

**Campbell, Frye, and Girard:
Myths, Heroes & Ritual Violence in Literature**

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Introduction

Some literary critics, in attempting to devise all-encompassing theories of literature, have incorporated the idea of the separation of the literary from the temporal. If the analysis of literature is allowed to become bound up in politics, the critics hold, then it becomes subject to the whims of other literary critics, resulting in the breakdown of its claim to universality. In my thesis, I analyze the literary theories of Joseph Campbell, Northrop Frye, and Rene Girard for their ability to address political concerns in literature. In the movement from Campbell -- who treated politics with an active disregard -- to Girard -- who has given interviews directly linking his theory of literature with political events such as 9/11 -- I hope to reveal that a theory like Girard's successfully incorporating political concerns is not an invitation to subjectivity, but instead a crucial method of ensuring the theory's adaptability to the ever-changing world in which we live. Another strength of Girard's theory is that it does not aim to account for all types of literature, but limits itself to accounting for the origins of ritual violence, a description lacking in both Campbell and Frye. While Campbell's and Frye's theories hold up fairly well in application to the examples which Campbell and Frye choose, I hope to show that these examples are limited to a certain types of narrative: Campbell to ancient myths and by Frye to canonical Western poets (Milton, Shakespeare, Blake). By examining other kinds of texts, such as science fiction narratives and literature featuring "anti-heroes," I hope to show how Campbell's and Frye's theories fail to account for important narrative modes developed in modern literature, modes which have lent themselves well to addressing contemporary social issues and conveying formerly marginalized experiences.

Chapter I: Heroes, Holocaust, and Violence in Joseph Campbell's *Hero With a Thousand Faces*

I. Joseph Campbell's Heroes: A Thousand Faces Counted, Several Others Absent

Joseph Campbell, author of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, identifies elements common to myths from many different cultures. For Campbell, these common elements fit together to constitute a "Hero's Journey," the fulfillment of which is a psychic unity of the hero with the universe. In the hero's triumph can be found an "ultimate boon" to humanity. While this outline works, Joseph Campbell's universalizing theory of the hero must be considered incomplete, however, insofar as his theories offer no way to interpret the Holocaust, or an event like the Holocaust, as a manifestation of human evil. I argue that Campbell's project in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* -- to outline a scheme whereby various cultures have attempted to effect a unification of the individual with a concept of divine will -- occludes practical political dialogue by negating critical approaches to certain kinds of trauma. Rather than creating a vision of an all-encompassing "hero," Campbell's literary theories in fact reinforce the primacy of a certain kind of hero found in ancient myths, while denying novel heroic archetypes, like the anti-hero, found in modern forms of literature. By viewing elements in stories solely terms of universally recognizable symbols, Campbell denies such a political role for art, an approach which leaves the "Hero's Journey" vulnerable by default to majoritarian politics. Although the "Hero's Journey" has been used as the basis for popular "quest" narratives written in the past half-century, I hope to show through an analysis of other kinds of contemporary literature (especially science fiction) that contemporary authors have rightly identified negative associations with aspects of the "Hero's Journey." My analysis aims to reveal that the "Hero's Journey" only applies to a certain kind of hero

who comes to manifests the will of his master and the values of his society without having engaged in critical inquiry. This hero can easily become a propaganda tool, a useful idiot in the hands of those with ambitions of reforging their societies in their own image.

Joseph Campbell, in his 1949 work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, outlines an archetype of the "Hero's Journey." The Hero's Journey consists of several stages, each characterized by common movements and symbolic of certain psychological barriers. I will briefly outline the Hero's Journey in conjunction with Star Wars as a representative example ("Star Wars origins"). "The Departure" is the first phase of the Hero's Journey, consisting of the hero's movement from an average member of society to discovering his own powerful, unique, and occasionally magical innate qualities. "The Call to Adventure" consists of society being faced with a problem, perhaps a princess has been taken captive ("Princess Leia's message"), which will then become the goal of the hero to rectify. Heroes may "Refuse the Call" to action ("Luke must help with the harvest"), temporarily failing to live up to their highest potential, and in this case "Supernatural Aid" may intervene to assist the hero back on his way ("Obi-Wan rescues Luke from sandpeople"). With the "Crossing of the First Threshold" ("Escaping Tatooine"), the hero realizes there is no turning back, and in "The Belly of the Whale" ("Trash Compactor"), the hero becomes consumed in a mysterious world profoundly unlike the one he has left behind.

"Initiation" represents the second stage of the Hero's Journey and the locus of the hero's most severe tests. The hero must survive "The Road of Trials," ("Lightsaber practice"). The hero "Meets with the Goddess" for additional strength and resolve ("Princess Leia"), but to be faithful to the goddess must face down the "Woman as the Temptress" ("Luke is tempted by the Dark Side") and achieve "Atonement with the Father" ("Darth and Luke reconcile"). Having demonstrated his mastery,

the hero reaches a God-like "Apotheosis" ("Luke becomes a Jedi"), and the goal of the Hero's Journey, "The Ultimate Boon" ("Death Star destroyed") then accrues to the hero naturally.

The Hero's "Return" occurs in a series of phases properly ending in the transfer of the benefits of the "Ultimate Boon" to society, as well as to the hero's conquest of his own internal psychological barriers. The hero may "Refuse the Return" ("Luke wants to stay to avenge Obi-Wan") in a similar way to "Refusing the Call," the difference being that such a refusal is born out of the hero's new desire for mastery rather than the hero's old cowardice. "The Magic Flight" ("The Millennium Falcon") occurs in conjunction with a "Rescue From Without" ("Han saves Luke from Darth"), and "Crossing of the Return Threshold" ("Millennium Falcon destroys pursuing TIE fighters"). The triumphant hero achieves for himself and for his people a "Freedom to Live" ("Rebellion is victorious over Empire"), often represented in secular texts by the hero's rise to the throne, or in spiritual texts by an ascent to heaven.

Campbell's theories, popularly known through a series of interviews conducted with Bill Moyers at the Skywalker Ranch, have had a great impact upon popular culture ("The Power of Myth," aired in 1988, one year after Campbell's death). George Lucas cited Joseph Campbell as the inspiration for his *Star Wars* film series, which had grossed \$22.2 billion by 2007, a total which includes the sales of books, video games, and related merchandise ("Star Wars' Galactic Dollars," *Forbes*). Although J.K. Rowling has not said so herself, some have suggested that the *Harry Potter* book series is also based upon Campbell's Hero's Journey (Bailey). In addition, popular Disney animated films from the 1990's (including *Aladdin*, *The Lion King*, *Toy Story*, *Mulan*) follow so closely upon Campbell's Hero's Journey model that it is probable that Campbell's theories influenced the production of these movies as well. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy makes another persuasive candidate for inclusion in the Campbellian pantheon. So it is clear that Campbell's Hero's Journey model has enormous

cultural resonance, serving as the source of entertainment, moral instruction, and spiritual uplift for many.

By now it should be apparent, however, that Campbell's "universal" scheme for the hero has failed to include a large body of literary protagonists. Campbell has already excluded from his discussion "heroes" whose journeys end in failure for whatever reason, be it failure of the individual or society. A well-known subcategory of such heroes are Romantic (or Byronic) heroes, who often assume characteristics and beliefs opposite to those held by mainstream society, such as Don Giovanni or Pechorin in Mikhail Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*. Another category of "hero" not considered by Campbell is the comic anti-hero, famously represented by Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote or Shakespeare's Falstaff, who represent humor as a way of illuminating ironies in the societies they inhabit. I contend that to ignore such literary types in an attempt to build a universal theory of the hero is to miss important and necessary ways of viewing other people sympathetically. Censoring these kind of heroes may even be the first step towards dehumanization.

To be fair, Campbell has taken for himself an enormously ambitious project in attempting to explain the human condition through the way humans tell stories. In the service of this project, Campbell does not confine himself to one tradition, but examines myths and practices from cultures as different as the ancient Minoans to modern-day Aborigines. Watching "The Power of Myth," it is clear that Campbell is very learned about such cultures and has much to teach, but I take issue with his attempt to universalize his own understanding of what constitutes a "heroic," and for Campbell absolutely correct, way of viewing the self in relation to the world. Campbell's universalizing approach becomes an attempt to fit vastly different cultural practices within the positive, world-uplifting scheme he has outlined. This approach leads Campbell, I argue, to draw surprising and upsetting conclusions about violent practices, from Aborigine circumcision rituals to the Holocaust. While some might

question my introduction of such a complex and controversial phenomenon as the Holocaust into my literary analysis, I am only staying consistent with Campbell's approach. As Joseph Campbell himself attempts to substantiate his literary theory with real-world cultural practices, I believe it is not demanding too much of Campbell to introduce other cultural practices, no matter their origin, to criticize his theory.

The Myth-Ritual: Frazer's *Golden Bough* as a Predecessor to Joseph Campbell

"He was a priest and a murderer; and the man for whom he looked was sooner or later to murder him and hold the priesthood in his stead. Such was the rule of the sanctuary."

--James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, p. 2

Joseph Campbell's application of anthropology to the study of literature was not novel; his approach follows in the tradition of earlier comparative mythologists which have come to be known as the "myth-ritual" school. Among these works, paramount in influence upon Joseph Campbell was James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, a work of comparative mythology first published in 1890. Frazer sets out his overall approach thus: "if we can detect the motives which led to [the ritual's] institution; if we can prove that these motives have operated widely, perhaps universally, in human society, producing in varied circumstances a variety of institutions specifically different but generically alike" (Frazer 3).

In the service of this goal, *The Golden Bough*, Frazer examines the practice of myth and ritual from many diverse sources. Frazer cites numerous examples to demonstrate the validity of the particular points he wishes to make about the way humans relate ritual and myth. For example, Frazer suggests that "the rain, the sun, and the wind... are commonly supposed by savages to be in some

degree under their control," then describes the weather-making ritual practices of the Russian villagers of Dorpat, the tribal inhabitants of the island of Halmahera, and the Omaha Indians, to name just a few (Frazer 13). In this way, Frazer's argument proceeds in much the manner of Joseph Campbell in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* when he attempts to substantiate a particular element of the Hero's Journey. While Frazer amasses evidence in support of a claim, nothing in his argument makes his contention about the degree of control "savages" suppose themselves to exercise over the weather infallible. In fact, rarely is the proximity of "ritual," the physical act, and "myth," the overall meaning of the act, as close as Frazer suggests. The closest association possible between the two occurs when the "thing said" matches exactly the "thing done," which does occur, for example, when Frazer describes the spoken words in the ritual of a wizard of New Caledonia: "Sun! I do this that you may be burning hot, and eat up all the clouds in the sky." (Frazer 23). The wizard's statement can be taken to indicate his belief, or his hope, that performing his own ritual will grant him the ability to influence the sun and the clouds. Without such a statement, however, it is impossible to tell what myth the ritual practitioner has in his mind when he performs his ritual. One can imagine, for example, many alternative explanations for a rain-dance which appears, from the outside, to be solely about influencing the weather; such a rain-dance could be a leftover custom from a prior time when the tribal people believed they could influence the rain, or the rain-dance could be merely a display put on by the tribal leaders for show at a certain time of the year regardless of the weather circumstances. So while Frazer and Campbell's claims on the relationship between a culture's practices and the mental state of its adherents are always ambitious and often provocative, they frequently overstate their own cases while occluding other points of view, for rarely in their work is any counter-argument presented or even acknowledged.

Frazer makes a number of other assumptions which contemporary critics would regard as antiquated. When speaking of cultures from around the world, for instance, Frazer characterizes the cultural practices he describes as "primitive" and those who practice the rituals he calls "savages." This terminology of Frazer's is unhelpful at best, since Frazer makes no attempt to define what he means by "primitive" or "savage" or, alternatively, what his idea of "civilization" is. It is perhaps not too much to assume that Frazer, a Scotsman writing in 1890, means by "civilization" roughly the British Empire, a myth prevalent among the educated class through Victorian-era attitudes on colonialism. The Holocaust, however, a creation of European "civilization," upended this Victorian myth of civilized progress for many critics and authors writing post-World War II. Other scholars can debate what separates the "civilized" from the "savage"; my focus is how cultures at all stages of development justify violent ritual practices -- those actions which kill, maim, and trample on the rights of others -- through myth.

The title of *The Golden Bough* is taken from the first myth-ritual which Frazer analyzes, the Golden Bough myth contained in Virgil's *Aeneid*. In this myth-ritual, the priesthood of the lake and grove of Aricia is passed down in a series of ritual murders. A candidate ascends to the priesthood by plucking the Golden Bough and then slaying the current priest. Aside from the obvious violence within this myth-ritual, the myth-ritual has a secular political dimension as well: the presiding priest of the grove of Aricia was actually called the "King of the Wood" (Frazer 7).

That Frazer chose this particular myth is pertinent to my thesis, as the "Golden Bough" myth-ritual features the main element which I wish to examine: the relationship between politics and ritual violence. Frazer wants to answer two questions: "first, why had the priest to slay his predecessor? and second, why, before he slew him, had he to pluck the Golden Bough?" (Frazer 6). My thesis is itself

an exploration of the more generalized versions of these same questions: first, why do men kill, and second, why do they justify with taking another life with cultural practices?

