

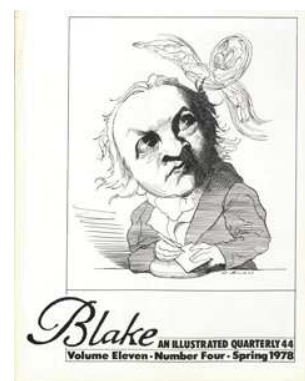
AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

R E V I E W

The Legacy of English Romanticism: Northrop Frye and William Blake

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Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 11, Issue 4, Spring 1978, pp. 276-283



REVIEWS

THE LEGACY OF ENGLISH ROMANTICISM: NORTHROP FRYE AND WILLIAM BLAKE

Northrop Frye. **The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance.** Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976. Pp. viii + 199. \$8.95.

Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976. Pp. xvi 296. \$11.50.

Reviewed by Michael Fischer



The recent publication of *Spiritus Mundi* and *The Secular Scripture* occasions this review of Northrop Frye's works since *Fearful Symmetry*. (A list of all books included in this review precedes the notes at the end.) Keeping in mind Frye's own contention that his critical ideas have been "derived from Blake," I have tried to clarify his indebtedness to the poet who has provided him "the keys to poetic thought." Unlike other critics of Frye, I have discussed this indebtedness in the moral terms which he himself has used to explain his interest in Blake's art. As a teacher and critic, Frye has never considered literature without defending its importance to life; he has valued Blake in particular for his service to "values and standards" that only the imagination can keep alive.

Thinking about literature often originates in extra-literary value judgments. When twentieth-century critics like Pound and Eliot, for example, tried to consider "poetry primarily as poetry and not another thing," they did not forget their moral opposition to the English Romantic movement. To be sure, Pound and Eliot sympathized with the Romantic writers' hostility to modern society, but they nevertheless deplored the destructive direction taken by Romantic social criticism. The Romantic poets, in Irving Babbitt's analysis, remained "half-educated," unable to formulate a satisfying alternative to the values which they had rejected: "The half-educated man [Babbitt wrote in *Rousseau*

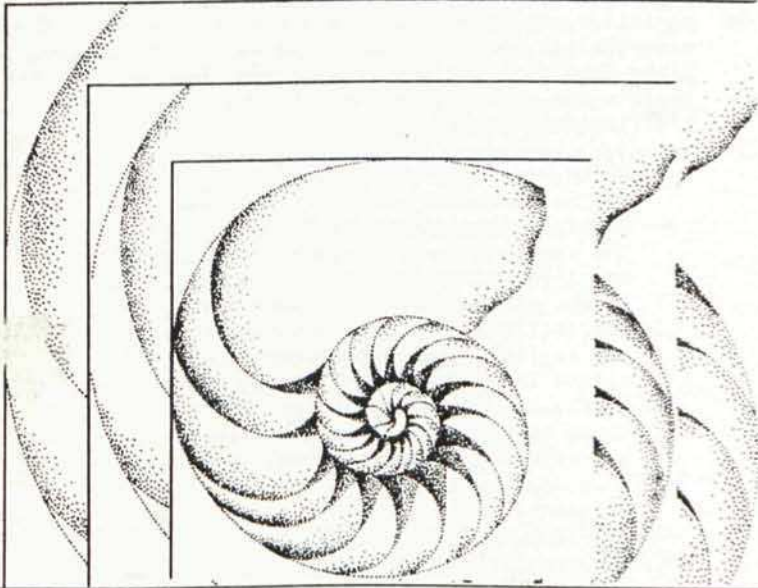
and Romanticism] may be defined as the man who has acquired a degree of critical self-consciousness sufficient to detach him from the standards of his time and place, but not sufficient to acquire the new standards that come with a more thorough cultivation."¹ Lacking "more thorough cultivation," an artist like William Blake seemed to Eliot a "resourceful Robinson Crusoe" whose estrangement from his age resulted in "crankiness" and "eccentricity" rather than allegiance to an established set of superior norms:

We have the same respect for Blake's philosophy (and perhaps for that of Samuel Butler) that we have for an ingenious piece of home-made furniture: we admire the man who has put it together out of the odds and ends about the house What his genius required, and what it sadly lacked, was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own, and concentrated his attention upon the problems of the poet.²

