The Play and Place of Criticism

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Think of poetry, dear B——, think of poetry, and then think of—Dr. Samuel Johnson! Think of all that is airy and fairy-like, and then of all that is hideous and unwieldy; think of his huge bulk, the Elephant! and then—and then think of the Tempest—the Midsummer Night’s Dream—Prospero—Oberon—and Titania!

(Poe, "Letter to B——")

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1 I am indebted to Frank Lentricchia of the Department of English, University of California at Los Angeles, who pointed this quotation out to me after becoming acquainted with the essay that follows. Thus only while this volume was being readied for the printer did I become aware of a passage whose polemical relevance might well have inspired my title and my approach to Northrop Frye had I come upon it earlier. Can Poe on Johnson fail to remind us of Frye’s model, Blake, on Johnson’s colleague, Reynolds?
The three essays which follow were originally conceived and written independently of one another, and within only a most general format. They could be expected only coincidentally to make up a total consideration of their subject. Consequently, it seemed to me that I might best introduce and organize them by creating a context for them: by commenting both on the theoretical situation upon which that extraordinary volume, the *Anatomy of Criticism*, made its extraordinary impact and on the aftermath of that impact.

Whatever the attitude toward Northrop Frye's prodigious schemes, one cannot doubt that, in what approaches a decade since the publication of his masterwork, he has had an influence—indeed an absolute hold—on a generation of developing literary critics greater and more exclusive than that of any one theorist in recent critical history. One thinks of other movements that have held sway, but these seem not to have depended so completely on a single critic—nay, on a single work—as has the criticism in the work of Frye and his *Anatomy*. For example, pervasive as was T. S. Eliot's influence, it joined almost at once and indistinguishably with that of a number of followers who tried to systematize the master's casual essays drawn together from here and there. But with Frye, there is no difficulty disengaging master from disciple, nor even Frye's own later and lesser works from the masterwork. His followers and his ensuing works produce in the main simplifications and extensions of—even footnotes to—the *Anatomy*, the Word propagated and translated, thinned in order to be spread.

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2 In *Northrop Frye in Modern Criticism: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. Murray Krieger (Columbia, 1966). Mine is the introductory essay to that volume. The three essays here mentioned are referred to later as the work of Angus Fletcher, W. K. Wimsatt, and Geoffrey H. Hartman.
The Place of Criticism

The unequalled sweep with which the Anatomy has gathered to itself our theoretical imaginations is largely due to the unequalled sweep with which it claims to embrace our entire conceptual world. Frye's incomparable power among many of us may well be traced, as Geoffrey Hartman suggests, to his universalism, his system-making daring, his unmitigated theoretical ambition, his unlimited reach—even where some would say it has exceeded his grasp. His power may be traced also, as Angus Fletcher and Hartman both suggest, to his revitalizing the flow of a romantic sensibility and vision that the critical tradition after Eliot, with the austerity of its would-be classicism, had too long congealed. Fletcher well reminds us that Frye terms himself an Odyssean rather than an Iliad critic, and Hartman credits him with the recovery of romance for us all as well as with the recovery of the romantic arrogance that strives for the universal completeness of a man-centered, man-created logos. There is a satisfying lack of inhibition in the cosmic pretension with which Frye permits the imagination to chart the galaxies dreamed of by human desires. And this pretension, in its very recklessness, has seized the imagination of the rest of us, long inhibited by the unyielding finitude flung upon us like a blanket by the critical tradition of T. E. Hulme and Eliot. The audacity of Frye's mythophilia is an alternative appealing through the very assertion of its autonomy. Responsible only to itself and, thus, to our dreams of wish-fulfillment, the free-ranging mythic universe shifts its galaxies at will to answer every need. It freely rotates in patterns beyond the fixed sublunary purposes of our pedestrian interests which require the universe to stand still. As pedestrians, we persist in hunting for equations, echoes, parallels, or just analogues among Frye's schematic groupings; and we do find some—or almost do, but not quite. Shifts in axis give each of his constellations a different center. Together they elude our two-dimensional spatial need to systematize and thus assimilate them.