Frazer does not occlude all politics from his analysis. Frazer identifies one place in ritual and myth where ritual practice assumes a political aspect, the distinction drawn in some cultures between "magic" and "organized religion." According to Frazer, "magic" is distinct from religion in that it is practiced by rogue actors who are somehow marginalized, yet despite their marginalization, magic also harbors the potential for effecting progress:

Hence, when at a late period the distinction between religion and superstition has emerged, we find that sacrifice and prayer are the resource of the pious and enlightened portion of the community, while magic is the refuge of the superstitious and ignorant. But... magic, based as it implicitly is on the idea of a necessary and invariable sequence of cause and effect, independent of personal will, reappears from the obscurity and discredit into which it had fallen, and by investigating the causal sequences in nature directly prepares the way for science. Alchemy leads up to chemistry. (Frazer 32)

Unfortunately, Frazer's prediction that magic will socially redeem itself against organized religion by morphing into science is rarely borne out in practice. History in fact furnishes us with many cases where representatives of "religion" have intruded to snuff out legitimate scientific inquiry; the Catholic Church's persecution of Galileo and the Scopes Monkey Trial are only two of the most infamous instances; later, I will examine a work of science fiction, William Tenn's *Of Men and Monsters*, in which science is similarly put "on trial" by religion. While it is true that alchemy did "lead up" to chemistry, the transition from alchemy to chemistry was not as insignificant as compiling more data and accurately describing chemical process. Chemistry and other fields of science as we recognize them today would not have been possible without a major paradigm shift, often called the

"Enlightenment" or the "Scientific Revolution." Post-Enlightenment, science is far more threatening than magic ever could be to religious power, since science does not rely upon superstition, but upon devising cogent theories on the nature and origin of the universe. Significantly, and contrary to public misconception, scientific theories do not offer themselves as authoritative; they are instead constantly in revision due to the rigors of honest inquiry and public debate, while religion jealously guards the "Truth" with a patriarchy of self-appointed high priests. So to make progress in describing the violent potential of myth and ritual, I believe one must focus carefully upon the particular channels of power which experts of myth and ritual use, or attempts to use, both to harmonize the community and to justify their own existence.

The Hero: Hazed by Barbarous Fathers

"The problem of the hero going to meet the father is to open his soul beyond terror to such a degree that he will be ripe to understand how the sickening and insane tragedies of this vast and ruthless cosmos are completely validated in the majesty of Being."

--Joseph Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, p. 147

Joseph Campbell's archetype of the hero myth proceeds from Jungian psychology. In his preface to *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Campbell states: "I know of no better modern tool than psychoanalysis" in his project of "uncover[ing] some of the truths disguised for us under the figures of religion and mythologies" (vii). In Jung, humans tell stories out of "a need for mythic statements... which fit man meaningfully into the scheme of creation and at the same time confer meaning upon it" (Friedman 388). As such, for Jung story-telling is a process which intimately relates those who participate in myth both with themselves and with the external world. Campbell's theory of spiritual

progress through participation in the Hero's Journey thus can be seen as a movement from metaphysics to psychology, but in fact, the "journey" does not end here. Upon closer examination of real-world examples of cases suggesting mediation between internal and external objects, Campbell's mythic psychology becomes inescapably political.

Campbell himself acknowledges just such a problem in his chapter "Atonement with the Father." This stage of Campbell's Hero's Journey is perhaps most replete with uncanny "terror": "The problem of the hero going to meet the father is to open his soul beyond terror to such a degree that he will be ripe to understand how the sickening and insane tragedies of this vast and ruthless cosmos are completely validated in the majesty of Being" (147). Yet Campbell's project is primarily an attempt to reconcile, not repudiate, manifestations of human-inflicted pain which we would recognize as "evil" both in real life (the anthropological side of his work) as well as in texts and oral stories (the literary side of his work). Indeed, evil becomes uncomfortably "familiar," for according to Campbell, the archetypal hero confronts pain and evil most directly when he confronts his father: "The hero transcends life with its peculiar blind spot and for a moment rises to a glimpse of the source. He beholds the face of the father, understands -- and the two are atoned." (147). Atonement is, for Campbell, the ability to look past this "blind spot," or as it is better known in theological debates, the "problem of pain." The instances of pain which Campbell discusses, however, are not inevitable, but the direct result of specific cultural practices which, in Campbell's scheme, serve the project of spiritual "progress" by reconciling the human psyche with pain. Campbell's reading of such rituals never attempts to justify why such rituals are necessary. I will argue that this "blind spot" is only a blind spot for Campbell.

Examples of "atonement" which Campbell discusses in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* involve brutal rites-of-passage ceremonies, which can be thought of as acts of corporeal punishment

inflicted by the group against the individual, or, in language more germane to the collegiate experience, hazing. For Campbell, these Aborigine circumcision rituals represent a kind of "Atonement with the Father" in real life:

The culminating instruction of the long series of rites is the release of the boy's own hero-penis from the protection of its foreskin, through the frightening and painful attack upon it of the circumciser... It is night, and in the weird light of the fire suddenly appear the circumciser and his assistant... With their beards thrust into their mouths, signifying anger, their legs widely extended, and their arms stretched forward, the two men stand perfectly still, the actual operator in front, holding in his right hand the small flint knife with which the operation is to be conducted... one of the boys is lifted from the ground by a number of his uncles, who carry him feet foremost and place him on the shield, while in deep, loud tones a chant is thundered forth by all the men. The operation is swiftly performed, the fearsome figures retire immediately from the lighted area, and the boy, in a more or less dazed condition, is attended to, and congratulated by the men to whose estate he has now just arrived. "You have done well," they say; "you did not cry out.

The native Australian mythologies teach that the first initiation rites were carried out in such a way that *all the young men were killed*. (emphasis mine, Campbell 138-139)

Afforded no insight into Campbell's attitude but his own vivid prose style, readers are left wondering why Campbell has thus chosen to memorialize this gruesome act of casting a young boy in the mold of a "hero." The passage raises a number of practical questions which Campbell fails to address. Why are such rituals necessary? What if the young boy had "cried out," either in pain, or out of fear, or out of a

principled objection for being placed in a situation so disempowering? Would he be any less of a "hero," to his tribe or, indeed, to Campbell himself? Such are the questions which Campbell fails to ask, but which critics should ask when attempting to interpret the underlying politics of a hero's journey which relies so heavily upon a communal ritual to define the traits of the individual hero.

Campbell suggests that the modern world is worse for lacking such rituals: "In fact, it may well be that the very high incidence of neuroticism among ourselves follows from the decline among us of such effective spiritual aid" (Campbell 11). Yet, outside circumcision rituals, the modern world does furnish us with many examples of attempts at this sort of "spiritual aid" gone awry. A public lynching defines individual and group identities through violence: is it therefore a form of "spiritual aid?" What about Mao Ze-Dong's "struggle sessions," famously parodied by George Orwell in *1984* as "hate sessions?" Through these kinds of analogies, we can begin to see how the notion of collectively-achieved spiritual progress through communal violence is a particularly dangerous myth for Campbell to adopt, as one person or group's elevation comes most easily at another person or group's expense. The functioning of this collective unconscious through rituals such as Campbell has described can be credited with the institutionalization of societal regimes built upon defining the "other": for example, racism and patriarchy. Additionally, a modern mythology devoted to "progress" seems particularly ill served by countenancing a return to practices of violent, public child-disfiguring.

The theme of communal violence in rites-of-passage ceremonies has been satirized in dystopian science fiction, such as William Tenn's *Of Men and Monsters*. *Of Men and Monsters* is a novel in the *bildungsroman* heroic tradition, featuring an adolescent hero, Eric the Only, who undergoes trials in a passage to manhood. Earth has been radically transformed, however, by the arrival of aliens; men scurry through underground tunnels in the position of mice, with enormous alien "monsters" stalking the surface. Eric's tribal society of only 128 humans -- audaciously naming itself "Mankind" when in

fact other tribes of humans, known as "Strangers," exist -- is geared toward survival and remains largely ignorant of the larger world. In particular, Eric's initiation rites are shown to be a farce through the priests' poor understanding of the technology used in the initiation; an oracle uses a broken record player, for instance, as an attempt to divine the future. The tribal priests' mistaken application of performative language characterizes the tribe as anti-scientific, authoritarian, and patriarchal. This society's farcical rituals act as a foil to Eric's real "rite-of-passage" to adulthood, which he chooses for himself by leaving his primitive society for a quest for true scientific knowledge.

In the first section of *Of Men and Monsters*, "Priests for Their Learning," Tenn indicates his concern with Campbellian theories of the Hero's Journey, by showing how the young Eric the Only is enchanted by acting out the role of a "hero":

To be a man--this was what it was like! To go on expeditions like this for the rest of one's life, glorious, adventure-charged expeditions so that Mankind might eat well and have weapons and live as Mankind should. And when you returned, triumphant, victorious... you sang and acted out for the tribe all the events of this particular expedition, the dangers you had overcome, the splendid courage you had shown, the strange and mysterious sights you had seen. (Tenn 408).

The society of "Mankind" has a set path for anointing its heroes; boys prove themselves in dangerous raids on monster territory, to bring back the "Ultimate Boon" of food and weapons, upon which are sustained the tribe's meager existence.

As Eric the Only learns of the society's scientific intolerance, however, he begins to question the goodness of this social order. The tribe of "Mankind" is surrounded by the monsters' "Alien-science," but the priests regard "Alien-science" as a taboo, privileging instead the far less effective, but orthodox "Ancestor-science." Furthermore, the tribal leaders publicly execute those who pursue "Alien-science,"

including Eric's uncle and mentor Thomas the Trap-Smasher, as heretics. Through Eric the Only's social development, Tenn takes issue with the idea that an archetypal Campbellian myth-ritual scheme as a necessary precursor to an adolescent's socialization and psychological development. Instead, the ritual shows how can have the exact opposite effect: psychological scarring and anti-social (because violent) behavior. So Eric's choice between adherence to the tribal ritual and following the nonconformist path of his uncle is also framed as a choice between freedom versus conformity, and scientific progress versus superstitious regress.

William Tenn challenges Campbell's notion that an adolescent's identity can be determined by a community ritual. At stake in the initiation rites is Eric's name, the source of identity in the premodern society of "Mankind." In his tribal initiation ceremony, the village seer pronounces Eric to be "Eric the Eye." The appellation is fitting, as Eric possesses a keen eye, not only in supply raids, as his new role would dictate, but also for the uncomfortable truths buried beneath the tribal leaders' obfuscation. This is entirely incidental, however; the tribal leaders' process of naming the new men such as Eric is a performative, not a constative. This is a problem for the patriarchy of "Mankind." In their tribal society of 128 people, where livelihood depends on risky raids on the "Monsters," they need specific roles to be fulfilled; however, a misaligned role can be devastating. The tribal leaders recognize this problem, but their solution -- to pronounce a role for the individual at the moment of rite-of-passage -- is a failure for individualists like Eric. The priests base their naming upon mystic evidence, rather than to allow individual choice to dictate the outcome; to question this regime is the most serious taboo, however, for in the desperate circumstances of "Mankind," individuality is abdicated to the leader in the name of survival. The backward, anti-scientific regime of the tribe reigns unassailable and unchallenged until Eric chooses to dissent and live the life of an outcast, and Eric's nickname as "Eric the Only" becomes charged with extra significance. The tribe's monopoly over its members' identities,

exercised through such communal ceremonies, is as antithetical to science, democracy, and individualism, yet it is fitting to tribal societies of the kind described in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, as well as to the patriarchs and despots of the world.

In the modern world, the public ceremony remains the sphere of performative language. Many of our society's most significant events proceed by performative language: marriages depend upon the authority of a clergyman to pronounce the couple "man and wife," law cases depend upon the oral delivery of a verdict -- "guilty" or "not guilty" -- by jury or judge, and U.S. presidents are sworn into office on the Holy Bible. Such uses are not typically tyrannical, as a degree of consent is involved: husband and wife agree to be married with a performative utterance of their own: "I do," citizens choose their president by popular consent; a condemned criminal may appeal the verdict if she has grounds to believe the legal proceedings were invalid. The ceremonial power which performative language wields when consent has not been properly gained, however, means that the acts undertaken by performative language should be regarded critically. Performative language in rites-of-passage rituals in Tenn's view do not necessarily result in progress for the individual and society, as Campbell would claim, but instead can be used as a tool of oppression which the strongest may use against the weakest members of society. In *Of Men and Monsters*, William Tenn forces readers to question the authority of those in society who are entrusted with such communal power.

In his *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell has cited violent rites-of-passage rituals as one part of his Hero's Journey's movement toward spiritual fulfillment. Moving from Campbell's Jungian psychology to the field of politics, as I believe we must if literature is to be treated with just such an real-world oriented and interdisciplinary approach, Campbell's silence and even celebration of such rituals incriminates his Hero's Journey theory as fundamentally incompatible with modern ideas of natural rights.

Heroic Crimes: Campbell Beyond Anti-Semitism

"What about the six million that were gassed during World War II?"

[Joseph] Campbell shrugged and responded, "That's your problem."

--Exchange between Joseph Campbell and a student at a lecture (Friedman 397)

Hazing is one particular type of communal violence against the individual. One could argue that hazing is not a kind of communal violence worth repudiating, as the individual participates willingly in such activities in order to gain admission to an inner circle -- valid, perhaps, for fraternity hazings, but invalid for mandatory circumcision rituals of the type described above. A much more serious problem, however, is assessed by crimes committed by the collective against the individual without the individual's consent, a dilemma symbolically represented most famously (and in most extreme fashion) in the Holocaust. Indeed, political controversy has emerged when scholars of Campbell discuss the relation of Campbell's theories to his anti-Semitism. Two articles in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, by Maurice Friedman and Robert Segal, frame the question of Joseph Campbell's anti-Semitism against his ideas about the hero's journey.