As numerous studies of modernist criticism began to point out in the late 1950's, this reaction against Romanticism concealed profound affinities with its adversary. Eliot's appeal to Anglican Christianity, for example, did not support his work with a "framework of accepted and traditional ideas"

The Secular Scripture

A Study of the Structure of Romance



Northrop Frye

SPIRITUS MUNDI



Essays on Literature,
Myth, and Society

but in the context of twentieth-century intellectual life was itself an eccentric gesture, like the "home-made" mythology which he constructed in poems like the *Four Quartets*. Books like John Bayley's *The Romantic Survival* (1957), Frank Kermode's *Romantic Image* (1957), Robert Langbaum's *The Poetry of Experience* (1957), and Murray Krieger's *The New Apologists for Poetry* (1956) all argued that modernist critics of Romanticism had only extended the very movement which they had tried to repudiate and that, in Northrop Frye's words, "Anti-Romanticism . . . had no resources for becoming anything more than a post-Romantic movement" (SS, 216). "The Romantic movement in English literature," Frye continued, persisted because it seemed "a small part of one of the most decisive changes in the history of culture, so decisive as to make everything that has been written since post-Romantic, including, of course, everything that is regarded by its producers as anti-Romantic" (FI, 3).

The publication of Frye's own *Anatomy of Criticism* in 1957 appropriately coincided with these efforts to show the indebtedness of modernism to Romanticism. Unlike his New Critical predecessors, Frye from the outset of his study of literature affirmed his commitment to the Romantic tradition and his political discomfort with its critics. As he recalls in "The Search for Acceptable Words" (1973),

I expected that a good deal of contemporary

literature would be devoted to attacking the alleged complacency of the values and standards I had been brought up in, and was not greatly disturbed when it did. But with the rise of Hitler in Germany, the agony of the Spanish Civil War, and the massacres and deportations of Stalinism, things began to get more serious. For Eliot to announce that he was Classical in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion was all part of the game. But the feeling of personal outrage and betrayal that I felt when I opened *After Strange Gods* was something else again. And when Eliot was accompanied by Pound's admiration for Mussolini, Yeats' flirtations with the most irresponsible of the Irish leaders, Wyndham Lewis' interest in Hitler, and the callow Marxism of younger writers, I felt that I could hardly get interested in any poet who was not closer to being the opposite in all respects to what Eliot thought he was. Or, if that was too specific, at least a poet who, even if dead, was still fighting for something that was alive. (SM, 14)

That poet, Frye goes on to say, was William Blake; the study of his work, begun in 1933, led to *Fearful Symmetry* (1947) and eventually to the theory of literature and criticism developed in the *Anatomy*.

The progression, Frye notes,

from one interest to the other was inevitable, and it was obvious to anyone who read both books that my critical ideas had been derived from Blake. (SS, 160)

Convinced since *Fearful Symmetry* that Blake's poetry contained "the keys to poetic thought" (SS, 178), Frye consistently has reaffirmed the Romantic assumptions which Eliot and others tried to disown. True to the independent spirit of Blake himself, however, he has used these critical ideas to support rather than circumscribe his own vision. He has written as Blake's collaborator, not as his disciple or rival, and he has tried in his own way to keep alive "the values and standards" that first drew him to his poems. Rather than react against the influence of Blake's work, Frye has attempted to read it in such a way as to strengthen its service to human life.

Frye's use of Romanticism builds on his assumption that Blake's art is at its center. He agrees with those studies which make a revolt against Lockean empiricism the cornerstone of Romantic aesthetics.³ But he argues that Blake is the paradigmatic Romantic artist precisely because he carried the revolt to its furthest extreme. The Romantic writers all claimed a degree of autonomy for their art and freed the imagination from bondage to philosophical reason, or that "owl-winged faculty of calculation" (Shelley) which they and even their mechanistic adversaries deemed a purely factual, "lazy Looker-on on an external World" (Coleridge). A poet like Wordsworth, however, made the artist's independence from reason his means to spiritual truth, which he located both in the mind of man and in the external world. The poet, Wordsworth urged, worked in alliance with an active universe and did not project onto nature qualities which were not really there. "Willing to work," his imagination was able "to be wrought upon" by the spiritual presence which Wordsworth thought immanent in natural forms.

