within the Nietzschean combat of strong individuals. In Bloom, we cannot choose our canon from the strong and the weak by a process of mutual consent; we cannot choose who is strong and who is weak, for the choice is already made; in Bloom, as in Frye, we cannot even choose.

What I have attempted to do in the three chapters of this dissertation is set forth a problem, ask a question, and consider some of the ways in which canon-formation and canonicity are discussed and how they might be relevant to literary criticism. It is an exceptionally difficult topic--to which I have taken a simple approach--because we rarely say anything about it, as if we did not recognize the element we swim in, and yet by the very act of choosing to write about one text as opposed to another, we are constantly engaged in canon-formation. On the one hand it appears to be merely a theoretical issue, but its consequences are largely practical. It concerns the way we define our subjects,

our fields, and in fact the entire province of literature itself. For better or worse, we are taught by and teach a canon, and though we may never talk about this fact it is not the less true. Our canons hide in the open.

Few acts of criticism are binding in the way that scientific discoveries are. New criticism does not preclude old criticism, any more than the "new new criticism" precludes new criticism itself. Our discipline does not contain the seeds of its own obsolescence, nor does it require the development of a subject like the history of science, a history of superseded theories. We continue to have recourse to traditional modes of criticism, and one of these is always evaluative and canonizing. Because we have fashioned other critical tools it does not mean that we have abandoned that one, for it continues to exist in our midst; I would suggest that it continues to exist in our beginnings too. The necessity of selection, incidental or not, survives as an atavism, a recollection of earlier, less troubled modes of criticism. Our sophisticated techniques contain within them the primitive canonical operation of choice, an inheritance from the past that cannot be cut away. Of critical theorists who would deny this, we might say, with Hume, that they reason like skeptics but live like ordinary men, for to write about any work, from whatever perspective, is to reflect on the canon.

In a sense, this combination of the primitive and the

avant-garde defines the nature of all secular canons, just as it does secular criticism. I remarked in the first chapter of this essay that in biblical canon-formation there came a stage at which the evaluative, hermeneutical shaping of the canon began to yield to commentary and exegesis, and that at least some of the authority of the canonical work passed on to the exegetical work, as society's relation to the canon began to change. This is essentially the accomodation of the ancient to the modern, an act implied in all secular, as in all religious, canon-formation. Frye formulates this relation beautifully near the conclusion of Anatomy of Criticism, in what is truly an Arnoldian end to that work.

> It is obvious, for instance, that one major source of order in society is an established pattern of words. In religion this may be a scripture, a liturgy, or a creed; in politics it may be a written constitution or a set of ideological directives like the pamphlets of Lenin in present-day Russia. Such verbal patterns may remain fixed for centuries; the meanings attached to them will change out of all recognition in that time, but the feeling that the verbal structure must remain unchanged, and the consequent necessity of reinterpreting it to suit the changes of history, bring the operations of criticism into

the center of society.[105]

But this act of accomodation or reinterpreting a work belongs to two phases of canon-formation, as I explained in the first chapter. Before the canon has been fixed, reinterpretation--hermeneutical evaluation--shapes the canon itself; after the canon has been fixed, it leads to the production of authoritative exegesis. What is canonical requires interpretation in one form before its metastasis, in another form after.

It seems to me that contemporary criticism has foundered on the crucial issue of this shift from evaluative shaping of the canon--the selecting of traditions within a secular framework--to authoritative interpretation of it. T.S. Eliot's distinction between evaluation and elucidation, for instance, is simply a distinction between what criticism does when a canon is still being shaped and what it does when a canon has been closed. In effect, Frye wishes to eliminate this distinction, to destroy the possibility of evaluation, by declaring the canon, which for him includes all literature, closed for good; Bloom wishes to do the same by uncovering a self-contained lineage of strong poems within literary tradition, poems that ward off the weak, the secondary, and each other. But as long as new works are being written, literary criticism will always evaluate and elucidate together, for the secular canon is open-ended. We must always choose and, having chosen, interpret. To eradicate the

primitive part of this act--choice--eradicates the modern part--interpretation--too. What is missing in the meantime is a sense of the fruitful adaptability of canon itself, lost in the ideological tensions that afflict the study of literature. The canon, as James Sanders and others have observed, is fundamentally adabtable and stable; it must be both to survive.