Such diagrammatic attempts to freeze the dynamic fluidity of Frye's categories account for the simplifications and reductions that Frye's followers and opponents have worked on the original grand mythic scheme in order to make it hold still either to be applied or to be attacked. And his followers have been at least as guilty as his opponents. Indeed on occasion his own more popularly directed essays have as seriously sacrificed the earlier shifting fullness of his entire scheme. It is true, of course, that critics who tried to take Frye whole could not then put him to their uses; they could only apprehend him aesthetically as having the unusable completeness of a
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poetic entity. So it must for the most part be said that we have not been responding to the totality of his modes in their own deceptive movements so much as we have been, as followers, adapting his work or, as antagonists, disposing of it for our own more parochial purposes. However we have been using him by putting him to our tests, we have not paused sufficiently to accommodate ourselves to him or him to the total march of critical theory. Few except the most faithful (and these therefore too uncritically) have selflessly tried to uncover the source of his power, together with the cost—the expense in theoretical soundness—which that power exacts. We must attempt that critical search, however, with a daring that matches his daring if not, alas, with a wit that matches his wit.

The educational concerns of Frye and the educational possibilities of his work have been largely responsible for the reduction of certain isolated aspects of his theories into fixed and simplified programs. His large-scale categorizing, the tendency to outline, the invention of a nomenclature—all have misled the pseudo-scientific among his followers into making of him a framework for teaching and for literary study. Programmatic applications have begun to appear in places like *College English* and in textbooks, and we can expect more of them. Frye's admitted propensity to spatialize literature has led others to spatialize him, to flatten him into the firmness of diagram. But often there is too little awareness that his space can be Einsteinian, its relations defiant of the two-dimensional page, its categories as slippery as time itself. Frye is far more difficult and deceptive than others have often made him or than he has often made himself in writings after the *Anatomy*. Too frequently, then, the swirling galaxies of Frye's autonomous universe have been fixed in a single position, as by geocentric man, in accordance with the terra firma commanded by pedagogic interests. And what made that universe so uniquely provocative—its elusive, free-swinging character—is lost.

The sublunary concerns of rival theorists have led them to be similarly partial. Without his dedication to an autonomous projection of a universal schematics, his antagonists have had to reduce him to the traditional terms

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3 Originally I thought of using *systematics* instead of *schematics* here. But, as Frye points out in his respondent essay to this volume (which I took the editor's privilege of reading before my remarks went to press), his categories and modes might better be thought of as schematic than as systematic creations. The word *system*, used effectively by Hartman at the start of his essay, suggests too regular and philosophically consistent a structure for the bold, imaginative, often system-defying structures of a poet-theorist like Frye.

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that have guided the history of more modest critical theory.¹ The essay by
W. K. Wimsatt amply and effectively demonstrates the several varieties I
shall enumerate of the traditional theorists' impatience with Frye. With
their traditional theoretical criteria, they have manifested their distrust of
what they see as his too great trust in an eccentric and arbitrary pseudo­
logos. There has been the general complaint that Frye's shifting categories
produce not the brilliant dynamics of dialectic but the sloppiness of inconsis­
tency; but the complaint is accompanied by admiring bafflement at his
sleight-of-hand, at the way he evades the reductive and spatial impulse that
wants to "place" him. More specifically, there has, first, been the complaint
that he neglects, and at times flatly denies, the critic's task of evaluation; but
the complaint is often accompanied by the acknowledgment that he some­
times speaks effectively about taste and judgment. There has, secondly, been
the complaint that, in centering upon the literary relations of literature, he
irrevocably separates literature from its relation to life, from its mimetic
responsibility; but the complaint is often accompanied by the admission that
he, sometimes uneasily, wants it tied to life, even in the name of mimesis. It
has thus been charged that, while he emphasizes now one and now the other
of these desirable opposites, he cannot fuse them systematically, that he has
not shown how, "the actual being only a part of the possible," "literature . . . neither reflects nor escapes from ordinary life."² There has,
thirdly, been the complaint that Frye's archetypal interests cheat the indi­
vidual work of its uniqueness by seeing it only as another translation of the
universal story, but this complaint should be accompanied by an awareness
that Frye does attend to detailed meaning-functions in the more minute
levels or "phases" which he attributes to the many-leveled literary symbol.
Or, to move in the other direction, we should remember that the archetypal
gives way to the all-involving anagogic phase which carries in itself the
potential identity of every part of man's myth, both before and in the
individual work: the microcosm become macrocosm, but—as always in the

¹ My own earlier treatment of Frye (A Window to Criticism: Shakespeare's
Sonnets and Modern Poetics [Princeton, 1964], pp. 42-49, 207n) is representative
of this partial view of Frye's multiple schemes, a view that limits him to what one's
own limited position would make of him. I am not confessing to being wrong so
much as to treating him only insofar as this treatment was relevant to the fixed
concerns of the modern critical tradition. Since his is a revolution against this
tradition, both in substance and in attitude, against its conception of the very nature
of critical discourse, my terms could not be meant to be relevant to his totality.
italics].
circular pattern—only as the converse is also true. The movement from literal to archetype and from archetype to anagoge, as it swirls, deprives us of these complaints. Still it allows us, in our sublunary language, to complain now about what we insist on terming inconsistency, discursive irresponsibility, even if our Blakean poet-critic claims, in his lunar dialectic, to soar beyond our downward pull. For example, we find Wimsatt condemning Frye on the one hand for being too Chicagoan in his multiplication of differentiated categories, on the other hand for being too Platonic in his archetypal universals that blur all distinctions and all particulars, and, beyond both, for allowing the two jarring inadequacies to become inconsistencies as well. But what we learn we are learning about Wimsatt and the habits of the traditional theoretical intelligence as well as about the will-o’-the-wisp imagination of the poet as theorist or theorist as poet.