For Blake, of course, "Natural Objects" deadened rather than fostered imagination; what Wordsworth "[wrote] Valuable [was] Not to be found in Nature" but in his own active mind (E, 655). From Blake's point of view, Wordsworth's anxiety to attribute to nature the spirit that was only in himself reflected nostalgia for a pre-scientific world and produced self-doubts that conservative Christianity finally had to resolve.⁴ Blake himself, by contrast, accepted the meaninglessness of "this vegetable Glass of Nature" and elevated his art above any "such fitting & fitted." Rather than share his creativity with nature or derive it from a transcendent God, Blake claimed radical self-sufficiency for his art: "All Forms are Perfect in the Poets mind. but these are not Abstracted nor Compounded from Nature but are from Imagination. . . . Man is born Like a Garden ready Planted & Sown This World is Too poor to produce one Seed" (E, 637, 646). By making the severance of art from external reality the very strength of imaginative vision, he thus transvalued the conclusions of modern philosophy itself. The same assumption that "Inspiration" defies "Mortal & Perishing Nature" made Lockean philosophers mock art

and Blake accept it as his "Eternal Dwelling place."

In Frye's view, Blake is central to Romanticism because his claims for art are so severe. The Romantic movement marked what he calls the "recovery of projection" (SER, 14), or the discovery that all forms of civilization--works of art, institutions, etc.--originate in the human imagination rather than imitate external models. The advancement of science, of course, precipitated this discovery because it discredited the attribution of human meaning to the objective world. Although a writer like Wordsworth nevertheless sought the moral "ministry" of nature, Blake knew that the artist's freedom from preexistent reality was unconditional and the very source of civilization itself:

Blake was the first and the most radical of the Romantics who identified the creative imagination of the poet with the creative power of God. . . . Everything we call "nature," the physical world around us, is sub-moral, sub-human, sub-imaginative; every act worth performing has as its object the redeeming of this nature into something with a genuinely human, and therefore divine, shape. Hence Blake's poetry is not allegorical but mythopoeic, not obliquely related to a rational understanding of the human situation, the resolution of which is out of human hands, but a product of the creative energy that alone can redeem that situation. ("The Road of Excess," SS, 172)

Not a "literary freak" or "a kind of intellectual Robinson Crusoe" (FS, 147), Blake exemplifies Romanticism because he makes its "recovery of projection" absolute.

Frye's own contribution to criticism in the *Anatomy* picked up where Blake left off and responded to twentieth-century critics in much the same way as Blake had reacted to his Romantic contemporaries. Although critics like Brooks, Tate, and Wimsatt had exempted art from imitation of the rationally known world, they had nevertheless betrayed a Wordsworthian willingness to qualify the artist's autonomy. Literary works, they argued, were distinct from "scientific, historical, and philosophical propositions," but they still offered us "complete knowledge of man's experience." Though not "the handmaiden of some doctrine which it is to reflect or 'communicate,'" poetry, in Cleanth Brooks's words, seemed "far more central to man's nature than any subjective 'projection.'"⁵ Objective reason, however, could not validate these cognitive claims and the correspondence of poetry to reality remained nebulous because no "scientific or philosophical yardstick" could measure it.⁶

Frye's criticism injected into this discussion a Blakean renunciation of all such self-contradictory attempts to fit art to an external referent. Without equivocation, he has insisted in all his works that "the writer is neither a watcher nor a dreamer. Literature does not reflect life, but it doesn't escape or withdraw from life either: it swallows it.