The aggressive claims about the importance of literary criticism, so familiar in today's critical discourse, seem to be made in this gap between the open and the closed canon, between evaluation and elucidation, adaptability and stability. They reveal a basic uncertainty about the true context of a critic's work and about the source of his authority in relation to the canon itself. One notices that, to a certain degree, some critics attempt to close or stabilize the canon, to complete literature. Frye does this when he tells us that literature is a total form, which only the critic can perceive, a single vast work of art, which only the critic can frame or bind. Bloom does it when he observes that "to practice Antithetical Criticism on the more recent poet or poets becomes possible only when they have found disciples not ourselves."[106] The work must be completed by finding an ephebe, though Bloom does not stand by his remarks that it be "not ourselves"; he is more than ready to complete the work of Ammons, for example, by becoming a strong misreader. Frye and Bloom close the canon for largely opposite

reasons: Frye, to demonstrate the posterior, exegetical, and scientific nature of his own criticism, which, like Christian doctrine, depends on a stable, closed canon; Bloom, to reveal the adaptable canonical dialectic that includes him in the canon by choosing him as a strong ephebe. By attempting to close the canon, a critic seeks to guarantee the soundness and continuing validity of his conclusions, just as he prefers to study a dead poet rather than a live one. But a closed canon presents its own problems, for its authority, as Bloom would say, comes to be pure anteriority, against which there is little defense.

Forced to confront the gap in authority between the close of Revelations, to take an extreme example, and the opening of their own discussions, critics become very nervous. The tendency then is to claim anew what has always been theirs, to a certain extent. To assert that the critic is as valuable as the poet, that criticism is also the poem, that the canon includes the critic, is simply to announce in an overly-loud voice that the canon is not closed at all, that our activity helps to shape it, and finally, that without the canon, molded in some mysterious way by our activity, poetry could not be carried forward. What should be more valuable to a critic than a closed canon, whether it includes all literature or only the strongest, is an open one, in which the critic's work is not hopelessly belated, in which the critic can demonstrate his own, natural

authority, and in which the terms of stability and adaptability can be reconciled in an evaluatively constructive manner. A closed canon sets apart the sources of vision and says, like Josephus, that there has been, in effect, a "failure of the exact succession of the prophets." In contrast, while the canon remains open and contested, the succession continues, or at least continues to be possible.

In the first and second chapters of this essay I described several features that characterize the biblical canon and remarked that in its most general formulation, canonizing was an intercession on behalf of a normative text, an attempt to give a work permanence and make it a cynosure. This feature characterizes the best criticism, too, but unintentionally; though a critical work must have other purposes, it invariably intercedes in a general way on behalf of its chosen text. The nature of this intercession in secular criticism is uncertain, however; in what way, for example, does one intercede when one writes about a thoroughly minor work, or a work that has undoubtedly acquired canonical status? What does seem evident is this: though criticism contains a primitive canonizing component--that is, choice--and though all our critical decisions reflect on the shape of the canon, most criticism does not directly claim to be canonizing. Skilled writing about the best works brings them to the center of our attention for a time, but most criticism cannot

do this immediately or with an eye to it. The value of works that announce their canonizing intentions, like Arnold's "Wordsworth" or Bloom's Agon, is that they emphasize an element common to all criticism but which normally lies hidden, and that we can so readily argue with them and continue the necessary debate over the canon. We shall see if Ammons, Ashbery, and the others in Bloom's lists are truly canonical; Wordsworth has proved to be, but not only through the good offices of Arnold.

I have not raised the question of canon-formation in order to try and settle it by stating how it should be done; any such prescription would be misleading. The canon grows because we perceive links between the old and the new; it also grows and acquires definition through the process of reaction, just as it has always done, whether the context is sacred or secular. The Samaritans erect an heretical canon in defiance of the mainstream of Judaism; the Marcionic canon provokes a more rigid definition of the New Testament among the orthodox; in differing degrees, Wordsworth and Eliot reject the canons of their predecessors. Canon-formation belongs to ideological contests all along, as Bloom has asserted, though not only to romantic versions of them. To free literature from such struggles, as Frye wishes to do, would be a great weakening of literature itself, for it would essentially break the canonical bond between a society and its verbal art and the tension between the past

and the future. It is in the nature of religious and cultural objects for some to be valued more than others, just as it is for those values to change. Also, literatures, like religions, reveal their most effective influences within society when they exist as canons, as a vital selection of works.