To reckon honestly and totally with Frye, then, to uncover the source and the cost of his power, we must for the occasion soar with him to his lunar universe with its modes that change their faces and shift their places in accordance with a reckless dialectic of dream that shades every point we focus upon and slides across our sober, sublunary, daytime complaints. It is precisely the opposition of the lunar to the sublunary that characterizes Frye’s flight from the dominant critical tradition—from Hulme through Eliot to the New Critics—that preceded the fervent revolution he perpetrated. His departure accounts for the true basis of their resistance to him and his sway. About no claim are those I once termed “the new apologists for poetry” more constant or even dogged than the claim that poetry should reveal, and should be limited by, our worldly experience: what Dr. Johnson called “the real state of sublunary nature,” product of what Keats called “the dull brain [that] perplexes and retards.” These theorists speak as with one voice for the true poet’s capacity to respect the drag of material reality, to convert the handicaps of a finite existence and a finite language into victories of an imagination that never forgets or rejects its basis in common experience.

Their early spokesman, Hulme, may have been their most intemperate in his attack on romanticism by way of his defense of classicism:

What I mean by classical in verse, then, is this. That even in the most imaginative flights there is always a holding back, a reservation. The classical poet never forgets this finiteness, this limit of man. He remembers always that he is mixed up with earth. He may jump, but he always returns back; he never flies away into the circumambient gas.

You might say if you wished that the whole of the romantic attitude seems
to crystallise in verse round metaphors of flight. Hugo is always flying, flying over abysses, flying up into the eternal gases. The word infinite in every other line.\(^6\)

We can see his nearly violent scorn translate what I have been calling Frye's lunar universe of swirling galaxies into "circumambient gas." But in Hulme's extreme statement we can see the basis for the theoretical antagonism to Frye's romantic creativity—a classicist might call it romantic escapism—by the critical tradition he has pretty well supplanted. The antagonism can be traced to the unromantic doctrine of the fall of man which leads the Hulmean to call for earthbound man to recognize and even celebrate his limitations and to avoid the humanist's arrogance that, denying the Fall, disdains the earth for the arbitrary heavens of his own creation. (Clearly in this essay and in the one with which I conclude my volume, I am trying to account for two opposed concepts of the literary imagination: one that relates it to the limiting world in which it finds itself and another that relates it to the unlimited world it would create for itself—thus the downward spirit of gravity that binds and the upward spirit of Ariel that loosens.)

One after another of the New Apologists pays tribute to the poet's capacity to dedicate himself to his material finitude. We can recall that John Crowe Ransom related the unique power of poetry to the rich contingency of the world's body in its earthy density. Poetry for Ransom shows its power by devoting itself to—not evading—the furniture of our world, its dull, burdensome obstacles to our will to flight. We can project what would be his opposition to Frye from his early attack on "Platonic poetry," where he joins the battle for Dinglichkeit against a disembodied utopia. Or Allen Tate makes his doctrine of "tension" begin at its lower end with literal reality, no matter how transcendent the symbolic levels into which it opens. In his later work "tension" becomes the "symbolic imagination," which, beginning from the "common thing," "carries the bottom along with it, however high it may climb." The inadequate alternative to the symbolic imagination is the "angelic imagination," which bypasses the earthly, over-leaps and cheats the condition of man, "in the illusory pursuit of essence." This "angelism of the intellect," performed by a Frye-like creature too anxious to renounce his sensuous being and to become angel instead of man, can be seen as the poetic weakness deriving from Gnosticism. Or we can recall Eliseo Vivas' constant insistence on the poet's chief obligation to the

"primary data of experience" or my own claim that the ultimate function of a contextual poetry is to provide existential revelation.