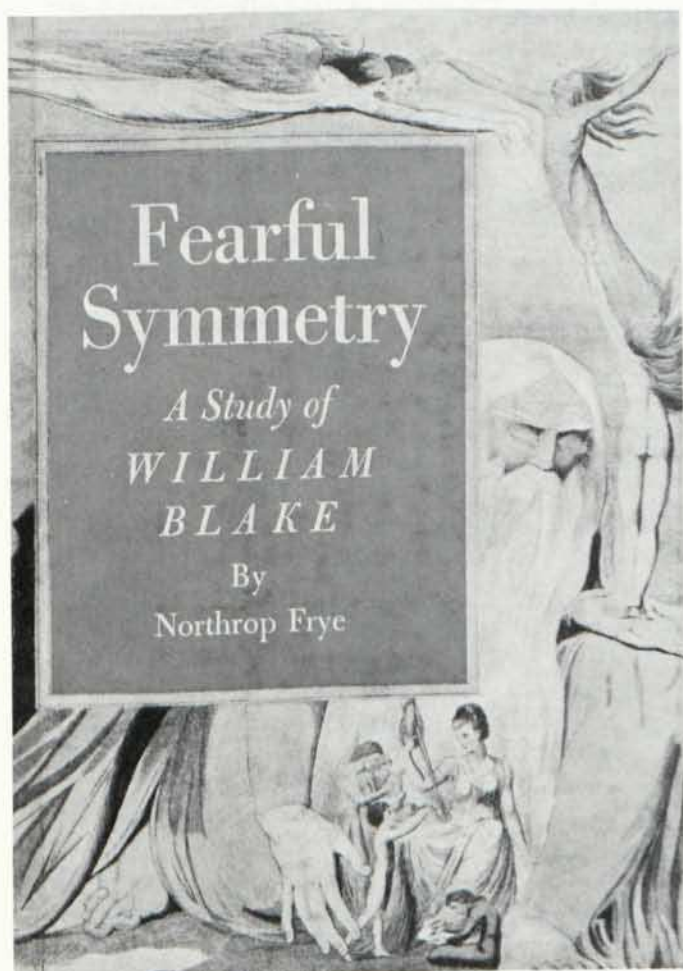
And the imagination won't stop until it's swallowed everything" (EI, 80-81). Only the factual perspective of reason passively imitates life; the imagination redeems it by imposing human form onto the external world which reason accepts as meaningless. To guarantee the self-sufficiency of art, Frye emphasizes that literature itself--not "any observation of human life or behavior" (FI, 36)--provides the artist with his forms: "Poetry can only be made out of other poems, novels out of other novels. Literature shapes itself, and is not shaped externally: the *forms* of literature can no more exist outside literature than the forms of sonata and fugue and rondo can exist outside music" (AC, 97). A reservoir of imaginative possibilities or forms, literature in its ultimate "anagogic" phase remains self-contained; it swallows everything outside itself to encompass man's limitless desire for a human world:

Nature is now inside the mind of an infinite man who builds his cities out of the Milky Way. This is not reality, but it is the conceivable or imaginative limit of desire, which is infinite, eternal, and hence apocalyptic. By an apocalypse I mean primarily the imaginative conception of the whole of nature as the content of an infinite and eternal living body which, if not

human, is closer to being human than to being inanimate. "The desire of man being infinite," said Blake, "the possession is infinite and himself infinite." (AC, 119)

The assumption that "literature shapes itself and is not shaped externally" makes metaphor and romance the central terms of Frye's criticism. Metaphor is the fundamental linguistic device of literature because it expresses our desire to identify human concerns with the non-human world. The poet uses metaphor "because his job is not to describe nature, but to show you a world completely absorbed and possessed by the human mind" (EI, 32-33). Similarly, romance highlights the mastery of reality by imagination which renders literature "always a form of 'lying,' that is, of turning away from the descriptive use of language and the correspondence form of truth" (Sec S, 46). Rather than pretend that its context is an outer world which it imitates, romance accentuates what realism tries to hide, namely, the indebtedness of all literary works to literature itself. "The symbolic spread of realism," Frye notes in *The Secular Scripture*,

tends to go from the individual work of fiction into the life around it which it reflects: this can be



accurately called allegorical. The symbolic spread of a romance tends rather to go into its literary context, to other romances that are most like it in the conventions adopted With romance it is much harder to avoid the feeling of convention, that the story is one of a family of similar stories. Hence in the criticism of romance we are led quickly from what the individual work says to what the entire convention it belongs to is saying through the work. (Sec S, 59-60)