Frye desires to separate society and literature in order to eliminate the pattern of reaction, heretical formulation, or ideological use of canon, and so to rescue all literature from the distortion of tradition. In doing this, he, like Bloom, neglects an important fact about canon-formation: no critic or poet, no matter how radical, overthrows the entire canon of the past. Usually, the canon comes into contention only as it regards immediate, contemporary claims to canonicity and the traditions that support those claims. Beyond that, there is a large area of necessary if generally unexpressed agreement on the constituents of the canon, atolls built up by previous generations in an otherwise featureless sea. In biblical development, there was virtually no debate over Torah and the Prophets while the status of Hagiographa was being debated; their authority was assumed. Similarly, it is this area of overlapping, barely conscious interest among, let us say, Arnold, Frye, and Bloom, that defines the abiding nature of the canon.

As critics we cannot overtly claim to canonize, as Bloom does, and expect to be believed, especially if we introduce

such radical distinctions between strong and weak poems. Our sense of canon must grow slowly and adhere more to the model offered by Quintilian, who would be as surprised by the canonical omissions from at least one library in New Haven as he was by those from the library at Alexandria. At the same time, we must not incline too far in Quintilian's direction; we cannot attempt, as Frye does, to protect all literature in a sort of game preserve from the encroachment of the canonizing critic. Like Quintilian and Josephus at the end of the first century A.D., Frye and Bloom present extreme examples of the faults of contemporary approaches to canon. The one introduces a rigid hierarchy that allows no commerce between strong and weak poems, the other banishes evaluation and any theory that would assert a difference in value between one work and another. Strangely, each critic makes too much of canon in his way, Frye, like Quintilian, in rejecting it, and Bloom, like Josephus, in accepting it.

Of course, there is a mid-point between these two extremes, one that combines the best features of both. It is largely the position set forth by Arnold, who stresses the value of joining evaluation with what he calls "fresh knowledge." As our experience of literature grows, differing degrees of value among works become evident, the authority of certain works increases, but not to the extent that it prohibits us from appreciating lesser works. Here, Arnold's insistence on avoiding an

"equipollent" view of literature, on developing a sense of the canon within a canon becomes useful in mediating between Frye and Bloom. Like Bloom we must recognize the differences in authority that prevail among works; like Frye we must extend our scope beyond major works alone. The real obligation is to avoid the faults of both critics. Hierarchies and canons will continue to exist because some works are simply more important to us than others, for good and bad reasons; at the same time, all works are important to a certain extent. But the works we begin with and continually come back to finally govern our sense of canon. Thus, Coleridge, in the best definition of canon I have seen, observes in Biographia Literaria that "not the poem which we have read, but that to which we return, with the greatest pleasure, possesses the genuine power, and claims the name of essential poetry."[107] And thus Arnold, in elaborating the value of "points de repère," to which we can return when we are lost, sets forth the authority of a center in ourselves and in our reading from which all values radiate.

Flexibility, that is, choice, is the primary issue in canon-formation. A canon cannot be formed without heresy, and heresy depends upon the existence of an alternative. Any system, like Frye's, that eliminates choice by canonizing everything and requiring of the critic a perpetual overview of "undiscriminating catholicity" is inadequately acquainted with the details of

canonical life. To consider evaluation merely a function of the history of taste, as Frye does, is to denigrate the very process by which he received the possibility of studying Blake. Similarly, any system, which, like Bloom's, banishes choice by prescribing its canon with a circular argument, which, by removing choice, eliminates the job of canonizer and yet takes up that position itself, seems equally inadequate. What is needed is a criticism that can discuss all types of literary experience without abandoning the notion that some are more important than others. The tendency in twentieth-century thought to create methodological approaches (like structuralism and the various post-structuralist movements) that cut across the boundaries of disciplines as well as traditional distinctions between elite and popular art forms has also eradicated the hierarchies that have traditionally belonged to those disciplines. One may examine a poem by George Herbert and the text on a can of diet-cola under the same lens, but without concluding that the two are in any way equivalent in value. A democratic approach to defining subject-matter need not exclude a hierarchical or evaluative approach to the authority with which our subjects speak to us. In the same way, a theory, like Bloom's, that tries to account with a greater sense of reality for the strange fact that canons continue to exist need not do so in such a way as to invalidate all canons but the author's and to do so a priori. The issue, again, is

adaptability, especially within a larger social context. A canon is many things, but among them it is a metaphor for the adaptable relation between a society and its literature, about which we know very little; it is also a form of authority that has been concentrated by challenges to its authority. These aspects of canon seem worth exploring.