Maurice Friedman examines the myth of progress, personal and historical, which underwrites Campbell's hero's journey. Central to Friedman's critique is the idea of a "touchstone of reality," a historical event that psychologically shapes a person's worldview. Contrasting Campbell with those who have not heard of the Holocaust or even Nazi sympathizers who willfully deny it, Friedman makes the surprising claim that Campbell's "universalist approach to mythology" precludes his finding in the Holocaust a touchstone of reality. As evidence for the claim, Friedman quotes Campbell's response to a

story of German novelist Thomas Mann, whose "blue-eyed Hans and blond Ingeborg" were reappropriated "under Hitler, into what [Mann] could only name and describe as depraved monsters":

There is a deep and terrible mystery here, which we perhaps cannot, or possibly will not, comprehend; yet which will have to be assimilated if we are to meet such a test. For love is exactly as strong as life. And when life produces what the intellect names evil, we may enter into righteous battle, contending 'from loyalty of heart': however, if the principle of love (Christ's 'Love your enemies!') is lost thereby, our humanity too will be lost. (Campbell 1972, 173)

Although he calls it a "deep and terrible mystery," Campbell here has failed to address directly the moral and political implications of the re-appropriation of heroic symbols to Nazi ideology, ducking the question by insisting that the only way to retain humanity is to unconditionally "love" those who seek to destroy it. Friedman indicates that Campbell belongs to those who "will not comprehend such a 'mystery'" and it is easy to see why (Friedman 390). Although this statement of Campbell's appears as one of his trademark generalizations, not as an attack on Judaism specifically, Campbell's troubling neutrality here will become central to my discussion of *The Iron Dream*, a work of satirical SF which makes manifest the inability of a Campbellian hero to confront or even identify Nazi Germany.

For Friedman, an American Jew who has found in the Holocaust a "touchstone of reality," history does not "prove that progress is inevitable"; instead, the Holocaust shows itself as a sign that the condition of humanity may be ruptured by historical events (Friedman 388). I would add that those who claim to stand for the heroic model of "historical progress" are most susceptible to committing acts of violence themselves, or failing to speak out in defense of those whose rights are being systematically violated. Campbell is in this sense not so far removed philosophically from the proverbial German

citizen for whom it would have been impossible to imagine what horrors were being committed by Nazi "heroes" just outside of town.

Campbell scholar Robert Segal refuses Friedman's thesis that Campbell's blindness to the Holocaust stems from theoretical commitments, arguing instead that Campbell's "sheer anti-Semitism" is the sole factor determining his blindness to the Holocaust. As evidence, Segal discusses Campbell's criticism of how Judaism (as an organized religion) "exterminated" the goddesses in the mystical Jewish mythological tradition, leaving only "patriarchal" and punitive monotheism. Campbell's approach here is not consistent, however, for he "allows for grand exceptions to the patriarchal, literalistic, and anti-mystical rule in other western religions, but he barely grants any exceptions in Judaism" (Segal 462). Segal argues that Campbell's "coldness" exhibited in the introductory quote to this section "is not the expression of his universalism but the violation of it" (Segal 464). However, in my reading the weakness of Campbell's theory transcends mere anti-Semitism, precisely *because* his theory aims toward generalization; the Holocaust is just one visceral manifestation of this blindness, visceral and useful as a shorthand because it has served as a "touchstone of reality" for so many.

In his monograph *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell is never explicitly anti-Semitic, yet phrases such as "the Greek and the barbarian, the gentile and the Jew" (suggesting by analogy an identification of the "Greek" with the "gentile" and the "barbarian" with the "Jew") do nothing to clear Campbell's reputation for insensitivity toward Jews (Campbell 38). This chapter does not attempt to resolve questions regarding the anti-Semitic tendencies of Campbell; I mention Segal's thesis in the controversy in order to indicate that I hew closer to Friedman's approach in targeting Campbell on theoretical grounds. Although Campbell may well have been an anti-Semite, I hope to show this is the correct approach by showing how Friedman's criticism of Campbell applies to other cases of "Holocaust" in literature outside of Judaism.

The Iron Dream, a science-fiction novel by Norman Spinrad, satirizes this weakness of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey theory, revealing how Campbell's notion of communal spiritual "progress" can easily become, when viewed from the victim's perspective, an invitation to infinite regress: a vehicle for fascist ideas and an accessory to the Holocaust.

Norman Spinrad stated that *The Iron Dream* was a critique of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey. The novel also satirizes the genres of "sword and sorcery" science fiction and fantasy narratives which pitted a pure and virtuous human race against armies of degenerate aliens or trolls. Spinrad intended to show how easily these authors' fantasies could take the form of the ideas of Nazi Germany. *The Iron Dream* thus reduces the tropes of a particular heroic myth -- the mode of storytelling which, according to Aristotle, most ennobles its protagonist -- to satire, the form of storytelling which most ridicules its protagonist.

The title of Hitler's novel-within-the-novel -- "Lord of the Swastika" -- marks *The Iron Dream* as a satire. If readers are still unsure, they will soon discover Spinrad's tongue-in-cheek attitude as they contend with heroic yet cringe-inducing descriptions of Feric Jaggar. Jaggar is both a stand-in for the historical Hitler, the self-authoring hero of the novel, and is, according to the novel, an exemplary "Trueman." Jaggar -- blonde, blue-eyed, tall, muscular, just like Thomas Mann's Hans and Ingeborg -- possesses an unmatched intuition for sensing the presence of the genetically impure "Dominators" which have infiltrated Jaggar's country of Helder. These "Dominators," controlling the minds of Helder citizens through mental patterns, represent Hitler's paranoid prejudices about the supposedly subversive role Jews played in German society.

Many elements of Jaggar's journey in *The Iron Dream* echo Joseph Campbell's archetypal schema for the hero's journey. Jaggar "Crosses the Threshold" into his heroic journey when he crosses the border from Borgravia into Helder, just as the historical Hitler moved from Austria to Germany as

he gave up his average life as an artist to undertake a more fateful career as political agitator. Jaggar begins his quest alone, but through a series of successful speeches and trials, builds a following. Following a "Road of Trials" with a biker gang, Jaggar receives the Great Truncheon of Helder, the "Ultimate Boon" which marks him with the destiny to rule the people of Helder, just as King Arthur received Excalibur from the Lady in the Lake. The only role of Campbell's hero which Jaggar never performs is to "Refuse the Call" to be a hero, so unshakable is Jaggar's conviction that only he can liberate Helder from the grip of the Dominators, a task which he achieves after much heroic struggle in style suggestive of a foregone conclusion. Unlike the historical Hitler, Jaggar transforms his society and achieves his "Thousand-Year Reich" by eliminating the Dominators once and for all. The joy readers of *The Iron Dream* have been conditioned to feel for Jaggar as a result of being saturated in a universe full of Campellian stories clashes with with the horror readers feel as they imagine what Hitler's triumph as a "hero" of Nazi Germany would have meant for the real world.

Dr. Walpole, in a faux-critical essay appended to "Lord of the Swastika," takes the role of an ideal naive reader of "Lord of the Swastika." While taking issue with the extensive passages glorifying the slaughter of genetically disfigured mutants, Walpole qualifies his disgust with a reminder that science fiction is pure fantasy and an assertion that the events in the novel "can't happen here." Yet the reader of *The Iron Dream*, informed with the historical knowledge of World War II, understands that an author's personal fantasies are not worthy of such facile dismissal, for the story of "Lord of the Swastika" *could* in fact happen anywhere. In *The Iron Dream*, Spinrad shows how Campbell's theory of the hero can produce a powerful story, yet at the same time also be abused to promote a horrific cause. As such, Spinrad suggests that readers themselves must act as critics when evaluating new language of the heroic type, rather than assuming that all that occurs under a Campellian heroic structure will result in spiritual progress for the individual and community.

For Campbell, the hero's journey ends with a psychological merging of the self and the universal, and achievement of political utopia. Campbell does not discuss, however, of how a hero's triumph can actually create and reinforce categories of "self" and "other," a distinction which shines through in virtually every page of *The Iron Dream*. As such, Campbell's Hero's Journey can offer no assistance in interpreting acts of ritual violence committed by so-called "heroes."

Chapter II: Occluded Politics in Northrop Frye's Inter-Textual Universe

Politics in the *Anatomy of Criticism*: Discontinuity within the "Unified Whole"

History is literary history, and in Frye's version it has no place for discontinuity. No historical event -- not the life and death of Jesus or the Holocaust -- can fundamentally alter or break the archetypal form and telos of the 'great dreams of the arts'.

--Lynn Poland, "The Secret Gospel of Northrop Frye," *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 64, p. 518.

A literary text assumes a political aspect when it alludes, or directly relates in some way, to the social status of people living in the real world. Formalism, a school of literary criticism popular in the first half of the 20th century, rejects such political concerns, along with well as details such as the circumstances of the text's creation, or the biographical information of the author. These external factors are viewed in formalism as secondary to the form and medium of the work itself. Formalism can be imagined as an attempt to analyze literature scientifically, or 'as literature' and nothing else. While Northrop Frye was not himself a formalist critic, his *Anatomy of Criticism* also sought to building a "science" of literary criticism by downplaying extra-textual concerns.

Frye centers his *Anatomy of Criticism* on the idea of "the literary experience," an elusive quality which can only exist at the convergence of the literary critic and the author, while containing neither party's own predispositions. Frye acknowledges that an author's mastery of formal elements plays a role in creating this experience, but unlike a true formalist critic, Frye does not limit himself to analysis of these elements; equally important to Frye's critical approach is his emphasis on the need for effective reading. For Frye, the critic's task is one of thoughtful 'recognition' and not of hasty judgement, an

approach which Frye disdained, and labeled as lazy and narcissistic when he identified this quickness to judge in other so-called literary critics. Documents composed in this vein Frye describes as only useful in studying the "history of taste." Thus Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* also does not fall under the "reader-response" branch of literary criticism, either, but hovers somewhere in between formalism and reader-response, with slightly more primacy given to the author, who is generally more aware of the literary tradition, than to the reader.

As an example of the way Frye delimits his critical approach, Frye disparages critics' perennial search for the mysterious characters appearing in Shakespeare's sonnets as a task better suited for historians than for literary critics:

The questions usually asked about Shakespeare's sonnets, such as who was W. H. and the like, have nothing to do with Shakespeare's sonnets or with literary criticism, and have only got attached to criticism because, owing to Shakespeare's portentous reputation, critics have acquired an impertinent itch to know more about his private life than they need to know. ("Criticism, Visible and Invisible," p. 7)

Frye maintains that the overall meaning of Shakespeare's sonnets should be a function of the power of Shakespeare's words, not of whomever Shakespeare had in mind when he wrote the sonnets.

Not only does Frye exclude biography from his literary criticism, but he also questions the value of various schools of literary criticism which reappropriated tools of critical analysis that had originally been developed to serve another context. In this way Frye means to "avoid the kind of externalized determinism in which criticism has to be 'based on' something else, carried around in some kind of religious or Marxist or Freudian wheelchair" ("The Search for Acceptable Words," p. 253). I argue that Harold Bloom, author of a foreword to a 2000 edition of *Anatomy of Criticism*, mistakenly extrapolates the disdain Frye felt toward the Marxist and Freudian schools of criticism to newer critical

schools such as feminism and post-colonialism, which were originally developed not to serve as social criticism (although they have also developed in this direction), but to give voice to other kinds of literary experience. There is evidence in Frye's later writings that he would have been at the very least sympathetic to the literature, though perhaps not willing to accept the entire critical approaches, associated with the labels attributed to these various schools.

In *The Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye argues that in order to study literature systematically, literature must form a unified whole. That literature forms such a whole is a major assumption of Frye's, which, like Campbell's assumption of the primacy of the Hero in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, is persuasive in the examples he chooses, but perhaps not applicable universally. Consider, for instance, the way in which Frye scholar A.E. Hamilton summarizes his view of Frye's overall critical project:

The *Anatomy of Criticism* is neither a technique to dissect criticism nor the criticism dissected by it. It is not any superstructure built over literature, nor is it scaffolding built around literature, as [Frye] claims (29); instead, it is the skeleton of literature itself, one that structures what would otherwise be seen as a miscellaneous heap of literary works into a single body with a human form. It is not designed to interpret literary works from some 'position' or 'approach' or 'basis,' but to allow the reader to respond imaginatively to any literary work by seeing it in the larger perspective provided by its literary and social contexts. (Hamilton 19-20)

While Frye makes explicit his disdain for reading literature in a Marxist or Freudian mode, it is unclear what other types of "position[s]" or "approach[s]" or "bas[es]" Frye would exclude. There is a danger within this approach in making the "literary and social contexts" so broad that they cease to speak of life precisely, which is ultimately the only way to speak of life generally. One could argue that certain

"positions" are fundamental to the production of literature because they are positions grounded upon the author's identity. Such an approach is common in the classification of books in libraries, or indeed in whole departments; for instance, literary works are often grouped by the nationality of the author, or by the author's race or gender, or by some combination of the above (female Afro-Cuban American literature, for instance). While Frye would not likely argue against the practical benefits of the existence of such categories, he would likely dispute the attempt to turn these categories into stand-alone critical schools: feminism, post-colonialism, queer theory, etc. To exclude the formation of such schools would deny the existence of recurrent shared experiences and political beliefs, which have traditionally not been represented in the Western canon and arguably continue to be underrepresented.

If Frye answers 'no' to the possibility that new critical schools can branch out from new literary experience, then Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* offers another incomplete theory of literature. In this view, Frye's structure fails for the same reasons Campbell's theory fails: because Frye's critical anatomy does not include an apparatus which can be useful in situating literary acts within a political context. Instead, Frye repeatedly suggests that literature, comprising a totality, speaks the same unitary meaning. It is my contention that the canonical Western literature analyzed by Frye -- including Milton, Shakespeare, and Blake -- only comprises one narrow subset of all literature and the meaning contained therein.

Politics & Value-Judgments

Value-judgments are founded on the study of literature; the study of literature can never be founded on value-judgments.

--Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 20

Northrop Frye uses the term 'value-judgments' to refer to a type of literary criticism which attempts to rank works of literature according to a particular selected criteria. Frye refers to this way of thinking as the "X is a failure because" formula, whereby the critic is free to choose any statement he wishes to complete the "because" clause ("Criticism, Visible and Invisible, p. 6). Arguing against this kind of analysis, Frye posits a hypothetical comparison among the poets Shakespeare, Shelley, and Milton under three different rubrics: piety, creative vision, and trueness-to-life. Using any one of these three criteria produces a different ranking of best to worst poet: if piety is chosen, then Milton is superior, creative vision places Shelley at the top, and for trueness-to-life none can match Shakespeare. As an even more frivolous example, Frye posits a critic who regards *King Lear* is a failure "because it is indecorous to represent a king on the stage as insane." (Ibid., p. 6). Frye metaphorically represents a critic's tendency to judge a work by narrow criteria as looking into a mirror: gazing into the work of another and seeing only one's own prejudices reflected back. Literary criticism which follows in this vein becomes, for Frye, a project of mere narcissism.

These value-judgments are perhaps not entirely meaningless, for they can help reveal a particular critic's or author's own dispositions; however, they do not contribute in any way to literary analysis, Frye argues, precisely because they are mere reflections of these prejudices. In another exercise in the futility of value-judgments, Frye pens a fragment of a hypothetical book review from the 1820's wherein the reviewer praises the author of a book on Shakespeare for "for the first time... enabl[ing] us to distinguish what is immortal in our great poet from what the taste of his time compelled him to acquiesce in." ("On Value Judgments," p. 313). Frye argues that such a critical statement says less about the author's book, and even less about Shakespeare, than about the prevailing critical values of the time; in this case perhaps the disdain many early 19th-century critics practiced towards the emerging genre of novelistic fiction, filled as it was with meaningless frivolities and often

penned by women (the horror!). Frye is even more explicit about the dangers of using literary criticism in this way to reinforce social hierarchies: "Every attempt to exalt taste over knowledge has behind it the feeling that the possessor of taste is certainly a gentleman, while the possessor of knowledge may be only a pedant." (Ibid., p. 312). Frye does not exclude, however, the possibility that a literary critic of truly superior learning may be qualified to speak authoritatively on subjects of taste.

Such comparative exercises can serve as a convenient teaching tool to readers, as Frye concedes: "I would of course not deny that teaching is a different activity from scholarship, and that many assertions of value are relevant to the classroom that are not relevant to the learned journal" ("On Value Judgments" 318). Frye, however, argues that literary critics must be held to a higher standard than teachers, in that value-judgments should only follow from a critic's own knowledge. As such, Frye stresses the importance of "recognition" as the "fundamental act of criticism" and of knowledge being the necessary antecedent to evaluation: writing "Every value-judgement contains within it an antecedent categorical judgement, as we obviously cannot tell how good a thing is until we know what it is" (Hamilton 22). In these statements, Frye pleads for philosophical integrity against what he saw as groundless assaults upon valuable literature, while the examples he chooses suggest that Frye is fighting mainly against upper-class moral prejudices, and not, as Bloom would suggest, against the political concerns of historically disenfranchised groups.

I broadly agree with Frye's stance against value-judgments in matters pertaining to literary taste, within the formal areas of literature which Frye discusses. Frye's exclusion of politics from his analysis, however, begs several questions concerning the broader application of his principle of refusing value-judgments, for political categories are constituted from value judgments. This is especially evident in the treatment of violent crimes or socially disenfranchising institutions. Are value judgments concerning a galvanizing political event in a work of literature -- rape, slavery, the

Holocaust -- for example, to be treated no different from critical judgments of formal elements? I argue instead that the appearance of these kinds of symbols in literature demands a new critical apparatus, one that must be sensitive to the meanings acquired from the real-world. Such a critical approach would eschew visions of a complete literary totality by including reservations for how such meanings are experienced by different audiences and the ways in which such meanings can morph over time.

If critics are instead to treat these symbols of violence objectively, then Frye asks critics to attempt to leave their pre-formed attitudes concerning an author's treatments of race, sex, class, etc. at the door the same way he asks critics to discard their pre-formed attitudes regarding the author's treatment of minor elements -- for example, the decorum for a king, or the author's chosen rhyme scheme. Frye's statements on values-judgments indicate no inherent bias against treating categories of identity as fundamentally different from formal concerns, but neither does Frye offer any explicit support for such a distinction. So as we see in Campbell, acts of communal violence are implicitly justified as the means toward a higher spiritual end; in Frye, the politics thereof are simply occluded.

Frye might respond that it would be critical overreach to attempt to deduce any particular political belief held by an author from his work of literature. In illuminating this attitude, Frye scholar A.C. Hamilton discusses what Frye terms the critical fallacy of "existential projection":

Historical critics of the 1950s and earlier were guilty of this fallacy in assuming that they could abstract ideas, beliefs or values from a poem, project them against various intellectual traditions of the age, and then discuss the poet's political and religious views as reflected in the poetry. Frye recognizes this fallacy when he remarks that 'we still talk about Shakespeare's acceptance of legitimacy, divine right, order and degree, the chain of being, Christian eschatology, and the like, as though they were

truths that he believed in and wrote his plays to illustrate, or at least did illustrate incidentally,' and then adds: 'it seems a strange critical procedure to equate so skillful a dramatic use of a theme with a belief in it which was mere commonplace in his own day and is mere superstition in ours' (NP 41). (*Anatomy of his Criticism*, p. 78)

I do not dispute this particular analysis, but Shakespeare is only one author. I would argue that in many cases, an author's political beliefs may be ascertained without 'existential projection' or consulting outside documents. Witness, for example, George Orwell's anti-authoritarianism in *1984*, or Toni Morrison's disdain for slavery in *Beloved*. Even in cases where an author's attitudes toward societal practices are not easily ascertainable within a given literary text, it is usually assumed that literary critics have a legitimate role in attempting to answer such questions. To relegate all studies of Joseph Conrad's attitudes toward colonialism in *Heart of Darkness*, for example, to the "history of taste" seems extreme, and would require discounting the influence which Chinua Achebe had upon subsequent readings of this novel, for instance. Although Frye does not create a place within literature for any specific political concern, he does provide a general framework for understanding the way politics and mythology interact in "The Critical Path," where he sets forth the concept of the "myth of concern."

Politics & Mythology: Myths of Concern

When a myth of concern has everything its own way, it becomes the most squalid of tyrannies, with no moral principles except those of its own tactics, and a hatred of all human life that escapes from its particular obsessions.

--Northrop Frye, "The Critical Path," p. 315

Like Campbell, Northrop Frye is generally optimistic about the role of myth in society and

literature and argues against the word's recently acquired pejorative connotations. Frye even makes his own critical approach synonymous with the study of mythology, writing:

One difficulty... comes from the lack of any literary term which corresponds to the word "mythology." We find it hard to conceive of literature as an order of words, as a unified imaginative system that can be studied as a whole by criticism. If we had such a conception, we could readily see that literature as a whole provides a framework or context for every work of literature, just as a fully developed mythology provides a framework or context for each of its myths. Further, because mythology and literature occupy the same verbal space, so to speak, the framework or context of every work of literature can be found in mythology as well, when its literary tradition is understood. It is relatively easy to see the place of a myth in a mythology, and one of the main uses of myth criticism is to enable us to understand the corresponding place that a work of literature has in the context of literature as a whole. ("Myth, Fiction, and Displacement," p. 604)

While Frye, unlike Campbell, associates his criticism with mythology, he is much clearer in addressing the societal dangers in the application of certain kinds of myth. In identifying these dangers, Frye employs two dichotomies in his discussion of the role of myth: "myths of concern" versus "myths of freedom," and "open myths" versus "closed myths."

For Frye, a "myth of concern" is a community-unifying, totalizing myth, which seeks to explain the progression of the universe from beginning to the present-time and from the present-time to the end. In addition to this universal timeline, the myth of concern will explain any "concerns" the receiver of the myth might have about the current state of humanity and the world. Religion is the traditional repository of myths of concern; evident, for example, in the Biblical arc of Genesis to Revelation. Frye

argues that Karl Marx invented the first wholly secular myth of concern, which he achieved by describing the progression of human history as a function of class struggle; Marxism as a myth of concern was taken up in the 19th and 20th centuries by many members of the secular intelligentsia as well as by revolutionary movements. Similarly, Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory was taken up by so-called "social Darwinists" to explain and justify colonialism, the dominance of certain societies and races over others.

Political events in the first half of the 20th century were dominated by clashing of myths of concern. The Nazi belief that the Third Reich would lead the Aryan race to assert its rightful rule over the world, for example, was opposed by the myth of concern that the United States must go to war against Japan and Germany to make the world safe for freedom and democracy. While the 20th century saw an increase in the scale of conflict, friction between myths of concern was not novel; Frye explains the almost universal prevalence of anti-Semitism in societies around the world as the result of a clash between the dominant religion (Christian, Muslim) and Jewish myths of concern. Myths of concern thus reveal themselves as frequently dangerous or militaristic, when they compete for dominance over society, but Frye notes as well the positive aspects of shared concern: "the myths of belief enable members of a society to hold together, to accept authority, to be loyal to each other and courageous against attack" (Ibid., p. 341). While myths of concern can annihilate individual lives, for Frye they do not pose a threat to humanity. Frye discounts the likelihood of one myth of concern asserting itself worldwide, for he argues that the larger one such myth grows, the more likely it is that other local variations would branch off to form their own myths.

A "myth of freedom," by contrast, concerns the survival and flourishing of the individual, independent of the social structures which confine him or her. Frye credited Blake's prophecies as an example of a myth of freedom, which helped him "keep his head" at a time when many in literature,

such as Ezra Pound, adopted totalitarian political beliefs. At the same time, Frye discounts myths of freedom for leading, in their most extreme forms, to selfishness, idleness and anarchy. If myths of concern define the first half of the 20th century, then myths of freedom, such as "tune in, turn on, drop out" attitude of the Hippy Generation, or the "Gospel of Wealth" preached in many Protestant churches, have predominated in the second half of the 20th century.

Together, Frye's myth of freedom and myth of concern can be thought of as two opposing poles on an axis of human desire. These opposing poles can be formulated in different ways depending upon which school of thought is favored for analysis: sociologically, these poles would be the desire for individuation versus the desire to become a part of a community; in psychoanalysis, they would be the id versus the ego; in an ascetic tradition, they would be the desire to spiritually transcend one's physical boundaries versus the desire for physical mastery over the self. In literature, Frye's ultimate aim of study, these myths can adopt any of the above forms.

Frye also distinguishes between "closed" and "open" myths. A "closed myth" occurs in a society which has been overrun by one particular myth of concern, wherein the society refuses to tolerate any competing myths. By contrast, an "open myth" is not itself a coherent myth as such, but rather a "pluralistic mythology with several myths of concern competing within it" ("The Critical Path," p. 338). Myths of concern would never completely disappear from society, but a tolerant society would allow adherents of multiple to co-exist peacefully. This kind of society was set forth in the American Constitution, Frye argues, with its protection of freedom of religion. In his discussion of the role of myths in society, Frye articulates a method for literary criticism to understand political questions within literature from a broader perspective, without necessarily taking sides. This neutrality will become a problem for critics of Frye, however, considering the high degree of influence which the Bible has exerted as a myth of concern upon american novelists the Western canon.

God as Author: The Bible's influence upon the Western canon

The Old & New Testaments are the Great Code of Art.

--William Blake

In 1947, Northrop Frye published his first work of literary criticism, *Fearful Symmetry*. In this book, Frye argued that the often misunderstood prophecies of William Blake could be understood by placing them in the context of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the Bible. Frye thus helped to situate Blake, who had been dismissed by previous critics as "delusional," within a larger prophetic tradition in Western literature. Throughout his career, Frye continued to return to the Bible as a source for archetypes which he argued resonate throughout literature in the Western canon. However, there are reasons to believe that the Bible's influence upon the Western canon owes less to its intrinsic value as a work of literature -- the lens through which Frye prefers to analyze the Bible -- than to the political control which Christianity exerted (and, to a lesser degree, continues to assert) upon Western societies.

The Bible is unique in Western literature in that it is assumed to be written from the perspective of God. While the books of the Bible were written by multiple authors, these authors are, within the Christian tradition, assumed to have been directly inspired in their writing by God himself. Thus, the Bible has traditionally been read as the word of God: absolute, incontrovertible. While this view has faded in importance for modern literary critics, its influence upon centuries of Christian authors and critics should not be discounted. A secular critic, Frye himself remains a proponent of this traditional view; although he does not literally view the Bible as the product of one author, he nonetheless analyzes the Bible as one cohesive whole. For example, in *The Great Code*, Frye compares the structure of the Bible to the U-shaped plot of comedy, beginning in Genesis with the paradisaical

Garden, descending into episodes of violence and political tumult, and ending with the ascent of the Christian faithful into heaven at the end of Revelation (Marx 164).

Supposing that to imagine literature as one cohesive unit is "the first and most indispensable of critical assumptions," Frye almost seems to suggest that if the Bible did not exist, literary critics would have to invent it (Poland 513). Perhaps it is more accurate to say that if the Bible did not exist, then Frye would have to invent it in order to sustain his own view that Western literature forms a cohesive whole. As critics, we do not have to suppose the Bible's existence; what is less clear is the project of tracing the Bible's influence -- and separating its literary influence from its political influence -- upon centuries of Western authors. What I find not clear at all in Frye is his suggestion that all works of literature form a unified whole with the Bible at its source.

I argue that one aspect which can help distinguish so-called 'modern' literature from previous literature is the degree to which modern literature eschews the Bible as the primary source of symbols and themes. I do not mean to propose this criteria as an absolute rule in modern literature; William Faulkner and Toni Morrison, for example, are two 20th century novelists who include many biblical allusions in their work. However, authors in modern literature have also created the space for literary works to be founded on immediate experience and influence social attitudes through allusion. The Bible may have been the "Great Code" for Blake, and for many others, but it is clear that the Bible does not form the "Great Code" of art for an H.G. Wells or a George Orwell. How, then, to analyze literature which diverges from the well-worn path the Bible has trodden?