The dedication to the existential is often accompanied, in the modern critical tradition, by the interest in the tragic and the ironic. The difference in Frye's emphasis can be seen point by point. He condemns "existential projection" as the false attempt to destroy the autonomy of the literary universe by reducing it to our lowly experiential world. For literature to pursue a relation between itself and the existential would be, for Frye, an abdication of its high destiny, of its obligation to minister to the creative human desire rather than to open for us the destructive realities of the human condition. Literature is made out of prior literature, not life; it yields poetic, mythic categories, not existential ones. The relation of a central tragic concern to our existential sense seems clear enough from what has been said; this concern can be followed as a major theme in recent criticism before Frye. That his own work centers on comedy and romance, spring and summer, rather than the autumn of tragedy, Fletcher and Hartman, as I have said, make abundantly clear in their essays. Frye dwells on rebirth and not death, not on the descent to the underworld but on the return and the upward movement within the circle which man uses to construct his sense of his destiny. Similarly, irony, which became so conclusive a literary (and existential) quality for critics before Frye, is by him seen as the lowest reach of the downward movement of displacement from pure myth, to be gone through almost before we arrive at it; for irony derives its major excitement for Frye from our capacity to see in it, paradoxically, the beginnings of the upward movement that can return us to the undisguised gods.

Frye and the modern critical tradition, then, should, in their opposition, come to be recognized as utter alternatives, indeed as very little less than mutually exclusive. In spite of my earlier worries about the inadequacy of diagrams in dealing with Frye, let me try the accompanying diagram as an immediate indication of this opposition between him and the modern critical tradition.

In traditional modern theory the critic is seen as viewing the individual work in its relations to the actual world of experience (including the world of art) even as that world is in part defined by the work in its internal relations. The endless variations among such theories depend on how these relations achieve their definitions and their priorities. According to the revolutionary theory of Frye the critic is first seen making a downward movement to the work and the world. This movement is an echo of the
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downward movement toward displacement and the reality principle that literature makes in its historical movement from unencumbered myth through mimetic forms to irony, although with the latter's promise to return. For myth, like a god, enters history's downward path, marching through history in a variety of displaced forms before the eschatological return to oneness. The critic, too, moves through the lowering displacements of the individual work, the limitations placed on its meanings and movements by its discreteness, its persistent attempt to become a unique self-enclosure. As man, the critic makes a similar downward movement through the unresponsive realities of the unelevated sublunary world. But there is an answering upward movement and return, as in the archetypes of rebirth and of the quest myth: the critic moves from the individuated work, as man

moves from the unenlightened world, upward to his imaginative home, which is their (the work's and the world's) imaginative transposition. This is the world as remade by human desire, man's dream, which as creative act makes a world in which man chooses to live. If the critic's downward movement is made in accordance with the reality principle, the upward movement is made in accordance with the pleasure principle—pleasure rendered innocent as the creation of unfallen man. Thus Freud's development and hierarchy, from pleasure to reality, are reversed. The critic moves from displacements, in their variations seen in multiple singleness, to the pure revelations of the oneness into which all single variations empty. It is as if the work and the sublunary world, suffering similarly under the curse of the Fall, the curse of individuation, were—with critic as midwife—reborn as the Platonic One of which all human experience and all art are in quest.

But the other arrow from the critic indicates that he has also moved
directly to this world-as-dream, in an upward movement of unmediated vision. I have warned earlier of the spatial inadequacies of diagrams applied to Frye's schematics. In my diagram of the critic's movements we also find space betrayed and deepened by time. For the critic has had his world of culture—created by himself as poet—prepared all the time for the ascent from the individual work and the world. Until this point we have described the critic as making two movements. The first is downward: he has, as critic, descended to the work and, as man, he has descended to the world. (Indeed, he has descended to what, from the view on high, seems to be the underworld.) But, preparing to make his second movement, which is the upward return, he need not relate work and world to one another since both are to be dissolved into something higher. At this stage the literary work is seen only as it is related to the world of literature, of culture, of dream—only as it evolves out of literary causes. For the fallen world must be raised rather than allowed the praise of art; it must be transformed and not transcribed. Neither subject nor object, the fallen world is what poetry—in its creation of its properly human subject and object—must leap across. But now we discover that there has also been a third movement all along, made prior to and independently of the others, even as it is also made simultaneously with them. The downward and upward movements arrive at the place where the critic has always been, a place to which he must always immediately move. Out of the work and the world, out of the downward movements made by both critic as critic and critic as man, both critic and man make the return to the imaginative world, to the world as man wills to have it, although it is the very world which, as Blakean poet, he has already created from the beginning.

