Chapter 6 – The Vocation of Eloquence

- The title is a reference to the poem “Anabase” by St. John Perse. The poem is about the establishment of a new society and includes how important words are in the founding of a new city.

- Frye says he wants to explain the relevance of literature to consumers (i.e., the majority of people) and not just its relevance to writers/creators of literature.

The Imagination and the Truth

Frye says the ways of using words overlap quite often (the language of the imagination, which is literature/ordinary speech/conveying information to others). They overlap because we use our imagination everywhere in our lives: in conversations, in our practical/working lives, in our dreams, etc.

- Frye even says our imagination is what forms our social life – our imagination being the merging of our emotions and our intellect.
- This leads to the conclusion that, perhaps, truth is a higher essence than words can express, since there is always a dire need of “saying the right thing at the right time.”
- Remember, literature is the language of the imagination and the more literature we digest the more our imagination is “trained” to see this higher truth.

We act as literary critics in our everyday lives – e.g., by identifying when others are angry and why.

References to Society

- In his work, 1984, Orwell suggests that to make tyranny permanent and unstoppable is “deliberately to debase our language by turning our speech into an automatic gabble.”
- Speech of a mob is cliché, leads inevitably from illusion to hysteria.
- There can be no free speech in a mob.
- “Freedom has nothing to do with lack of training; it can only be the product of training.”

Advertising

- Advertisers make images with psychologists that appeal to our minds. Deliberate creation of an illusion. Reaction to advertising, Frye says is “...is similar to reader response.”
- Frye’s point is not to dismiss advertisements or take them literally, but to take them ironically. Using our ‘voice of sanity’.
- Develop a vision of society and choose what we want take out of advertisements and remove the rest into what fits into our society.
Advertising Cont’d

- The fundamental part of the imagination is to produce out of the society the world we have to live in, the world we want to live in.

- The first thing that our imagination have to do for us, as soon we can handle words, is to fight to protect us from the illusions that society presents us with.

- Frye states that advertising appeals to the snobbery and what he calls status symbols. The public is exploited to the point of fearing to be ridiculed or isolated from society. Advertising gives an ‘easy way’ into the inner track. The use of the cliché, the pre-fabricated, ready to eat/use world where everything is made for those too lazy to think the illusion of thinking.

- Advertisers use what is called jargon or gobbledygook. They use this to sound as impersonal as possible. Example Anti-personnel mine------ bombs that blow up men. Throwing away a document------permanent deposition.

- People use jargon to exclude personal emotions and feelings (politicians)

- Frye’s main point: “Ordinary speech is largely concerned with registering our reactions to what to what goes on outside of us”

Outcomes of Educating the Imagination:

- Our wants and desires become more impersonal and unselfish
- Develops us socially and morally, not just the mind
- Gives us a clearer understanding of our reality

Power of Imagination:

Genuine, permanent human civilization = world that brings us areas of studies

Areas of Studies = Constructed Structure of Words

Conclusion:

Imagination gives the humans the power to construct

“ And then all it has to tell us, when we look over the edge of our leaning tower, is that we are not getting any nearer heaven and that it is time to return to Earth” - Northrop Frye (Page 98)

What is Northrop Frye’s last warning/message he is trying to tell us?

Consider the above quotation.