Politics in Literature: Relating Fiction to Reality

The fundamental critical act... is the act of recognition, seeing what is there, as distinct from merely seeing a Narcissus mirror of our own experience and social and moral prejudice.

--Northrop Frye, "On Value Judgments," p. 313

In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye analyzes literature as a self-contained body of knowledge, a project of artists' collective imagination which need not comport with real-life circumstances. In Frye's view, literature creates a parallel universe wherein texts communicate among themselves, building a collection of symbols and meanings which critics come to identify as constituting the "Western canon." While Frye's critical approach holds up relatively well in his analysis of literature fitting squarely within this Western canon (the Bible, Milton, Shakespeare, etc.), Frye excludes the possibility that a text, or a body of texts, could split off from the Western canon to create a novel paradigm featuring new symbolic patterns and adhering to new myths of concern. The result is that Frye's approach fails to create a space in literary analysis for determining the political import of such texts.

These tensions reach an apex in Toni Morrison, a Nobel Prize-winning American author whose literary work juxtaposes Biblical allusions with the political concerns of feminism and post-colonialism. One novel in particular, *Paradise*, enacts just such a desire to break free of the confines of tradition -- and moreover, a fictional representation of the schism from an old repressive regime, and the foundation of a new society with new leaders responsive to the political concerns of the previously disenfranchised.

Paradise takes as its setting the all-black town of Ruby, Oklahoma, founded by nine African-American clans as a way to escape the oppression of segregation in the 1940's Deep South. Ironically, however, the town of Ruby, though purportedly free, has imposed its own hierarchy, persecuting women of the "Convent," an all-female community which has retreated to the outskirts of Ruby. The 'myth of concern' at work within the heroic tales Ruby residents tell each other about their town's

founding is the myth of racial liberation, supplemented also with the myth of concern defined by extreme religious conservatism. The men who control these myths of concern must contend with another myth of concern and source of political power, the more radical (because more peripheral) idea of female liberation, personified in the women of the Convent. The women of the Convent are routinely implicated in a sequence of mysterious crimes, which are in fact terrorist acts of the male leaders. The scapegoating causes the Convent women psychological damage and puts them in physical danger, but they find resolve and resilience in the shared suffering with one another. In the uneasy dynamic between the 'founding fathers' of Ruby and the 'founding mothers' of the Convent, Morrison suggests that all communities are defined not only by inclusiveness, but also by exclusion -- the dark side of comedic triumph which Frye overlooks in his account of how comedy reenacts the coming together of society.

If the archetypes available to an author are already pre-determined, then, as it is sometimes phrased, nothing new can be said, because everything worth saying in literature has been said already, and likely more eloquently said before. Alternatively, the poet of true skill contributes to poetry by phrasing, in Pope's words, "what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed" ("The Critical Path," 291). Toni Morrison's *Paradise* turns this traditional attitude on its head by positing an unprecedented fictional community which criticizes a community's common-sense reliance on racial solidarity, revealed ultimately as patriarchy. I argue that, in our ever-changing contemporary world, it should be more obvious than ever that, while these old archetypes still maintain much of their traditional symbolic resonances, novels such as *Paradise* demonstrate how feeble is our grasp of the potential usages of these archetypes, and the array of new meanings which they can acquire. As such, the idea that these archetypes, which we so poorly understand, can delimit all that can be said within literature no longer has a persuasive case.

Consider the consequence of this old approach to criticism: that fictional texts which describe a set of experiences with no prior basis in the Western canon -- for example, slave narratives, feminist short stories, or anti-war poetry -- have no place within the pre-existing pantheon of literature. Thus, the Western canon, written by and for the leisure-class of the bygone centuries, is often ridiculed by various schools of modern literary criticism (Marxist, feminist, post-colonialist) as being the literature of "dead white men." The reaction of Shakespeare scholar Harold Bloom to these new schools of criticism, illustrated in a 2000 foreword to a new edition of Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, suggests the vigor with which the self-appointed guardians of the Western canon cling to an aesthetics-based method of analyzing literature:

All this is now quaint: Frye and his opponents have been folded together, as antique Modernists inundated by the counter-cultural flood of feminists, queer theorists, sub-Marxists, semioticians, and the ambitious disciples of Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, and other Parisian prophets. Aesthetic and other cognitive values doubtless still exist, but not in the universities, where the new multiculturalists denounce the aesthetic as a colonialist and patriarchal mask. Poetry, demystified, has been leveled. Elizabeth Barrett Browning is taught more frequently than Robert Browning, and Charlotte Armstrong has obscured William Wordsworth. As we turn into the new century, I wonder if I should summon up Frye at a seance, to ask him if he still feels that overt value judgments have no place in criticism? ("Northrop Frye in Retrospect," viii).

Bloom here denounces in one fell swoop virtually all of the important movements in literary criticism in the latter half of the 20th century; but he must admit that in order to denounce these new schools, it is necessary for him to abandon Frye's argument against critics making value judgments. This admission of Bloom's reveals that literary criticism, once a project of, by, and for the aesthetic concerns

of a literary elite, has in the 20th century become democratized and, almost by necessity, politicized. While the thoughts and experiences contained within the Western canon are no less real for their authors' and readers' lack of diversity, the Western canon as represented within Frye's analysis, and within Bloom's jaded foreword, cannot and should not be construed as comprising a totality of human experience.

Literature & Political Change: Frye after *Anatomy of Criticism*

Whenever we read anything, we have two things to do with the words: fit them together, and relate them separately to what they mean in the world outside the book.

--Northrop Frye, "The Responsibilities of the Critic," 1976

After the publication of his *Anatomy of Criticism* in 1957, Northrop Frye showed a greater willingness to explicitly address political concerns in his writing, and to speak forcefully against those in literature who gave support to reactionary politics:

The most intellectually tolerant of critics, studying the ideas or opinion of Yeats, D. H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, Robert Graves, or Wyndham Lewis, is bound to be puzzled, even distressed, by the high proportion of freakish and obscurantist views he finds and the lack of contact they show with whatever the ideas are that actually do hold society together. In the twentieth century an important and significant writer may be reactionary or superstitious: the one thing apparently that he cannot be is a spokesman of ordinary social values. ("The Critical Path," p. 292).

That Northrop Frye, one of the most-cited literary critics, would call out many of the most prominent 20th century poets for their "freakish and obscurantist views" -- which included forays into fascism and

eugenics -- suggests a significant departure from the apolitical Northrop Frye of *Anatomy of Criticism*. Rather than delimiting his criticism to an analysis of the poetry of these poets, Frye here shows a willingness to employ his influence to call attention to these poets' questionable political beliefs, if not completely opposing these poets' coronation within the Western canon. While Frye never abandoned his belief that literature should be analyzed as a "unified whole," he became more explicit in pointing out the degree to which literary figures' political beliefs can make them inadequate "[spokesmen] for ordinary social values," the kind of beliefs which Frye viewed as a boon to all humanity and not just a particular group.

For Frye such "ordinary social values" include, of course, the enjoyment of literature and more generally the celebration of life therein. Although Frye cites overwhelmingly from highly canonical writers such as Shakespeare and Milton, as a critic he appears to place a value upon diversity; similar to his view of literature as a totality, Frye does not discount any particular writer or school of writers. For example, in his writings Frye appears as an unprejudiced man unpersuaded by the early 20th-century's racist classifications. Frye's outlook surfaces with a clearer partisan bent in his defense of "the central English literary tradition as Protestant, radical, and Romantic," a reflection of his allegiance to Blake (Hamilton 61). Frye felt the need to defend Romanticism from prevailing critical attitudes of the 1930's, inflected as they were with "anti-Semitism, racism, and fascism... [and] Thomism based its study of literature on value-judgments," represented by the likes of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound (60-61). Frye is partisan in his inclusiveness of controversial, misunderstood "prophetic" figures, and partisan in excluding only those veins of criticism which themselves seek to limit and exclude.

Frye has noted many instances of value-judgments being used by critics to give a platform to their own narrow prejudices, and, in Frye's defense, during his age, and looking back upon the history of literary criticism, Frye may have seen the removal of critical prejudice as the main obstacle to

remove in a movement toward fairer criticism. Frye's stance against value-judgments, however, limits the extent to which such value-judgments can actually promote rather than stifle diversity. Even as he takes a more activist role as a critic in such defenses, Frye mainly limits his defenses to the purview of literature. When Frye speaks beyond literature, however, he attempts to maintain the illusion of objectivity by claiming, somewhat strangely, that his political value-judgments are based upon "solid" ideas. One candidate for a "solid" idea can be seen in the distinction Frye draws between sexual taboos and racial taboos:

The celebrated four-letter words raise few eyebrows today, because the taboo on them never was based on much more than reflex. The real obscenities of our time, the words that no self-respecting person would seriously use, are the words that express hatred or contempt for people of different religion or nationality or skin color, and disapproval of such words is based on a more solid idea of what is socially dangerous. ("The Critical Path," p. 313)

The "solid idea" which Frye has in mind here is the degree to which such racial slurs threaten the "open myth" upon which American and, similarly, Canadian culture are based. But while this anti-discriminatory attitude is now taken for granted among modern critics, it is a relatively recent development in Western culture and literature. It should be noted that the use of such racial slurs goes hand-in-hand with archetypal associations found throughout the Western canon -- of evil with blackness (*Othello*), or with Judaism (*The Merchant of Venice*). Tracing the use of such derogatory symbolic associations could help reveal how previous generations of Western writers used the language of closed myths to reinforce religious, gender and racial cohesion. By contrast, fealty to the 'open myth' may be found in literature produced in more recent times which either eschews, or works against, or deliberately re-appropriates such crass distinctions for dramatic effect, as in the way characters in the

works of Toni Morrison struggle to overcome their feelings of inferiority for being black and/or female.

Frye does not trace this ideological revolution in Western culture and literature; however, critic Jonathan Hart offers a more sympathetic reading of Northrop Frye, arguing that "even with [*Anatomy of Criticism*], we can witness a social and political Frye who always considered and confronted ideology" (Hart 160). In his book review, Hart notes that during the early 20th century, when prominent literary figures such as W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Paul de Man were dabbling with fascism, Frye's reading of William Blake gave him the means to clearly recognize Rosenberg's *Myth of the Twentieth Century* as a work of evil. Frye repudiates Rosenberg's book as "a big Nazi polemic claiming that the racially pure come from Atlantis and so forth... I could see that this was the devil's parody of Blake." (Hart 162). Thus Frye shows an awareness of the ability of the Nazi myth to seduce others by taking the form of Romantic myths. But while Frye recognizes the book as a "parody," Frye fails to reckon fully with the way such parodies are able to pass themselves off to multitudes of readers as gospel truth. The social ramifications of the abuse offered by such myths are potentially so dangerous that they deserve an account, one which could fit within Frye's theory by drawing a distinction between formal elements and political concerns in his conception of value-judgments.

Hart's justification of Frye is centered in Frye's later work; however Frye's seminal work, *Anatomy of Criticism* makes no space for such political distinctions, and Hart admits that the "old view" of Frye as an apolitical figure retains its persuasiveness. So while Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* provides a useful framework for categorizing Western literature -- and one which offers more diverse array of archetypes than Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces* -- Frye also fails to explicitly address the way political dynamics can underwrite the mythic structure found in much of literature. For just such an account, I turn now to consider Rene Girard.

Chapter III:

Rene Girard, the Anti-Hero, Christianity, and Communal Violence

Mimetic Desire & the Hero

Rene Girard, most famous as the author of *Violence and the Sacred*, is an anthropologist and a psychosocial critic in the vein of Sigmund Freud. Like Freud, Girard's attempt to explain the psychological origins of cultural practices is not principally literary, yet like Freud, Girard's theory of mimetic desire has often been applied to the analysis of literature.

In *Violence and the Sacred*, Rene Girard labors under the shadow of Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis whose theories have had an enormous influence upon literary criticism in the 20th century. Girard acknowledges key similarities between his theories and Freud's, yet Girard sets forth an approach to psychology which differs from Freud's approach in a very significant way. Girard's theory of "mimetic desire" holds that much of human desire comes from the subject's rivalry with a *mediator*, not from a desire for the object itself. This approach leads Girard to argue against the "Oedipal complex," which in Girard's view does not correctly account for how desire is patterned onto others. Girard thought Freud's theory provided no compelling reasons to explaining why the original Oedipal triangle had to be replicated in areas of human interaction outside the unique case of the father-mother-child relationship. Girard posits instead that "we understand very well... why the mimetic triangle must be perpetually repeated, why it is a search for successful rivals" ("Superman in the Underground," p. 1168) According to Girard, Freud has overlooked the role of the mediator in the triangular relationship: "Freud does not understand that the *desire of the mediator* is the essential factor in the desirability of the girl," (emphasis mine, *ibid.*, p. 1167). Let us more closely examine what

Girard means by these statements.

In Sigmund Freud's Oedipal triangle, the son's desire for the mother's affections produces the son's rivalry with his father, which can then lead either to abnormal behavior -- jealousy, or a desire to kill -- or normal socialization, whereby the son "identifies" with his father in the hopes of one day obtaining for himself another woman like his mother. According to Girard, however, it is instead the *father's* desire for the mother which produces the rivalry the son feels toward his father for his mother's affections. In Girard's scheme, the subject (in this case, the son) requires a role model (in this case, the father), whose desire for the object (in this case, the mother), serves directly as a pattern for the subject's own desire. This goes beyond the Freudian idea of "identification," which Girard calls one of "a series of concepts ambiguous in definition, obscure in status, and vague in function" (*Violence and the Sacred*, p. 169). To clarify the idea of identification, Girard notes one statement of Freud's which, in Girard's view, indicated that Freud "saw the path of mimetic desire stretching out before him and deliberately turned aside." Freud wrote, "The little boy will exhibit a special interest in his father; he would like to grow like and be like him, and *take his place everywhere*" (emphasis in the original). This statement of Freud's includes no mention of the mother as an object, and even suggests the possibility that the "Oedipal" triangle does not really require a mother, but can be formed with the son, the father, and *any* other object which the father desires. In contrast to Freud's Oedipal theory, Girard's theory of mimetic desire makes it possible -- but does not require -- that the son seek to adopt particular characteristics of his father, or else subconsciously carry with him for the rest of his life a repressed desire for his mother. Girard's theory only requires that the son adopt his father's desires, whatever they may be.