In contrast, then, to the careful distinctions among entities, functions, subject and object drawn by traditional modern theory, in Frye's theory subject, object, and universal—critic, man, poet, work, world, and literature or world-as-dream—all merge into the One that receives all, the One that the world-as-dream becomes even as it becomes the all-transforming creative act of man. No wonder critics in the wake of Frye have devoted themselves increasingly to "vision" and visionaries, to romantic and utopian poets-philosophers. Further, since his notion of epiphany does permit Frye to leave open the possibility of a momentary breakthrough of the desired into the real, of utopia into the resistant world of things, his position can—like an earlier romanticism—have immediate political consequences for those who are in earnest about the egalitarian possibilities of the "classless"
society. In all these respects, a vision is being pressed that apparently seeks to define, in the extremest terms possible, the humanist and romantic attitude which Hulme so bitterly denounced in the name of the classic and Christian traditions. It is as if Hulme's too simple caricature of romanticism had truly created itself out of his projections and now reached back to haunt the tradition he so sternly sought to protect. As Hulme saw it would have to be, the romantic attitude is born with the denial that the Fall can touch the human imagination; and this denial leads to the arrogant assertion that man creates, *ex nihilo*, like a god, out of his desires.—And he saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.—For in that creation man has eluded the traps of the fallen world of experience which would desecrate the innocence of imagination. This imagination is enabled to dream its golden dreams in its transcendence of the brazen world that, in its spirit of gravity, exerts a downward pull.

If the words *golden* and *brazen* recall us to Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*, it is as it should be, since Frye's use of Sidney's opposition of the golden world to the brazen world has been with us from the beginning. Frye's multiple schemes have sought to enclose nothing less than the entire history of human culture as the history of the forms created by man's imagination; and the forms, as archetypal, are seen to be controlled by the principle of eternal return. Therefore, what could be more fitting than to approach the center, the *primum mobile*, of these multiple schemes by way of Frye's own archetypal image? I find this image most clearly in the *Apology* of Sidney even as it came to him from Plato and passed from him to Shelley, though with less precision of adaptation than we find in Frye.

We can begin with Sidney's noted definition of the poet as being in no way limited to created nature but creating his own: "... only the Poet... lifted up with the vigor of his owne invention, dooth growe in effect, another nature... so as hee goeth hand in hand with Nature, not inclosed within the narrow warrant of her guifts, but freely ranging onely within the Zodiack of his owne wit." The word *Zodiack* should bring us at once to the area of imagery I have been pressing in Frye, that which

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7 In view of my own insistence on Frye's swirling galaxies and my attempt here to relate them to Sidney's "Zodiack of his owne wit," I must record the coincidental title of an essay by John Holloway, "The Critical Zodiac of Northrop Frye," in *The Colours of Clarity* (London, 1964), pp. 153–60. This essay does not refer to Sidney or to the theoretical context of the *Apology*, and I came upon it after my own essay—largely grounded in the Sidney reference—was well under way; but I did find the Holloway title comforting. I am indebted to my colleague and this volume's bibliographer, John E. Grant, for pointing out this review of the *Anatomy*. 
Wimsatt reminds us of when he quotes Frye's vision of man's imagination building its "cities out of the Milky Way." But a bit later we find Sidney, in freeing the poet from subservience to fact (he need "borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be"), frees him to "range onely rayned with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be, and should be." To range freely within the zodiac of one's own wit is apparently the same as ranging into the divine consideration of what may be and should be. Clearly wit, as imagination or invention, must be connected to the transcendent world of the ought-to-be. And so it is, in a quotation which comes between the two that I have cited and allows one to be transposed to the other. Anxious lest his reader, in a Hulme-like mood, accuse him of elevating man and his wit to God's level, Sidney tries to account for creative man in a fallen universe:

Neyther let it be deemed too sawcie a comparison to ballance the highest poyn of mans wit with the efficacie of Nature: but rather give right honor to the heavenly Maker of that maker: who having made man to his owne likenes, set him beyond and over all the worke of that second nature, which in nothing hee sheweth so much as in Poetrie: when with the force of a divine breath, he bringeth things forth far surpassing her dooings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accused fall of Adam: sith our erected wit, maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will, keepeth us from reaching unto it.

In this properly Platonic concession, our wit is exempt from the Fall, although our will is thoroughly subject to it: our "erected wit" which can apprehend perfection and our "infected will" which cannot attain it. The brazen world of things as they are, the coarsening individuation of God's world, is the product of our infected will even though our erected wit can within its zodiac range freely, imagining the archetypal perfections of the golden world, the world before the Fall, Platonically governed by the divine considerations of things as they should be. For the erected wit, the free range within its zodiac can never be arbitrary but must automatically bring it to range within its archetypal home, where the perfection of things as they should be works heavenly alchemy on the baser metals wrought by our sublunary will. For in its erect, upward-reaching state, the wit's zodiac is that of the Platonic heavens. The freedom from the Fall granted to wit is like that granted by Frye to his imagination. And it is like that which is found in Hulme's hostile definition of romanticism.