As Arnold would argue, the breadth of a canon conforms to the degree of literary excellence apportioned among men, regardless of the society they live in. The artist belongs to an elite, but the critic must remember that it is possible and necessary to recognize the existence of an elite and yet make use of it in non-elitist ways. Rarely, after all, do we teach works, outside the twentieth-century, that are not specifically class-marked; what connection can there be, for instance, between the audience for whom Pope wrote his Moral Epistles and the audience to whom we teach them? The canon need not imply prohibitive elitism, for it is only in canonical form that literature has its greatest impact. To make all literature equipollent, as Frye would do, is not to "privilege" it, but to obliterate elitist canons at the cost of literature itself. Writings privileged in this sense merely slump back into the primordial symbolic soup from which, in Frye's theory, they arose. There are many paradoxes in the idea of canon and canonicity--that canonizing is a tautological act, for one--but the best is that it seems to

take a canon to make literature function on the broadest possible level.

Whether we live in an elitist or non-elitist society, literature gets passed down in a canonical shape. It then becomes the teacher's duty, in an egalitarian country, to bring the elite to bear on the non-elite. To take one last religious analogy, the canon of the Old Testament did not apply merely to the priestly hierarchy, the center of Israel's power; it applied to all Israel. To assume that a society seeks to find itself mirrored in the structure of its literary universe, that a democratic nation inherently desires a democratic canon of all comers, seems to me naive. The issue is far more complex than that. Canonical authority, upon which is predicated the entire relation of society and literature, does not adhere to the many, only to the few, and the value of that authority is increased by flexibility, not rigidity. We can return, in Coleridge and Arnold's sense, to only a few works, but we may return to different ones over time. In the end, it is the inherent adaptability of the secular canon, reinforced by constant challenges to its authority, that keeps it open, present, and effective. There is a wonderful line in Christopher Smart's "Jubilate Agno" which may conclude this dissertation, because it sums up the condition of all canons: "For I am not without authority in my jeopardy, which I derive inevitably from the glory of

the name of the Lord."[108]

END NOTES. CHAPTER III.

Because Northrop Frye's most recent work, The Great Code, appeared too late to be incorporated fully in my argument, I have tried in several of the following notes to indicate the degree of continuity or discontinuity it shares with his previous position. For the most part it is only slightly concerned with matters touching on the canon and does not depart significantly from his discussions of the Bible in Fearful Symmetry, Anatomy of Criticism, and elsewhere.

1. Harold Bloom, A Map of Misreading (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 35.

2. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 18.

3. Geoffrey Hartman, Criticism in the Wilderness (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 5.

4. See note 122 to the previous chapter.

5. Walter Jackson Bate, The Burden of the Past and the English Poet (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1970), p. 35.

6. Roland Barthes, The Pleasures of the Text (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 13.

7. Geoffrey Hartman, "Ghostlier Demarcations: The Sweet Science of Northrop Frye," in Beyond Formalism (New Haven: Yale University

Press, 1970), p. 26.

8. See the appropriate entries under these names in the List of Works Consulted, as well as the bibliography by John Grant printed at the end of Northrop Frye in Modern Criticism, edited by Murray Krieger (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966).

9. Northrop Frye, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," University of Toronto Quarterly 19 (1949): 12.

10. Northrop Frye, "On Value Judgments," in Criticism: Speculative and Analytical Essays, edited by L.S. Dembo (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), p. 42.

11. Harold Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 31.

12. Ibid., p. 12.

13. Frye, "The Function of Criticism," p. 12.

14. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 6. It should be noted that in The Great Code (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982) Frye's centrifugal and centripetal metaphors have acquired completely new tenors, which have nothing to do with evaluative fallacies. See The Great Code, p. 61.

15. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 7.

16. Northrop Frye, The Critical Path (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1971), p. 27.

17. Frye, "On Value Judgments," p. 37.

18. Frye, The Critical Path, p. 33.

19. Ibid., p. 127.

20. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 21.

21. Ibid., p. 23.

22. Ibid., p. 23.

23. Hartman, "Ghostlier Demarcations," p. 25.

24. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 22-23.

25. Northrop Frye, The Secular Scripture (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 170.

26. Ibid., p. 16.

27. Frye, "On Value Judgments," p. 38.

28. Frye, The Critical Path, p. 36.

29. Ibid., p. 37.

30. Ibid., p. 101.

31. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 113.

32. Ibid., p. 319.

33. Frye, The Critical Path, p. 162.

34. Ibid., p. 170.

35. Ibid., p. 99.

36. Ibid., p. 112.

37. In The Literary Critics (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962), p. 156, George Watson puts my objection trenchantly when he observes that many critics "have surely fabricated [Arnold's] purpose in suggesting that he ever sought to substitute poetry for religion."

38. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 22.

39. Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 187.

40. Ibid., p. 404.

41. Frye, The Secular Scripture, p. 9.

42. Frye, The Critical Path, pp. 52-53. See also note 45 to chapter one.

43. Frye, Fearful Symmetry, p. 317. Frye's most recent statement of this "full cyclic vision" appears on page xiii of The Great Code.

44. Frye, Fearful Symmetry, p. 108.

45. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 315. Frye develops this idea further on p. xvii of The Great Code.

46. See H. von Campenhausen, The Formation of the Christian Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p. 215. Frye explains his fondness for Revelations when he notes that it is "the epitome of [the Bible's] imagery" (The Great Code, p. 193).

47. Frye, The Critical Path, p. 47. Frye's position is unchanged in The Great Code; there, p. xiii, he notes that all this, "even if true, does not matter."

48. Frye, The Secular Scripture, pp. 12-13.

49. Frye takes this more into account, but only slightly more, in The Great Code, p. xii.

50. Frye, Fearful Symmetry, p. 341.

51. Ibid., p. 317.

52. Ibid., p. 108.

53. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 315. Frye repeats this practically verbatim on p. 203 of The Great Code.

54. Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 25.

55. Frye, Fearful Symmetry, p. 108.

56. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 16.

57. Frye, "The Function of Criticism," p. 16.

58. Robert Langbaum, "The Function of Criticism Once More," Yale Review 54 (1964): 207.

59. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 25.

60. Ibid., p. 25.

61. Ibid., p. 28.

62. Ibid., pp. 161-17.

63. Frye, The Secular Scripture, p. 187.

64. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 94.

65. Frye, The Secular Scripture, P. 188.

66. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 6-7.

67. Harold Bloom, Kabbalah and Criticism (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), p. 63; see also Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence, p. 12.

68. See note 19.

69. See, for one, Steve Polansky, "A Family Romance--Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom," Boundary 2 9 (1981): 227-245, and also Lentricchia's discussions of Frye and Bloom in After the New Criticism.

70. Denis Donoghue, Ferocious Alphabets (Boston: Little, Brown, 1981), p. 137.

71. Frye, The Critical Path, p. 23.

72. Bloom, Kabbalah and Criticism, p. 106. The analogous argument in Frye can be found in Anatomy of Criticism, p. 97: "Poetry can only be made out of other poems; novels out of other novels."

73. Frye, The Secular Scripture, p. 163.

74. Bloom, Kabbalah and Criticism, p. 109.

75. Bloom, A Map of Misreading, p. 79.

76. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 27.

77. Bloom, Kabbalah and Criticism, p. 115.

78. Frye, Fearful Symmetry, pp. 321-322.

79. Bloom, A Map of Misreading, p. 30.

80. Bloom, Kabbalah and Criticism, p. 103.

81. Ibid., p. 121.

82. The most important of Bloom's traditional errors is his assumption that "the Council of Jamnia (Jabneh) closed out Scripture by affirming that Koheleth [Ecclesiastes] was part of the canon" (Poetry and Repression [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976], p. 33).

83. Bloom, A Map of Misreading, pp. 33, 34, and 35.

84. Bloom, Kabbalah and Criticism, p. 111.

85. Ibid., p. 100.

86. Ibid., p. 96.

87. It is worth noting that Bloom, for all his interest in Kabbalah, follows the Christian order of the Old Testament rather than that of the Masoretic text, in which Malachi is not the final work.

88. Bloom, Kabbalah and Criticism, p. 100.

89. My condensed version of Heidegger's argument is implicit throughout his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" in Poetry, Language, Thought (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

90. Harold Bloom, Poetry and Repression (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 37 and 40.

91. Harold Bloom, Agon (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 279.

92. Ibid., p. 286.

93. Ibid., p. 279.

94. Ibid., p. 284.

95. Bloom, Poetry and Repression, p. 29.

96. Bloom, Agon, p. 286. This is italicized in the original.

97. Ibid., p. 286.

98. Ibid., p. 285.

99. See A Map of Misreading, p. 37.

100. See Frank Lentricchia's discussion of this point, which derives from Hartman, in After the New Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 327-328.

101. Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence, p. 91.

102. Ibid., p. 5.

103. Bloom, A Map of Misreading, p. 12.

104. Ibid., p. 36.

105. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 349.

106. Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence, p. 94.

107. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria (London: Rest Fenner, 1817), p. 22.

108. Christopher Smart, "Jubilate Agno," Fragment B,1, in The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart, edited by Karina Williamson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), I, p. 12.

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