According to Girard, "[t]he subject is unable to desire on his own; he has no confidence whatever in a choice that would be solely his own." (ibid, p. 1166). The subject of mimetic desire

requires a *mediator* only as a go-between who serves to continually reinforce the bond of desire between the subject and object. Were the mediator's looming threat of monopolizing the object to disappear, then the subject would have no basis for believing the object of his desires to be worth competing for, and he would soon lose all interest in the object, along with any reason to imitate the mediator. Thus, in Girard's view, the mediator, not the object, is assigned a primary role; it is not the object's role to bestow affection upon the subject, but the mediator's role to bestow desire upon the subject.

While mimetic desire can easily lead to conflict between persons, in fiction and in reality, Girard holds that mimetic desire, once recognized as such, can be beneficial. For without mimetic desire, there would be no force driving humans toward self-improvement, and no desire to adopt beneficial practices seen in others. "Cultural imitation," for Girard, "is a positive form of mimetic desire" ("Violence, Difference, Sacrifice," p. 25). Unlike Freud's Oedipal triangle, the triangle of mimetic desire offers a stable end point for the subject's desires, which would be a reciprocal bond of affection with the object, rather than a monopoly over the object's affections. As an example, according to Girard, a person looking upon a "happy couple" sees "a couple's happiness which becomes the object of desire rather than either the man or the woman." ("Superman in the Underground," p. 1167). In romantic relationships, mimetic desire can explain how a man's sexual desirability increases in proportion to the number of women who desire him, or how a woman's playing "hard to get" can make her even more desirable to a man even in the absence of a direct romantic rival (when a woman plays "hard to get," her body becomes the object of the man's desire and she herself becomes a mediator for that desire, or a rival for access to her own body). Experience furnishes innumerable such "love triangles," and they have been re-enacted in romantic comedies from Shakespeare to the present day.

Jesus Christ is Girard's most favored model for benign mimetic desire; Girard notes that Christ's

pronouncements were also pattered upon ideas of mimetic desire. On the subject of a human's relationship with God, Christ commands his followers to "love God the father through me," and in their relationships with other human beings, Christ counsels his followers to "desire for the other *what the other desires for her or himself*," otherwise known as the Golden Rule (emphasis in the original, "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice," p. 25). Christ's understanding of how mimetic desire may be channeled into positive outlets engenders Girard's belief in Christianity as proclaiming a special truth distinct from other religions. Unlike Buddhism, for example, which identifies and rejects mimetic desire completely, Christianity accepts mimetic desire as a key to building healthy relations with the self and with others.

Girard's focus in *Violence and the Sacred*, however, is violent conflict, one negative manifestation of mimetic desire. For Girard, violent conflict can result from multiple subjects' rivalry with one another, and this conflict "snowballs" to involve more and more subjects, and violence among the rivals breaks out as the original object of desire is forgotten.

The first book of Homer's *Iliad* offers a prime example of how mimetic desire can generate the conflict which drives plot-action in literature. The first book of the *Iliad* may begin belatedly, during the final days of the Trojan War, but this point of departure makes sense literarily because it is precisely at the inception of the fundamental conflict which will dominate the whole epic poem: "Begin, Muse, when the two first broke and clashed, / Agamemnon lord of men and brilliant Achilles" (Fagles, p. 77). To put an end to an arrow storm sent by Apollo, Agamemnon gives up Chryseis, a female war prisoner, to a priest of Apollo. Agamemnon does not care about losing Chryseis herself, however, but only shows concern over the loss of prestige implied by the loss of his female prisoner. So to assuage himself, Agamemnon chooses to replace Chryseis with Briseis, the female prisoner of Agamemnon's least favored commander, Achilles. Achilles, too, acutely feels the loss of prestige which

Agamemnon's theft of the spoils of war causes him, which results in Achilles' desertion of Agamemnon's army for the duration of the war, at least until Achilles's brother-in-arms Patroclus is slain. Such a system of apportioning spoils is wholly alien to our culture, which is perhaps why the director of the 2000 Hollywood movie *Troy* chose instead to imply a romantic liaison between Achilles and Briseis. But even in *Troy*, the triangle of mimetic desire underpinning the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles is immediately comprehensible: Briseis is valuable to Agamemnon only because his biggest rival, Achilles, also values her. So although students of the *Iliad* may not receive a lesson in Rene Girard to go along with their reading, they have nonetheless been taught, quite correctly, that this conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles is not really over Briseis, but over the relative status of the two highest-ranking men in the Argive camp.

Achilles in the *Iliad* exemplifies another theory of Girard's: that literary figures become viewed as "divine" when their mastery over others exceeds normal human boundaries. Violence is one symbol of such mastery, and Achilles can only prove himself equal in comparison with a "god" through extreme violence:

Achilles storming on with brandished spear

Like a frenzied god of battle trampling all he killed

and the earth ran black with blood. (Fagles, *Iliad* Book 20, lines 557-559)

If a hero's mimetic desire serves as the initiator of interpersonal conflict, and his ability to wield violence serves as the route to his sanctification in the eyes of other men, then he is a hero which Campbell's supposedly "universal" theory of the hero fails to account for. For the Campbellian hero's journey model to work requires a hero opposite from Achilles in nearly every way; it demands a hero almost without an ego, willing to allow his desires to be determined by the demands placed upon him by his community, not by his own sense of personal gain or injured pride. Campbell's account thus

works very well for Hector, a reluctant and noble warrior who wishes to "refuse the call" to action, but nevertheless takes up arms in defense of his family and city. Campbell's model also accounts for Odysseus, who overcomes significant trials and temptations on his journey home to Ithaca to rescue his wife from her suitors. Both these characters in the *Iliad*, however, serve as foils to Achilles; Odysseus is intelligent, well-spoken and well-liked; Achilles is entirely physical, boorish in speech, and feared by others. Hector is married, a father, and genuinely desires peace for his nation, while Achilles deplores the idea of a stable home life and, in "Book 18: The Shield of Achilles," symbolically renounces peace forever and resolves to die young and glorious in combat. Campbell's theory misses the mark, then, when asked to explain a hero such as Achilles, whose sphere of concern is much more egocentric, extending outwards only to his best friend Patroclus.

The Old and New Testaments of the Bible provide much different grounds for Girardian analysis. In popular belief, the two testaments could not furnish a starker contrast in representing the relationship between man and god. The God of the Old Testament is thought of as a "vengeful" God; He is at once the God of Noah who drowned a sinful world, the God of Moses who set forth the proscriptive list of taboos known as the Ten Commandments, and the God of Samson who killed a thousand men. Yet the Old Testament also forecasts the model of Christian charity contained in the New Testament, and contains many stories which eschew the model of ritual sacrifice sometimes found in polytheistic religious cultures.

The story of Cain and Abel is one such Biblical example. The shepherd Abel's ritual sacrifice of sheep's fat pleases God, while God rejects the wheat offerings of the farmer Cain. If one were to frame this story as a mimetic triangle, then the triangle would have Cain as the subject, God's affections as the object, and Abel as the mediator. Yet it is clear that Cain does not truly desire God's affections, or he would not have resorted to the wrongful action of murder; instead, Cain desires to be in Abel's position,

prosperous enough to be able to afford such an animal sacrifice. For if Abel were taken out of the story -- leaving only Cain desiring God's affections -- then nothing could have logically produced the jealousy required for Cain to commit such an act of violence. After killing his brother, Cain replies to God "Am I my brother's keeper?", revealing that his mimetic jealousy for his brother has wrongly overridden his filial duties.

In a Girardian analysis, the Cain and Abel story presents a most interesting case. For the story suggests that Abel's example, the ritual sacrifice of animals, serves as a positive alternative to Cain's example, the killing of other humans. Yet Girard maintains that "Strictly speaking, there is no essential difference between animal sacrifice and human sacrifice, and in many cases one is substituted for the other." (*Violence and the Sacred*, p. 10). I would argue instead that although the ritual structures underlying both practices have "no essential difference," the movement from human sacrifice to animal sacrifice represents a first step toward the total elimination of sacrifice as a ritual. Cain's murder of Abel follows no ritual pattern, as it is divorced from God's wishes; however, the fate of Cain following his murder of Abel can be considered a matter of ritual, as God intervenes to make Cain's life valuable.

Consider God's response to Cain's fears that he will himself be murdered for his act of murder. God pronounces, "Not so, anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over. Then the Lord put a mark upon Cain so that no one who found him would kill him." (Genesis 4:15). In Romans 12:19, God further clarifies his role as the final arbiter in cases of murder: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," and in Proverbs 24:29, God says "Do not say: 'Just as he did to me, so I am going to do to him. I shall repay to each one according to his acting.'" In taking responsibility as the deliverer of justice, God makes belief in himself incompatible with the concept of reciprocal violence. So in the story of Cain and Abel, we see God intervening to put an end to the first Biblical instance of a potential spiral into reciprocal violence, a position to which He adheres remarkably and consistently over the course of

the Old and New Testaments. So in Christianity, violence and the sacred remain unified, but the ancient ritual punishment of death for murder laid forth in Hammurabi's Code -- an eye-for-an-eye, a tooth-for-a-tooth -- is taken out of the hands of mortals and becomes a matter only for God to decide.

The binding of Isaac is another story which discredits the model of human sacrifice. An angel of God tells Abraham that he must sacrifice his son Isaac. Wrestling with this information, Abraham decides to carry through with God's commandment. However, at the moment of crisis, God sends another angel to tell Abraham to spare his son, for God has been satisfied by Abraham's show of faith by carrying the rite this far. The episode suggests that one need only demonstrate his faith in God; the duty to sacrifice one's own offspring to God is no longer required. Later, Abraham finds a ram in a bush and sacrifices the ram to God instead; as in the Cain and Abel story, animal sacrifice is posited as a mode of sacrifice which can preserve peace among men.

In the New Testament, nonviolence as a doctrine of faith becomes more explicit, and it does so by reconfiguring the relationship between God and man. In Jesus Christ, God's son, God finally becomes a man himself. Not only do Christ's miracles cure lepers and feed the hungry, but He participates actively in the political struggles of men. Like other Jews before him, Christ is sacrificed in a political pogrom by the Romans, and his scapegoating can be framed in terms of mimetic desire. Although posing no imminent political threat to the Romans, as His "kingdom is not on earth," Christ becomes a rival to Pontius Pilate as Christ's claim of divinity competes for the affections of the Roman subjects. Yet the crucifixion of Christ only solidifies Christ's status as a symbol for resistance against the Roman regime. At the moment of his death on the cross, Jesus cries: "Father, why have you forsaken me?" vocalizing a feeling common to even the most faithful in their moments of persecution. Thus through Jesus, the Christian God becomes a personal god who, with absolute knowledge of human suffering, is able to walk alongside his faithful both literally and spiritually. For Girard, this

personalization of God was one of the major innovations of Christianity, a breakthrough in reconfiguring prior notions of the relationship of the human and divine. For Girard, Christian theology offers the possibility of ending the cycle of perpetual violence and obtaining a world-embracing state of peace.

When compared with the examples of more violent ritual practices cited by Girard in *Violence and the Sacred*, these Biblical stories indeed suggest that the Judeo-Christian God holds a relatively unique position in the pantheon of various cultures' gods. It should be noted at this time that Girard was himself a Christian, and the desire to portray his own religion in a positive light may have informed his selection of examples. Notwithstanding later violence committed in the name of Christianity such as the Crusades and the Inquisition, Christian theology as represented in the Bible appears convincingly in his analysis to be a religion tailored to liberal ideas of nonviolence and tolerance.

Yet Girard neglects to mention one glaringly obvious fact: the Christian myth contains at its own core a version of the violent scapegoat model he outlined. The most fundamental tenet shared by Christians of every denomination is the belief that Jesus, the "Lamb of God," sacrificed himself on the cross so that the community of Christians may be forgiven of their sins, or, to use a Girardian term, "purified." The example of Christ raises one possible exception to Girard's argument that Christianity differs fundamentally in its relationship to violence in "archaic" religions. If God is willing to sacrifice his own son, then how should Christians be expected to put an end to the idea that men must be sacrificed? Girard responds to this objection by noting that Christ's own agency propelled his sacrifice:

One has to make a difference between the sacrifice of others and self-sacrifice. Christ says to the Father: "you wanted neither holocaust nor sacrifice; then I said: 'Here I am.'"

In other words: I prefer to sacrifice myself than to sacrifice the other. But this still has to

be called sacrifice. When we say "sacrifice" in our modern languages it has only the Christian sense. Therefore the passion is entirely justified. God says: If nobody else is good enough to sacrifice himself rather than his brother, I will do it. Therefore I fulfill God's requirement for man. I prefer to die than to kill. But all other men prefer to kill than to die. (Girard, "Apocalyptic Thinking after 9/11," p. 30).

Again, the mimetic triangle offers a way out of this dilemma: Jesus says "love God through me." In other words, Jesus offers himself as the mediator for Christians' desire for God, and so asks men to strive to imitate his own earthly example of peace and charity toward man. Christians are asked to aspire to be "Christ-like," not to aspire to be "godlike" themselves. For as the *Iliad* shows, to become a god-man, like Achilles, is to really become an animal-man. Thus Christianity, for Girard, is different from archaic religions which employ human scapegoats in their rituals, as Christianity offers a novel conception of the *pharmakos* as a self-sacrificial figure, who by offering himself can end the cycle of reciprocal violence and ultimately re-humanize man.