Sidney's elevated world of wit is the world of the poem, as high-flying and as anti-existential as Frye's. The world of things as they should be draws the zodiac of the poet's wit to merge with its own: it thus becomes the free
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creation of that wit. This world produces "in Tantalus, Atreus, and such like, nothing that is not to be shunned. In Cyrus, Aeneas, Ulisses, each thing to be followed...." We seem to be in Frye's world of attraction and repulsion in accordance with desire, the wish-fulfillment that produces his things as they should be: the "demonic imagery" as "the presentation of the world that desire totally rejects" and its supernal opposite, the "apocalyptic imagery," "the categories of reality in the forms of human desire."8 Further, as Sidney insists that the poet's should-be world is merely a "figuring forth," that "for the Poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lyeth," that the stage "Thebes" is not the geographical "Thebes" because the poet speaks "not affirmatively, but allegorically, and figuratively," we sense his closeness to Frye's insistence on the supposed, as-if world of literature: "Literature is a body of hypothetical thought and action: it makes, as literature, no statements or assertions" (The Well-Tempered Critic, page 149).

It should please Frye for us to have uncovered his archetype in some passages of Sidney.9 Indeed, he should welcome our finding this early source as evidence of his claim that in the history of the human imagination all is new only as it is old, the new word but a new version of the old word, in the spirit of his own essay "New Directions from Old."

He should, of course, be quick to point out two serious differences between Sidney and himself. First, Frye can go all the way to the golden world of man's wit and remain

8 Anatomy, pp. 147 and 141. The golden world, for Frye as for Sidney, must always be defined by negative as well as positive fiat, by what we will not have as well as what we must have. Thus, in The Educated Imagination (Indiana, 1964), pp. 98–100, as Frye extends literature beyond "only a wish-fulfillment dream" by turning to tragedy as well as to "romances and comedies with happy endings," it is only to show how literature deals with the negation of desire as well as desire, what we reject as well as what we want, nightmare as well as bliss. He can justify the horror of the blinding of Gloucester in Lear as "not the paralyzing sickening horror of a real blinding scene, but an exuberant horror, full of the energy of repudiation... as powerful a rendering as we can ever get of life as we don't want it." The "most vicious things" presented in literature produce an "exhilaration" from the fact that "they aren't really happening." Here we are—even in tragedy—in full flight from the world of experience to the world as we would have it or as we refuse to have it. The world of the literary imagination, Frye says in The Well-Tempered Critic, "is the universe in human form, stretching from the complete fulfillment of human desire to what human desire utterly repudiates..." (p. 155).

9 Of course I am not claiming that Sidney is a unique source or that these doctrines are original with him. Further, one finds similar images in many places, if not within so similar and extensive a theoretical framework. One should notice, for example, that the development in America, in the nineteenth century, of the theory of fictional romance—as in many passages in the writings of Hawthorne and Henry James—is filled with heavenly and, more specifically, lunar imagery.

in it, while Sidney cannot systematically sustain his gesture to imagination since he is pulled back to the dully imitative by the conservative Italian critical tradition that claimed him. Frye has no Scaliger tugging at him to keep him from the total embrace of his grandest claims. Secondly and more basically, Frye explicitly and continually divorces his humanist-romantic attitude from all metaphysical claims, so that his golden world is the product only of the human imagination and has no other sanction. Like Sidney’s Platonic realm, Frye’s zodiac of man’s wit is related to the world as it should be. But this world has nothing of the metaphysically divine in it as it does for Sidney; the wit creates its zodiac which, responsive only to its creator, has no true home in the sky. So if one believes he can term Frye a Platonist, he must confront this crucial qualification to his claim, a qualification that might suggest Freud as an alternative influence. Freud rather than Jung, since Jung’s archetypes also demand a metaphysis that Frye must reject. Frye’s mythic gods, like Freud’s neuroses, are related to our wishes and the frustration of these wishes, and in each case their displacement can give rise to literary creation. However, while displaced meaning is private for the Freudian poet, in response to secret wishes and secret frustrations, for Frye displaced meaning—like the wishes that create it—is universal and shared, the public property of the common human imagination which created and always recreates those gods. In this departure from Freud, Frye joins Sidney in celebrating the universals of the should-be world, despite his rejection of the metaphysical sanction for them as they are derived from Plato.