The conventionality of romance secures its timelessness and shows that literary works do not progress or become obsolete but instead "displace" immutable archetypes. The meaning of a romance, like the meaning of any literary work, lies not in itself or in the external world but in the enduring conventions which it shares with other works.⁷

A "key to imaginative experience" (FI, 140), Blake's poetry illustrates how metaphor and structure lead back to literature as a whole. Reading Blake's lyrics moved Frye to assert that the fundamental unit of "formally poetic thinking" is the "inherently illogical metaphor" (FI, 141); studying his prophecies introduced him "to the grammar and structure of literary mythology" (FI, 143).⁸ Other critics, notably David Erdman, have tried to dispute Blake's characterization as a marginal, idiosyncratic figure by relating his work laterally to the public ideas and events of his day. Frye, however, has softened "the angularity of his genius" (FS, 3) by deriving his poetry vertically from literature itself. Blake's metaphors and myths, Frye argues, do use the content of late eighteenth-century life, but they also allow him to communicate "beyond his context in time and space" (FS, 420). The structure of the ninth Night of *The Four Zoas*, for example, may signify Blake's hopeful reaction to contemporary historical developments, but for Frye it also demonstrates his return "to the very headwaters of Western imagination, to the crystalline purity of vision of the *Völuspá* or the *Muspilli*, where the end of time is perceived, not as a vague hope, an allegory or an indigestible dogma, but as a physical fact as literal as a battle and as imminent as death" (FS, 305-6). Rather than stress with Erdman the presence of social content in Blake's plots or imagery, Frye insists on its displacement into trans-historical literary form. Blake for him is neither a watcher who records life nor a dreamer who withdraws from it but an artist whose metaphors and myths recast reality into archetypal imaginative shape.

Frye brings out the conventionality rather than the topicality of Blake's art not to seal it off from life but to respect its moral intentions. When he explains Blake's poems in terms of literature itself, he may seem to resort to a hermetic aestheticism which betrays the values that first led him to his work. But placing Blake within a self-contained literary universe serves the ideals of a poet who thought art "the Destruction of Tyrannies or Bad Governments." The freedom of the imagination from external reality allows literature

to liberate its readers; the radical autonomy of art insures its "socially emancipating" service to life (SM, 115). Frye's theory frees art from history not for its own sake but for the sake of human freedom:

The ethical purpose of a liberal education is to liberate, which can only mean to make one capable of conceiving society as free, classless, and urbane. No such society exists, which is one reason why a liberal education must be deeply concerned with works of imagination. The imaginative element in works of art, again, lifts them clear of the bondage of history Thus liberal education liberates the works of culture themselves as well as the mind they educate. (AC, 347-48)

Unlike other politically minded critics, Erdman himself has never confused Frye with Oscar Wilde or failed to see that his reading of Blake remains faithful to the poet's own social concerns.⁹ He has, however, disputed the way in which Frye allies Blake's art with liberation. For Erdman and the historian E. P. Thompson, Blake's "intellectual warfare" with society continually found reinforce-

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ment in concrete political developments. Unlike Wordsworth or Coleridge, he consequently never allowed the failure of the French Revolution to blast his hopes for social progress and he always looked for the "reign of Literature & the Arts" to begin in this world. He consistently satirized, in Erdman's words, "those who can accept a spiritual apocalypse but are terrified at a resurrection of the body of society itself." Although Blake never shared the Urizenic ideology of radicals like Tom Paine, he nevertheless continued to enlist his art in the service of revolutionary action. As Erdman writes, "No spiritual legerdemain, he implies, can remove from the infinite world such 'fallacies' as slavery or prostitution unless *action* removes them from the 'natural' world. No matter how far Blake seems to go along with a mysticism that treats 'the Natural Earth & Atmosphere' as 'a Phantasy,' he remains concerned with the essence of human history and is not seeking 'spiritual' escape from it." ¹⁰