The Scapegoat Myth: Collective Violence Concealed

"We know very little about the spontaneous mechanisms of collective violence, but we know enough to realize that these mechanisms do generate the type of collective delusion which our myths recognize as unquestionable fact."

--Rene Girard, "Violence and Representation in the Mythical Text," p. 934

Rene Girard may be contrasted with Northrop Frye, in that Girard attempts to account for the origins of myth and ritual, while Frye only classifies patterns in which myth and ritual manifest themselves in literature. I contend that Girard can explain better than Frye how and why the forces at

work in numerous episodes in the Bible, as well as Greek tragedies such as *Oedipus Rex*, are replicated throughout literature, even within Western literature not specifically influenced by Biblical or Greek sources. Additionally, in Girard's view, the Bible is more than a source for symbols in Western literature; it also set forth a new social order which changed Western myth and ritual, and therefore literature, by precluding certain kinds of violence.

Girard categorizes violence into several categories. The first is *reciprocal violence*, which is violence taken in response to another act of violence. As we have seen, this is one kind of violence which the Judeo-Christian God repeatedly says that humans must reject. Another kind is *indiscriminate violence*, an out-of-control kind of violence divorced from all notions of myth, ritual, or justice. *Unamious violence* is a term which Girard uses synonymously with communal violence. Interestingly, for Girard, the kind of violence can, under certain conditions, cancel out the other. Unamious violence committed by the group's collective action can, for instance, put an end to the otherwise never-ending cycle of reciprocal killing. But for such collective action to end the cycle of violence, rather than merely perpetuate the violent cycle, the violent action must be directed through certain rites of purification. According to Girard, "The role of sacrifice is to stem this rising tide of indiscriminate substitutions and redirect violence into 'proper' channels." (*Violence and the Sacred*). And still nothing can guarantee the success of any ritual attempt at re-channeling this violence. The priest, whom Girard compares to a nuclear power plant expert who must himself be decontaminated after decontamination, is himself not infallible; "accidents can always happen" (*Violence and the Sacred*, p. 41). The lack of guarantees in this situation is troubling, and Girard admits that he has no clear answer:

The difference between sacrificial violence and nonsacrificial violence is anything but exact; it is even arbitrary. At times the difference threatens to disappear entirely. There

is no such thing as truly "pure" violence. Nevertheless, sacrificial violence can, in the proper circumstances, serve as an agent of purification. (*Violence and the Sacred*, p. 40)

Girard cites the example of the Greek myth of Heracles, a returning hero who is consumed by the flames of a rite of purification gone wrong; "the rite itself that unlooses the evil" (p. 41). The evil occurs as a result of Heracles' having slain a centaur, whose inflammable blood has been spattered onto Heracles' shirt. Blood, a universally recognized symbol of violence, follows the hero home to taint his household. Perhaps a more recognizable modern example of this concept would be the 1982 Sylvester Stallone movie *First Blood*, otherwise known as *Rambo*. The Vietnam "war hero" John Rambo returns to a small town in America and turns it into a replica of the war; the hero's return home thus becomes a return to war, not a return to peace, as his return "should" entail. The film is unclear about the precise causes of Rambo's outburst, but there are multiple explanations. A psychologist might explain Rambo's violent rampage in terms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The mythic explanation, however, might hold that John Rambo, like Achilles, has already made a conscious decision to refuse to quietly adapt to peacetime, wishing to make it impossible for his home society to ignore the agony of war. Rambo in this way becomes a personification for the literature of the victim, which calls its readers into questioning their base assumptions about the rightness of a cause pursued through violence. This accounts more forcefully than a general psychological term like "post-traumatic stress disorder" for the guilt which war-makers must be prepared to accept when they send forth soldiers into combat.

Rambo and Heracles, who have killed, bear some responsibility for their actions and their ultimate fates. However, one category of victim which myth acts to conceal is the *pharmakos*, or scapegoat. The scapegoat must be an "arbitrary" victim, in the sense that his elimination will do nothing to solve the community's actual problems. But Girard notes that in fact, through ritual, the community deludes itself into assigning the scapegoat a special significance; the community projects

its fears and hatreds onto the scapegoat. Through myth and ritual the arbitrariness of the scapegoat must be concealed, and he must be transformed into a threatening figure capable of doing the worst harm and, through his death, of bestowing the highest good, or in Campbellian terms, bringing the "Ultimate Boon" to the community.

Oedipus Rex is the primary Greek mythological text which Girard uses as an example of the scapegoat mechanism, or of ritual violence in myth. Girard argues that the plot sequence of *Oedipus Rex*, revolving around Oedipus's own acts of violence toward his mother and father, conceals the play's original act of violence, which was his father's decision to abandon the boy Oedipus on a hillside. Thus, *Oedipus Rex* does not regard the fact that Oedipus killed his father and slept with his mother as a fitting punishment for his *parents'* original act of violence, but instead the play slyly shifts the culpability for these actions of murder and incest onto Oedipus himself. But if anything, Oedipus's crimes were foreshadowed by the fears of those in his community, chiefly his father Laius and the oracle which Laius consults before Oedipus's birth. Girard notes, "it is the oracle that puts [ideas of patricide and incest] into Laius's head, long before Oedipus himself was capable of entertaining any ideas at all." (*Violence and the Sacred*, p. 175). For Girard, Freud becomes a figure akin to the oracle, spreading the myths of patricide and incest throughout the culture, which cannot be beneficial, as "[t]he son is always the last to learn that what he desires is incest and patricide, and it is the hypocritical adults who undertake to enlighten him on this matter." (*ibid.*, p. 175).

By blinding and exiling himself, Oedipus puts an end to the cycle of violent and "unnatural" acts, but by focusing upon his self-inflicted wounds, the audience, too, is blinded to the true origin of Oedipus's tragedy: his abandonment by his parents on a hillside. Such may be "unjust," but Girard suggests that such mechanisms may sometimes function for the greater good.

Literature: Mimetic Desire & the Anti-Hero

"There is more in *Don Quixote* to help a man like Nietzsche to retain his sanity than in all of psychiatry and psychoanalysis combined."

--Rene Girard, "Superman in the Underground," p. 1173

Girard's theory of mimetic desire in literature can also be compared with Joseph Campbell's theory of the hero, for Girard shows how literary heroes can become metaphorically divine through their use of violence. Girard goes further than Campbell, however, in also accounting for ways in which tragic heroes can be made into sacrificial figures, or *pharmakoi*, and in showing how thin is the line which can separate the hero's triumph from his disgrace. Campbell's failure to account for examples of such heroic "disgrace" can be seen most evidently in the literature of the anti-hero, a genre of narrative which Girard's theory of mimesis can explain.

In an interview, Rene Girard proclaimed Miguel de Cervantes as the author "who contributed most... to the definition of mimetic desire." ("Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with Rene Girard", p. 12). Don Quixote rides forth to obtain fortune, fame, and Dulcinea's favor, not because he really desires any of these objects, but only because he wishes to count himself as a knight. He does what knights do because that's what knights do. To prove himself, Quixote must triumph in combat with pretended or imagined rivals, and thus he must invent or imagine all sorts of pretexts for doing so. His madness produces comedy, but it has also produced something far more significant: a new hero model. In a more than literal sense, Don Quixote was not a hero in the way that others before him were heroes, and not only because Don Quixote is a madman. Don Quixote may be literature's first example of an anti-hero, a literary character who acts independently of a fixed goal, takes no part in significant political struggles, and whose very existence means little or nothing for the society in

which he lives. In short, an anti-hero contradicts everything in Joseph Campbell's theory about how all heroes act or should, by virtue of being merely average. But I contend that the literature of the anti-hero is no less valuable for eschewing Campbell's model; indeed, there are legitimate reasons why we should find tales of anti-heroes more entertaining, and even more morally instructive, than those featuring traditional heroes. For with the anti-hero, literature descends from the exalted, immortal planes of myth and romance, and it begins to resemble life, with all its contradictory messages, shifting goals, and meaningless trivium.

For Girard, Don Quixote offers the best "cure" for Nietzsche's "insanity," because Quixote's knightly sallies humorize and trivialize the persecution complex built into Nietzsche's philosophical outlook. "To Nietzsche as to Don Quixote, the greatest peril is the indifference of the world that his classical mixture of ego-and-other centeredness is bound to misinterpret. [Nietzsche] constantly overestimates his own potential for scandal; he always exaggerates both the acceptability of his works and their lack of acceptability," writes Girard ("Superman in the Underground," p. 1173). In other words, Nietzsche's me-against-the world mentality can be metaphorized as Don Quixote's tilting at windmills; the story of a man exaggerating his own role in fighting the forces of evil and world-indifference only to see that his crusade is both illusory and vain. History (Hitler, Stalin) and personal experience no doubt furnish readers with examples of other people who could learn Don Quixote's lesson, and such examples are what has led Girard to slyly proclaim that "when the ordinary people and the intellectuals do not agree, it is safer to go with the ordinary people." ("Violence, Difference, Sacrifice," p. 16). For although actions performed out of paranoia can serve as a source of humor when those actions fail, the same complex underlies the scapegoating mechanism, whereby "success" in the wrong hands has proven immensely destructive.

After Cervantes, literature has produced innumerable anti-heroes. In the 19th-century, Gothic

fiction as well as the "Byronic hero" became important and popular archetypes. The 19th-century Russian writer Mikhail Lermontov in his first novel *A Hero of Our Time* uses the Byronic hero archetype for Pechorin, a man incapable of loving who ruthlessly places his own interests above all else.

A Hero of Our Time is a title laden with irony, as Pechorin himself emerges as a despicable character, wholly unlike Campbellian notions of the literary "hero." Scornful of his lovers and ungrateful to his friends, Pechorin dies a lonely death. Unlike a Campbellian hero, Pechorin is not well known and celebrated by his society, but is instead only known to the world through the unnamed narrator's chance encounter with Maxim Maximych, Pechorin's friend from his Caucasian intrigue. Pechorin is also unlike traditional notions of the "anti-hero," however, often conceived as an "unlikely hero" with noble pretensions (such as Cervantes' Don Quixote). Lermontov did not intend Pechorin as an object of ironic ridicule, however, but invested him with a conscious agency worthy of the reader's philosophical consideration. Lermontov's complex development of his anti-hero's worldview is revealed in the pessimistic insights which Pechorin gives of himself, as seen in a conversation with Pechorin's love interest Princess Mary, reported in his diary:

I was ready to love the whole world -- none understood me: and I learned to hate...
Fearing mockery, I buried my best feelings at the bottom of my heart: there they died. I spoke the truth -- I was not believed. I began to deceive. (Lermontov 127)

Such passages detailing the scope of Pechorin's depravity suggest that Pechorin, as a tragic anti-hero, has a greater level of emotional and social awareness than comic anti-heroes such as Don Quixote, but the problems Pechorin poses are no more serious.

Impulsive yet calculating, Pechorin describes himself as a man of a dual nature: "Within me there are two persons: one of them lives in the full sense of the word, the other cogitates and judges him" (Lermontov 163). Pechorin believes that living a life of the "head" and not the "heart" has left

him friendless in the moments before his probable death, but at the same time, Pechorin shows no remorse, for he sees no value in becoming emotionally attached to human relationships. For example, in Pechorin's kidnapping of Bela, Pechorin shows how he uses others for his own temporary pleasure. Although Pechorin makes continual attempts to win Bela's affections, when Bela's declaration of love for Pechorin is the exact moment when Pechorin decides he no longer desires Bela. This episode reworks a traditional trope of chivalric Romance; Pechorin reverses the idea that knightly hero conquers an adversary in order to win the princess's love, instead revealing that the object of the princess's love has served only as an excuse to engage in rivalry. Rather than accepting the girl's love, Pechorin's desire for Bela instead reveals itself as a desire only to triumph in her heart over Kazbich, Bela's brother, and in Girardian analysis, Pechorin's mimetic "rival" or "double." Having achieved this mimesis-oriented, and ultimately self-regarding goal, Pechorin cuts himself off from Bela emotionally, showing little remorse even at Bela's death-bed.

Although the settings and circumstances of Pechorin's narrative are unique and exotic, Lermontov suggests that Pechorin's failures as a person are generalizable. Lermontov appended to *A Hero of our Time* the statement that "[people] need some bitter medicine, some caustic truths," and suggested that critics responded harshly to Pechorin "perhaps, because there is more truth in this character than you would desire there to be" (2). In these ways, Lermontov encourages his audiences to consider in what ways Pechorin is representative of a larger problem inherent in social relationships in all society. So Lermontov, a Romantic who emphasized the individual above the social, here can be seen to adopt in *A Hero of Our Time* a surprising concern with the state of society.

If Pechorin's problems were merely social, however, then they would be fixable by societal change. But Pechorin's pride, insatiable desire, an absence of purpose are, for Lermontov, inherent in his nature rather than a result of Russian decadence. Evidence for Lermontov's attitude here can be

found in the fact that Pechorin's character remains remarkably static regardless of the society he inhabits; he slays a rival to seduce a Russian princess in just the same way as he slays a rival to seduce a Caucasian tribal girl. Even if there were an Arcadia in *A Hero of Our Time*, one would expect Pechorin's arrival to produce an amorous intrigue followed by bloodshed. Pechorin is thus, if anything, a threat to any potential social progress, not a potential instigator of that progress. So rather than posing a solution in *A Hero of Our Time*, Lermontov poses just that problem: "The disease has been pointed out, goodness knows how to cure it!" (2). If Lermontov had known how to cure this "disease," then it is possible that Lermontov himself would not die in a duel at the young age of 26. It is perhaps more likely that Lermontov had no desire to cure the "disease," only to make it visible, both in his most famous novel and in his death.