The relation of Frye to Plato, however incomplete, should recall us to Ransom’s charge of Platonism and Tate’s charge of “angelism” or Gnosticism against those who bypass the world of sense for an unmediated

11 Frye himself distinguishes the romantic humanist from the Renaissance Christian humanist in terms of the latter’s invocation of the Fall. See the important essay “The Imaginative and the Imaginary,” in *Fables of Identity*, pp. 151–67, especially pp. 159–60. He seems, however, less aware of the metaphorical similarities between himself and Renaissance Platonism than he is of the metaphysical difference between them.

12 Frye can try to make his “desire” something more than either whim or the Freudian wish. Speaking of the imaginative in “The Imaginative and the Imaginary,” in *Fables of Identity*, he can say, “The drive behind [the imaginative] we may call desire, a desire which has nothing to do with the biological needs and wants of psychological theory, but is rather the impulse toward what Aristotle calls telos, realizing the form that one potentially has” (p. 152). But this introduces a metaphysical dimension that he dare not develop, so that for him “desire” usually seems to carry its normal meanings and implications. He can urge but he cannot earn a distinction between “the creative and the neurotic.”
admission to the world of essence. Wimsatt's essay speaks similarly and with
disfavor of Frye's "Gnostic mythopoeia." It is worth remembering that, in
his conclusion to the *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957), on which
he collaborated with Cleanth Brooks, Wimsatt spoke against both "the
Platonic or Gnostic ideal world views" and "the Manichaean full dualism
and strife of principles." The thirst for essence made the first too airy a
flight from gravity, while the over-absorption in the evil of the fallen world
kept the second too unelevated, too trapped in gravity's downward pull. As
orthodox Christian, Wimsatt would resolve the two critical heresies by way
of the divine-earthly mystery of the Incarnation. His polemical writings that
have followed this statement have pursued this double assault. Wimsatt has
attacked existential critics like me for Manichaean tendencies, and now his
linking of the anti-existential Frye to Gnosticism reveals him turning
against the opposed critical (and theological) heresy. Further, Frye's hu-
manistic liberation from Plato's metaphysic, the self-authentication of Frye's
Gnostic tendencies, only compounds his error in Wimsatt's eyes.

We have seen that, in contrast to the dark archetypes of Jung, the
archetypes of Frye have no metaphysical sanction. They are a humanistic
construct of common man in search of his dream which he creates out of his
need for wish-fulfillment. Thus the democratic universality of mythic struc-
tures is dependent on the universality, the commonness, of the structure of
human desires—even to the ultimately universal dream of man, the "class-
less" civilization. But this would seem to be an empirical claim, subject to
empirical evidence, and in need of an agreed-upon upward reading of the
stories of our literature in the direction of spring and summer, as the quest
for rebirth. In citing these two dominant archetypes of Frye, quest and
rebirth, I suggest that unromantic readers are more convinced by death than
rebirth, more convinced by the poverty they find than the pot of gold to
which the rainbow promises to lead them in quest. Since obviously the
history of our criticism has allowed many alternative readings of literature,
we must realize that, far from meaning an empirical claim, Frye is rather
creating, within the zodiac of *his* wit, galaxies that respond to his own
poetic vision, even as his vision responds to Blake's. It is a vision, gorgeously
complete in its dizzying schematics, that can be responded to by all cele-
brants of man in his spring and summer mood, the romantic singers of the
golden world, the utopist questers for an Eden that nostalgia will not permit
them quite to forget or forego and that irony will not permit them quite to
attain for the fallen daytime world.
Frye's vision must then be seen as his own construct of the world of our literature in terms of his desires, as he would like it to be. What he gives us is the authorization, indeed the licensing, of what earlier positivistic theorists and philosophers disparagingly used to call the "emotive," as they worried about the primary role of wish-fulfillment in the structures of poets and of too-ambitious philosophers. In the fashion of the early I. A. Richards, they used "emotive" to outlaw poetry from the realm of meaningful discourse, and apologists for poetry protested by trying to demonstrate how poetry did give meaning to life. But Frye rather insists on the emotive as poetry's only content and would not have it otherwise; he celebrates poetry precisely for the characteristic that its old enemies proclaimed as its weakness and that its old friends sought to deny. And his licensing poetry according to this definition is also the licensing of his own way of theorizing—so revolutionary in its relation to the theoretical tradition—and of his theory itself as a massive poetic vision with all its swirling galaxies.