For Frye and other critics, however, Blake qualified his aspirations for social change and went so far as to renounce his initial confidence in political action. Enthusiasm for the French Revolution lingered longer in him than in Coleridge or Wordsworth, but finally he, too, shifted from faith in political revolution to trust in imaginative revelation.¹¹ In his own terms, he transferred his allegiance from Orc to Los and even suggested that revolution cyclically leads to its opposite. His "revolutionary millennial optimism," in Frye's words, evolved into "a cyclic Spenglerian pessimism" (FS, 219): "But as Orc stiffens into Urizen, it becomes manifest that the world is so constituted that no cause can triumph within it and still preserve its imaginative integrity....The word 'revolution' itself contains a tragic irony: it is itself a part of the revolving of life and death in a circle of pain" (FS, 217-8). In Blake's own words,

Many Persons such as Paine & Voltaire with some of the Ancient Greeks say we will not converse concerning Good & Evil we will live in Paradise & Liberty You may do so in Spirit but not in the Mortal Body as you pretend till after the Last Judgment . . . while we are in the world of Mortality we Must Suffer The Whole Creation Groans to be deliverd there will always be as many Hypocrites born as Honest Men & they will always have superior Power in Mortal Things You cannot have Liberty in this World without what you call Moral Virtue & you cannot have Moral Virtue without the Slavery of that half of the Human Race who hate what you call Moral Virtue. (E, 554)

From the outset of his literary career, Blake had traced social conditions to intellectual causes. Lack of imagination made Reynolds, for example, accept nature as an unchanging, external model and preach "Passive and Polite" submission to the inalterable authority of the "Rich & Great." When the French Revolution failed, Blake, in Frye's view, switched to "Mental Fight" with society and made freedom result from the intellectual rejection of error which he called a "Last Judgment": "The

Last Judgment is an Overwhelming of Bad Art & Science . . . Error or Creation will be Burned Up & then & not till then Truth or Eternity will appear It is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold it I assert for My self that I do not behold the Outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance & not Action it is as the Dirt upon my feet No part of Me" (E, 555). Despite his disillusionment with Orc, he did not abandon hope for the historical "imminence of an apocalypse" (FS, 217). But he did argue that art can free the individual mentally without first changing society as a whole. A "residual anarchism," Frye notes, informed his typically Romantic contention that art emancipates the individual by releasing him "in Spirit" from the outer world.¹²

In determining whether Blake made freedom the effect of social or intellectual change, Erdman and Frye assign crucial importance to the demise of the French Revolution. In Erdman's analysis this failure did not discredit all political activity for Blake, but in Frye's view it split apart the alliance between imagination and history which he had forged in early poems like *America*. Frye's own literary theory incorporates the disillusionment which he finds in Blake's work; political history since the Romantic period only provides him additional reasons for distrusting Orc. Society seems an "eternally unwilling recipient of culture" (FS, 90), and "revolutionary action, of whatever kind, leads to the dictatorship of one class and the record of history seems clear that there is no quicker way of destroying the benefits of culture" (AC, 347). But if social life and political action destroy freedom, literature and the other arts still further it: "It is possible that social, political, or religious revolution always, and necessarily, betrays a revolutionary ideal of which the imagination alone preserves the secret" (Sec S, 165).

Literature promotes freedom by infusing its readers with imaginative energy. Rather than advocate specific values or "myths of concern," literature teaches that all such expressions are possibilities which the imagination itself has conceived. According to Frye, we passively adjust to society when we accept its values as objective or necessary facts; we actively criticize it when we see that its beliefs are imaginative creations projected onto "things as they are." As he writes in *The Critical Path*,

Evidently we must come to terms with the fact that mythical and logical languages are distinct. The vision of things as they could or should be certainly has to depend on the vision of things as they are. But what is between them is not so much a point of contact as an existential gap, a revolutionary and transforming act of choice. The beliefs we hold and the kind of society we try to construct are chosen from infinite possibilities, and the notion that our choices are inevitably connected with things as they are, whether through the mind of God or the constitution of nature, always turns out to be an illusion of habit. (CP, 104-05)

In a kind of "Last Judgment," literature activates our imagination and allows it to see that the society we accept is no more "real" than the one we desire. Although "the society around us looks like the real world," the "ideal world that our imaginations develop inside us" is for Frye "the real form of human society hidden behind the one we see." We live, then, "in both a social and cultural environment, and only the cultural environment, the world we study in the arts and sciences, can provide the kind of standards and values we need if we're to do anything better than adjust" (EI, 152-53).