Lermontov himself -- along with Maxim Maximych, Bela, the unnamed narrator, and Lermontov's readers -- all feel a powerful attraction, one might even say a compulsion, to associate with Pechorin. The Byronic anti-hero, although a failure as a moral exemplar, maintains a fascinating allure; the irony is that the social group created both within and outside the fictional narrative of *A Hero of Our Time* is centered around such an anti-social man. Pechorin himself represented Lermontov's conception of flaws germane in himself and in the state of humanity. Yet Lermontov also indicated that men such as Pechorin are in no way to be regarded as moral exemplars. Pechorin ultimately holds no solutions for solving his own problems, let alone larger social problems, but *A Hero of our Time*, along with other stories featuring Byronic anti-heroes, serve as further documentation of the self-destruction and social danger posed by those who allow their desires to become framed by Girardian mimesis.

The Modern World: Communal Violence Detached from Myth and Ritual?

"You can see the shape of the apocalypse increasing every day: the power capable of destroying the

world, ever more lethal weapons, and the other threats that are multiplying under our eyes. We still believe that all of these problems are manageable by man, but if you take them all together you can see that this is not the case. They acquire a kind of supernatural value."

--Rene Girard, "Apocalyptic Thinking after 9/11," p. 27

Girard identifies ways in which accepted cultural practices in our modern Western world have clearly diverged from tribal practices in ancient cultures. For Girard, modern notions of literature prize originality and uniqueness; originality, like a fashion, is "in." Unlike Campbell, however, Girard does not privilege the primitive lifestyle over the modern; instead, Girard argues that society has made true progress in many respects in eliminating reciprocal violence, or at least diverting its destructive nature into healthier channels.

Girard suggests that the widespread adoption of Christianity in Western culture has assisted in the pacification of Western societies over the centuries, comparing the relatively low levels of violence today with the high levels experienced in the 18th-century. Girard attributes this reduction in violence to the separation of violence from the sacred, a separation which is rarely consciously acknowledged, but which has nonetheless permeated the culture to the degree that it is not even recognized as specifically Christian, but instead as constituting a part of "liberal" attitudes. The Western schism between violence and the sacred, for Girard, has produced a curious split between self-professed Christian religious conservatives and secular liberals. For example, Girard argues that the lynchings once frequently carried out by "Christians" in the Southern U.S. represent not Christian, but pre-Christian, practices. "Many people believe that Christianity is embodied by the South. I would say that the South is perhaps the least Christian part of the United States in terms of spirit, although it is the most Christian in terms of ritual... You must define these lynchings as a kind of archaic religious act."

(Girard, "Apocalyptic thinking after 9/11," p. 31). That such acts can be committed by self-proclaimed Christians, as well as secular liberals' condemnation of religious feuding as "religious violence," is for Girard an unfair charge against the whole of Christianity, which is in Girard's thought a religion devoted to the idea of ending this kind of reciprocal violence on the communal level.

Christianity, for Girard, can also offer an alternative to reciprocal violence on a more massive, world-ending scale. While secular liberals sometimes charge that the history of violence committed in the name of Christianity has shown Christianity to be no different from other religions -- especially strains of radical Islam which currently practice terrorism and threaten world apocalypse -- Girard responds that this argument reflects a general misapprehension of Christian apocalyptic thought. Girard indicates that in Christianity, violence is actually understood to be a human trait, not a divine trait. For in Revelations, according to Girard, "[t]here will be revolution and wars. State will rise against state, nation against nation. These are the doubles. This is the power of anarchy we have now, with forces capable of destroying the whole world." (ibid., 26). Thus Christianity differs from Islam, which in Girard's view "has many aspects of the Biblical religions minus the revelation of violence as bad, as not divine but human; it makes violence totally divine" (28). For this reason Girard holds that "the 'mistake' of the first Christians was to believe that the apocalypse was going to be an instant affair," and thus Christianity initially failed -- but then succeeded through Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians -- to fully explain the ultimate secular, political source that threatens the eruption of world-ending violence. In Biblical times the Roman Empire was the source; today, it is the balance of power and military advents of the world's nations -- nuclear and chemical weapons, etc. -- that both keep indiscriminate violence in check through the doctrine of "deterrence" while simultaneously allowing us to "see the coming of the apocalypse in a way that wasn't previously possible" (p. 26). However, for Girard, deterrence is a weak theory, for it entails "putting our faith in violence; we believe

that violence will keep the peace. But this assumption is inevitably false. We are trying not to think radically today about what this confidence in violence means" (ibid., p. 29). So although the leaders of the "world community" have distanced themselves from smaller-scale, ritual violence, Girard concludes that peace founded upon "mutually assured destruction" reflects the same pattern of mimetic rivalry on a global scale, and thus can only be considered a temporary peace. When the weapons used are capable of destroying the world, then the Christian apocalypse becomes inevitable.

Indeed, the mass slaughter of the 20th century is a result of the lack of religion's restraining presence on societal order. Instead, the world's most destructive wars have resulted from an industrial-scale monopolization of political power through the same primitive channels which Girard has identified. Adolf Hitler's cult of personality, for example, while not formally religious, was based upon the familiar mythic structure of anti-Semitism, common in all areas of Christian Europe throughout the Middle Ages and fictionally represented in literature from this period. Chaucer's *Second Nun's Tale*, for instance, a tale of 'blood libel,' follows this pattern set forth by Girard:

- 1) Something is wrong with the community. Many people become ill and die mysteriously. The most sacred rules are transgressed; differences are erased; chaos reigns.
- 2) The Jews have the "evil eye." The Jews commit the most unnatural actions such as parricide, incest, etc. Hostile as they are to the true faith, the Jews must be responsible for whatever ails the community; a real plague, social agitation, etc. Rumor has it that some Jews have been tampering with the water supply.
- 3) Some Jews are killed or driven out.
- 4) Tranquility and order return to the community. (Girard, "Violence and Representation in the Mythic Text," p. 937)

What is striking about Girard's systematization of the myth of anti-Semitism is how closely the structure parallels the hero's journey set forth by Campbell: "The accusations against the Jews are no less fantastic than the nefarious properties attributed to mythological heroes. The two, in fact, are exactly the same: they include the evil eye, the plague, parricide, incest etc. The circumstances are the same, and the sequence of events is exactly the same." (Girard, 937-939). Perhaps the only difference between Campbell's and Girard's ways of retelling an anti-Semitic story in the heroic mode is that in Girard's recounting of the tale, the community rather than the individual hero takes action to restore the world to peace.

However, both Campbell's and Girard's accounts are similar in that *other individuals* within the community manage to escape responsibility for the victims' fate through the ritual of the *pharmakos*. The community can reap the rewards of violence while evading guilt through the tragic hero model, by sacrificing the returning hero who has taken action to purify or uplift the community. Such a model is seen in the myth of Prometheus; mankind benefits from his transgression, but Prometheus alone is forced to suffer the punishment for stealing fire for the Gods. Again, the Judeo-Christian Bible eschews the *pharmakos* ritual; the doctrine of original sin holds all of mankind responsible for Adam's and Eve's transgression in the Garden of Eden.

If the community, rather than the hero, takes collective violent action to defend itself from a perceived threat, then the responsibility for violence is diffused equally such that "justice" can only be served by punishing all, for in that case all have been tainted with the stain of violence, and all must be sacrificed to achieve purification. Most modern literature, however, blurs the distinction between the individual's and the community's acts of violence. For example, in the play *The Children's Hour*, a rumor started by Mary Tilford, a deceitful schoolgirl, spreads like wildfire through a prejudiced small-town American community. Mary Tilford scapegoats her headmistresses for her poor behavior at

school, claiming that "strange noises" from her headmistresses' bedrooms disturbed her. The resulting obscenity trial and social ostracism cause the headmistresses to lose their jobs, leading finally to the suicide of the headmistress Martha Dobie, who, it is revealed, was in fact in a lesbian relationship with the other headmistress.

As an audience, we look for a scapegoat to blame for Martha's suicide, who deserves to be sacrificed? Following Girard's predictions exactly, we feel as though the community cannot be purified until someone else's head rolls in the sand. Yet *The Children's Hour* continually frustrates its audience's predisposition to assign blame either to the individual or the community. Mary is actually ignorant of the fact that her rumor is true when she tells it, and her grandmother, possessing a greater social status and more credibility than this deceitful girl, is far more instrumental than Mary in amplifying and legitimating the rumor. The grandmother's retelling of her granddaughter's rumor, however, could not have infected others in the community unless the community, too, was predisposed to accept the rumor due to its own anti-gay prejudices. Even Martha's partner apparently shares in the blame, by emotionally retreating from Martha and pulling up the drawbridge in her hour of desperation.

As the play ends, the scapegoat is dead, but instead of helping atone for her community's flaws, Martha's death only reveals them. So *The Children's Hour* shows a new tragic model at work, far removed from the tragic model of *Oedipus Rex* or Shakespearean tragedy, which feature tragic heroes who in one way or another "deserve" their fate, and whose deaths instruct others, heralding a new order or the promise of a new order. Martha's death shows the community's lack of justice, and lack of progress, and perhaps explains how *The Children's Hour* lacks a sense of *catharsis* and proves so deeply unsettling. Is *The Children's Hour* therefore more or less "tragic" than *Oedipus Rex*? If we do decide that *The Children's Hour* is the more tragic play, then we will likely do so because in *The Children's Hour* the tragic irony is greater; only the audience is instructed by Martha's death, while the

community learns nothing.

Real world examples of this tension between individual and collective responsibility for violence -- influenced as they are necessarily by our own identities and prejudices -- can be far more partisan. Such was the dilemma facing the judges of the Nuremberg Trials as they attempted to assign culpability for the Holocaust, dramatized in the 1961 film *Judgment at Nuremberg*. Hans Rolfe, the defense lawyer for accused German judges who enforced Nazi laws, gives an impassioned speech raising the fairness of prosecuting these judges at Nuremberg rather than others who arguably shared guilt. How guilty was Churchill, who declared as late as 1938 that Britain deserved a leader like Hitler? How responsible were the American industrialists who built war materiel which was sold to Germany before the outbreak of World War II? How responsible was the whole world for standing by as Hitler took Czechoslovakia and Austria? The German barrister's questions turn an American audience's traditional feelings of responsibility for the Holocaust on its head, a juxtaposition which only Girard's theory accounts for. So while Girard explains, Campbell places all the agency on the individual hero, who is then sanctified, not sacrificed, by the community, despite the violence the hero has taken toward others.

In the Nazi Germany permutation of this anti-Semitic theme, Hitler, as the leader of the Nazi Party, can be conceptualized in Girard's terms as holding the position of the "Aryan" tribe's priest. Through the Nazi Party's rhetoric, Jews were ritually dehumanized, and through their policies, the Jews were taken captive as prisoners of the Germans. Then the activities of the Holocaust -- concentration camps, extermination camps -- physically separated the Jews from German society and made the Jews, along with members of other "foreign" groups such as homosexuals and Gypsies, into sacrificial victims. Hitler even termed this activity the "Final Solution" to the Jewish question, who came to bear the blame for all Germany's problems.

Notwithstanding the political propaganda deriving from "scientific" proofs of Aryan superiority, the "non-religious" or even "anti-religious" Nazi movement was at its heart a battle over the sacredness of Germany. In other countries, similar cults coalesced around Mao Ze Dong, China's "ritual sacrificer" of capitalists, Joseph McCarthy, America's "ritual sacrificer" of communists. This dynamic underpins even the formally religious cult surrounding Kim Il-Song and his descendents, perhaps the last temporal rulers in the world who are still regarded by their subjects as divine.

Conclusion

Literature is shaped by the direct experience of the author; in turn, the author's words have an impact on those around him or her. Sometimes the experience related through the narrative is a common experience which serves as a cultural touchstone; common examples in our cultural reservoir include prom night, marriage, or (more prosaically) a trip to Wal-Mart. At other times, the author relates a unique experience, such as a war journal or an account of living with Samoans. Either way, an author's narrative becomes a tool not only for the entertainment of the audience, but also for organizing the way her audience perceives reality. Literary theorists following in the tradition of the myth-ritual school have explored the interrelatedness of narrative and psychology, but critics like Joseph Campbell, and the Northrop Frye of *The Anatomy of Criticism*, did not probe far enough in this direction. For with the power to alter consciousness comes a responsibility to closely examine the kinds of messages, however subliminal, such narratives contain. Narratives which can make a claim to "universality" -- Campbell's Hero's Journey, or Frye's genre wheel of myth-romance-satire -- deserve particular scrutiny, for any messages contained therein could be continually transmitted and reinforced without our conscious knowledge.

With each passing year of artistic production, Frye's theory of literature as a "unified whole" seems to make less and less sense. New kinds of stories are being told in new forms -- documentaries, memoirs, YouTube videos -- and on a wider scale than previously. One historical event in particular appears to have been instrumental in transforming our outlook on the world. The Holocaust in Nazi Germany has laid bare to all citizens of the world, not just scholars of myth and ritual, the horrendous acts which the abuse of one aspect of narrative -- the scapegoating mechanism -- can produce. Yet the Holocaust is, sadly, only differentiated from other historical examples of ritual sacrifice in the size,

scope, and intensity of the destruction it inflicted upon its victims. Every year brings a new tragedy of ritual violence, and the international community's resolution of "never again" has been continually thwarted by recent genocides -- East Timor, Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Darfur, among others. Adolf Hitler was only of many fanatical leaders who have seized upon this potent avenue of psychological control: the mindset of demonization.

It is my contention that the fields of literature and literary criticism, when they intersect with politics, should help reveal this dangerous impulse towards violence within the human heart -- as Girard's theory does -- not concealing or glorifying it, as does a thinker like Joseph Campbell. To safeguard the progress our civilization has made so far, and to leave an even safer, more tolerant society for our descendents, we will need a theory of literature which unambiguously accounts for the origins of fundamentally evil human impulses, so that we may recognize and learn how to thwart such atrocities before they ever take place.

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