The lunar sweep of vision—beyond "Dull sublunary lovers' love,/Whose soul is sense"—must prevent Frye from claiming, with many modern critics, that literature in the narrow sense has a unique role in creating that vision. For him the power of vision must be one with the power of the human imagination to create its structures, poetic or otherwise. The romantic imagination, in search of unmediated vision, must transcend the finite body of the poet's controlled precision in language just as we have seen it transcend the world's body itself. This my earlier diagram was designed to show. The philosopher, the critic—social-political as well as literary—must be admitted with the poet, so that, like Arnold before him, Frye is led outward from literature to culture and civilization at large, all of them products of imagination, nature (science's nature) given human form:

But it seems clear that Arnold was on solid ground when he made "culture," a total imaginative vision of life with literature at its center, the regulating and normalizing element in social life, the human source, at least, of spiritual authority. Culture in Arnold's sense is the exact opposite of an elite's game preserve; it is, in its totality, a vision or model of what humanity is capable of achieving, the matrix of all Utopias and social ideals. (The Well-Tempered Critic, page 154)

If Frye must liberate literature from sublunary experience, if, further, he must liberate the poet's imagination from bondage to the sublunary language allowed it by a Hulme-like critic, so he must liberate the critic from the stringent procedures of a sublunary critical discourse. For the critic
also is an imaginative creator of a lunar world. As Frye—in deference to the ubiquity and primacy of vision—permits the literary imagination to expand to a culture's or a civilization's imagination, as he allows literature to expand to include all structures of thought, so he clearly must include the critical imagination within the literary, within what Blake termed the "poetic genius." The fidelity of the critical imagination must be first to its own free creatures, even before its fidelity to the creatures of others, of the poets, and surely before its fidelity to the bounds of critical discourse as agreed upon by the theoretical tradition from Aristotle to—shall we say—Wimsatt. To the last, Frye seems to demand systematic irresponsibility, a willful recklessness. For his is not only a revolutionary conception of the poet and of criticism, but a revolutionary conception of the nature and function of critical discourse. Whatever may be the accuracy of Wimsatt's assault on Frye's discursive methods, we must ask whether it is appropriate to Frye's elusive disdain for the methodological presuppositions which underlie all such assaults; whether it "is like trying a man by the laws of one country, who acted under those of another," as Pope said of neoclassical attacks on Shakespeare. Unlike traditional theorists, Frye means to leap the barrier between discourses: between criticism and poetry, between himself and William Blake. To do so, he must tear criticism free of those very encumbrances that constitute the measure of Wimsatt's critique.

I have struggled myself with the limits of critical discourse, its conflicting fidelities to its poetic object, to theoretical procedure, and to its own nature. And I respond, if only fleetingly, to the impulse to throw over all but the last of these fidelities in an autotelic defiance. But every critic has always had to concern himself with that in poetry which makes it more than mere transcriber of the world even as it retains the need to reflect the world. His criticism, a part of the sublunary world, has had to creep along in its circumspect way and yet to soar, to share the common world of non-poetic language and yet to ape—however feebly—the sublime world of the poet's tongue. In its long history, the circumspect practice of criticism has hardly led to theoretical resolutions that leave us with the satisfactions of a final revelation. Its failures may be seen as reflecting this fallen world's gaps, its yawning discontinuities. Which of us has not wished to rise to a total vision of our task? Those won over by Frye indicate the risk some of us would run in hope of such a vision. As circumspect critics and theorists bound to this world, the others of us, after our long history, cannot point to such success as to allow us to reject Frye's radically alternative procedure with much
assurance—even if our circumspect habits force us to worry about what we must view as theoretical irresponsibility fully licensed and theoretically urged.

Every critic, then, whether before or after Frye, has had to find in poetry some kind of mediation between sublunary nature and the high seriousness of its own lunar world. Every critic should respond with sympathy to Frye’s reading of the close of *The Tempest* with its rebirth of innocence and Eden. The genial artist-magician has given substance to his vision in the world: "out of the cycle of time in ordinary nature we have reached a paradise . . . where spring and autumn exist together." "When Prospero’s work is done, and there is nothing left to see, the vision of the brave new world becomes the world itself, and the dance of vanishing spirits a revel that has no end."13

No wonder Frye sees *The Tempest* as clearly his play. I therefore find it appropriate to conclude with figures borrowed from it. In what has preceded I have tried to account for the resistance to the flightiness, the unearthly irresponsibility of the poet—and the critic after him—as Ariel. But we must remember that the stubborn earthly pull can lead downward to the poet and critic as Caliban, who in his earthbound darkness worshipped false gods. Clearly any critic or poet should prefer to be master of both Ariel and Caliban, to be Prospero, dedicated to the world, but to the world so transformed aesthetically, so commodious, so fit for human habitation, that he can abjure the magic that was the agent of this transformation. Here indeed would be a marriage between the poet-critic’s heaven and our hell, the marriage that Frye has radically sought to perform.