Like Blake's Jerusalem, this "cultural environment" is not "one more objective environment" but the power of conceiving alternatives to our present one (SS, 198).¹³ For Frye, only the exercise of this power constitutes genuine freedom; no matter what political efforts we make to improve it, life in society can never free us so completely as use of imagination. "The only genuine freedom," he writes,

is a freedom of the will which is informed by a vision, and this vision can only come to us through the intellect and the imagination, and through the arts and sciences which embody them, the analogies of whatever truth and beauty we can reach. In this kind of freedom the opposition to necessity disappears: for scientists and artists and scholars, as such, what they want to do and what they have to do become the same thing. This is the core of freedom that no concern can ever include or replace, and everything else that we associate with freedom proceeds from it. (CP, 133)

Romance, the heart of literature, illustrates this in its very structure. Unlike comedy, which terminates in a new community, romance "has no continuing city as its final resting place": "We reach the ideal of romance through a progressive bursting of closed circles, first of social mythology, whether frivolous or serious, then of nature, and finally of the comic-providential universe of Christianity and other religions, including Marxism, which contains them both" (Sec S, 173).¹⁴

Frye does not discourage all political efforts to make society as free as our participation in our "cultural environment." But he does temper the expectations we bring to political action and warns that no historical setting will ever realize the imaginative freedom we experience as individuals. The only institution that permits this freedom, in fact, already "sits in the middle of our society" (SM, 42). This institution is the university, where individuals enjoy a greater freedom than society can ever give, namely, "the freedom that comes only from articulation, the ability to produce, as well as respond to, verbal structures."¹⁵ The university community provides "the only visible direction in which our higher loyalties and obligations can go" (SS, 256) because it alone encourages mental access to the "articulated worlds of consciousness, the intelligible and imaginative worlds, that are at

once the reward of freedom and the guarantee of it" (CP, 170).

The university, in short, offers the imagination the chance to exercise its autonomy and thus construct the cultural environment which Frye opposes to the natural world and to the mythology of society. For him, the legacy of English Romanticism is William Blake's concern for human freedom and his fear of docile adjustment to the constraints or hindrances of "the outward creation." Frye, like Blake, dreads confinement to the dull round of valueless nature, or that world which limits the factual discoveries of reason. He also fears uncritical submission to the values of contemporary society, or that capitulation which occurs when we treat social myths with the same deference we give to nature. Against both rational imitation of nature and passive accommodation to society, he places the creative imagination and urges us to complete the "recovery of projection" that began in the Romantic period.

This recovery, which made modernist critics uncomfortable, fills Frye with the Blakean hope that art will check our advancement toward a "self-policing state," or a "society incapable of formulating an articulate criticism of itself and of developing a will to act in its light" (MC, 45). We must finally measure Frye's achievement in terms of the values he has tried to keep alive. As a literary critic, he challenges us to emulate his own relation to Blake; he asks us not to fit into his "system" but to share his social vision. In trusting that vision to the autonomous imagination, he has either resisted or complied with that subversion of freedom which he has always deplored in the world outside art. From the perspective of reason, he has conceded, the poet's defiance of society is as irrational as his acquiescence; all value judgments are imaginative possibilities, not imperatives grounded in fact. Political action may aim at a free society, but it, too, cannot bridge the gap between imaginative vision and "things as they are." The poet consequently stands alone in his defense of freedom and articulates an ideal which reason and history dismiss as a dream. To evaluate Frye's work, we must determine whether this scheme grasps the importance of art or underestimates its critical power. Elsewhere I have argued that Frye has reduced rather than strengthened literature;¹⁶ but other critics, such as Robert Langbaum, have contended that he has saved art "as the last great sign of man's freedom or indeterminacy" and "the only creator of values in a world where other branches of knowledge have either ceased to deal with values or have limited themselves to analyzing and describing values."¹⁷ "The socially emancipating role" that Frye assigns to the arts suggests the larger question at stake in this discussion. In making art the sole safeguard of freedom, Frye has either secured liberty or allowed it to recede into mere imagining.

¹ Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism*, in *Criticism: The Major Texts*, ed. W. J. Bate (New York: Harcourt, 1970), p. 550.

² T. S. Eliot, "William Blake," in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, 1964), pp. 279-80. From a different perspective, Yeats also lamented that Blake "was a symbolist who had to invent his symbols . . . He was a man crying out for a mythology, and trying to make one because he could not find one to his hand." "William Blake and the Imagination," in *Essays and Introductions* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 114.

³ See, for example, M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953); Morse Peckham, *Romanticism and Behavior* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina, 1976); and René Wellek, "Romanticism Re-Examined," in *Romanticism Reconsidered*, ed. Northrop Frye (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 107-33. For different reasons each of these critics appreciates Blake's criticisms of Locke but refuses to make him the prototype of the Romantic movement.

⁴ Studies of Wordsworth which accentuate his distrust of imagination frequently contrast his longing for harmony with nature to Blake's desire for freedom from it. See especially Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (1964; rpt. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 169, 193-94, 233, and Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company*, rev. ed. (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 127, 146.

⁵ See Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn* (New York: Harvest Books, 1947), pp. 202, 252, 264, 266.

⁶ As Gerald Graff points out in his *Poetic Statement and Critical Dogma* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970), "The root of the problem is that the desire of post-Ricardian New Critics to claim an objective knowledge for poetry conflicts with assumptions that preclude the very possibility of objective knowledge. If the formulations of reason have no relevance to the deeper realities of experience, and if poetry is not predicated on rational knowledge, then it is not clear on what grounds objective truth can be claimed" (p. 16).

⁷ New Critical objections to Frye often dispute the objective status of these archetypes, which he thinks connect literary works to literature as a whole. For a thoughtful discussion of these criticisms, see Hazard Adams, "Blake and the Postmodern," in *William Blake: Essays for S. Foster Damon*, ed. Alvin H. Rosenfeld (Providence: Brown Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 3-17.

⁸ The typicality of Blake's lyrics and prophecies, in fact, makes him "formally popular" and "a key to imaginative experience for the untrained" (FI, 140-41).

⁹ For criticisms of Frye which ignore the social intentions of his work, see the references to him in *The Politics of Literature*, ed. Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter (New York: Vintage Books, 1973). To critics (and admirers) who assert that he neglects "the social reference of literary criticism," Frye replies, "I have written about practically nothing else" (SS, x).

¹⁰ See David V. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, rev. ed. (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1969), pp. 145, 178. For further evidence that Blake's social criticism found political reinforcement, see E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963), pp. 52, 832.

¹¹ For further support of this view, see M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York: Norton, 1971), pp. 334-42; Morton D. Paley, *Energy and the Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); and Harold Fisch, "Blake's Miltonic Moment," in *Blake: Essays for S. Foster Damon*, pp. 36-56.

¹² See SER, 48, 118-19 for further discussion of the "residual anarchism" that Frye locates at the heart of the movement. In *The Return of Eden* he finds a similar disillusionment with political action in Milton's poetry and suggests that the logic of literature itself pushes him to "find the true revolution within the individual" (112).

¹³ As Frye makes this point in *The Modern Century*, art liberates our imagination rather than provides us with "a statement both of what is believed to be true and of what is going to be true by a course of action" (116). Using our imagination frees us, but "all forms of politics, including the radical form, seem sooner or later to dwindle into a specialized chess game" (101).

¹⁴ Frye illustrates this point by appealing to romance in Romantic literature (SER, 37-40) and to Shakespeare's later plays (see *Fools of Time*, pp. 120-21, and *A Natural Perspective*, pp. 75-117).

¹⁵ "Presidential Address 1976," *PMLA*, 92 (May, 1977), 389. Frye consequently defended the university in the 1960's against those student activists who doubted the reality or value of its autonomy. See, for example, "The University and Personal Life," SM, 27-48.

¹⁶ See my "The Imagination as a Sanction of Value: Northrop Frye and the Uses of Literature," *Centennial Review*, 21 (Spring, 1977), 105-117.

¹⁷ See Langbaum's "The Function of Criticism Once More," in *The Modern Spirit* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 5, 7.

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