

Creation and Recreation
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980

Selected reviews by P. Joseph Cahill, Philip Drew, Donald Hair, Randy Harris, David Jeffrey, Frank McCombie, James M. Mellard, Malcolm Ross, and Diane Tolomeo.

Additional reviews are listed at the end.

1. P. Joseph Cahill. *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses* 10 (1981): 235–6.

In his magisterial *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye mentions creation only briefly. The metaphor is first mentioned as suggesting a parallel of art and organism, then as implying the image of birth. But the psychology of creation is not thematized. And recreation is, to my knowledge, mentioned but once. In these three lectures delivered under the auspices of Trinity College in the University of Toronto and St. Thomas Church in 1980. Frye turns his always stimulating attention to the metaphor of creation.

The creation activity of literature proceeds from an underlying vision of what society could be. Thus the creative profoundly disturbs our sense of the creation. For the truly creative expresses what our ordinary experience represses. But the vision of a new social future is always connected with the imaginative and creative efforts of the past. Recreation then is the renewed creativity of the past projected onto the future. The destructive models of Genesis (expulsion from paradise, flood) become the motivation while the creative activities of Genesis are the models for recreation.

The Western literary world's vision of creation and recreation has been determined by the biblical myth. This mythos, the narrative or words in sequential arrangement, has a long literary life in which the meaning is whatever the myth has been made to mean. And the myth itself is only understood when it is considered factually false so that the biblical creation story is effective by its power to transmit a sense of alienation now, the feeling of being currently surrounded by a nature not ours. Hence in the second chapter Frye insinuates what I take to be his principal notion that recreation is the activity of the critical reader who balances the two interpretative poles of past meaning and current relevance.

Dante's voyage becomes a journey back to the original creation. Here the passage of Adam is to the first creation which is then recreation. But the view of Dante is not the modern one. Rather is Blake's question to the Tyger. Did he who made the lamb make thee? the current problematic. Here creation is more of a ruin than beneficent design. Creation therefore is human recreation or the effort to get beyond the Tyger. And poetry, music, and painting become the three forms of conversing with paradise. So the arts are constitutively recreative. Getting beyond the Tyger reminds the reader of Frye's earlier citation of Oscar Wilde in which the Tyger may well stand for the actual screened-out lunatic country, the repressed which art evokes.

There is no question in my mind that Northrop Frye in a paragraph can throw more light on the Christian Bible than one usually finds in several issues of technical journals. His comprehensive retrospective imagination recommends these lectures as complementary to his earlier works and as a small prelude to his hopefully forthcoming work on the Bible.

I have two concluding observations. First is the note that Frye terminates his essays with recreation required on the part of the reader. This conclusion is of course an uncovenanted arrangement that places Frye's work in the currently vital area of hermeneutics. It is reminiscent of Collingwood not to mention Ricoeur's theory of sympathetic reenactment.

My second observation emerges from Frye's note that *Paradise Lost* is addressed to a reader and represents a transition from emphasis on the hero, on the past event, to stress on the current reader. This, it seems to me, is different from his position in the *Anatomy* where he consistently stresses that literature is not a form of direct address. I await further clarification of this point since I have the lingering conviction that classic religious literature is a form of direct address and can only be truly understood as such.

2. Drew, Philip. *Modern Language Review* 78 (October 1983): 880–1

This small elegantly-produced booklet contains the text of three lectures delivered by Professor Frye under the auspices of Trinity College, Toronto, and St. Thomas's Church. They examine, appropriately enough, creation in its cosmic and imaginative senses, though the actual creation of the universe is barely considered on a literal level. "The doctrine of divine creation," Professor Frye states firmly, "is among other things a linguistic device for shutting off the question "What happened before anything else happened?" Having thus deftly disposed of the great artificer and the big bang, the author is free to embark on a wide-ranging examination of creation myths and their analogues in the world of artistic originality, with further glances at the creative impulses of society in general. It will be plain that the development of these parallels is facilitated by a very generous interpretation of myth, a latitude which will not be unexpected by those who are familiar with Professor Frye's major writings. "At the centre of [man's] technical achievements is his transformation of a part of his natural environment into a nature with a human shape and a human meaning." This transformation, which is essentially inward looking, is for Professor Frye the central work of human creativity (or "re-creation") and is at the heart of all myths and mythologies.

His particular concern here is of course with the myths of creation. He analyses them with such subtlety and richness of allusion that it is impossible in a summary to do justice to the comprehensiveness of his argument. The basis of his discussion is the contrast between two alternative creation myths, a Miltonic sky-father myth and a Blakean earth-mother myth, and the analogous types of re-creation. From there he proceeds by a kind of binary fission, every position being resolved into a pair of complementary opposites, an apt enough emblem of the dualism of Professor Frye's view of the world, in which man is "isolated from Nature by his own culture." To postulate such an alienation is to invite the obvious question: in what sense if any can the poets be said to offer us a true account of the world? It is clearly not in any simple sense, since language itself is of no service for making accurate direct statements about nature: "Words can describe things only approximately: all they do with any real accuracy is hang together, in puns, metaphor, assonances, and the self-contained fictions of grammar and syntax." Nor are the poets truthful in the traditional sense of seeing life more clearly than other men: "It is not only, perhaps not even primarily, the balanced and judicious people that we turn to for insight. It is also to such people as Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Hölderlin, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche. . . . Their vision is penetrating because it is partial and distorted: it is truthful because it is falsified." The appeal of the paradox is evident, but so is the danger of speaking paradoxically about truth. And again: "Only a distorted imagination that breaks away from all this [realism] and sees reality as a strange, wonderful, terrible, fantastic world is creative in the human sense of the term." It is not unfair to ask whether Bosch is really more creative than Rembrandt, whether Beckford is really more creative than Jane Austen. If not, perhaps human creativity is less closely allied than Professor Frye suggests with de-creation, and stands in a simpler mimetic relation to the natural world than he allows.

His style is, as ever, clear and suggestive by turns. He seems to me most helpful when he is writing straightforwardly about literature, most evasive when he is writing oracularly about

mythologies, but it is perhaps ungracious to complain of lack of simplicity in a set of lectures designed to convey the complexity of the human mind. In fairness to the author it must be said that *Creation and Recreation* occupies a curious middle ground. He may reasonably expect that readers of his earlier work, especially *Anatomy of Criticism*, will accept it as underpinning some of the necessarily sketchier arguments of the lectures. They in turn look forward to Professor Frye's larger project, his "study of the narrative and imagery of the Bible and its influence on secular literature." Although the lectures thus form as it were an isthmus between earlier and later enterprises they offer, as I have tried to indicate, substantial pleasures of their own. The sentiments of the conclusion are unexceptionable, and on his way where Professor Frye sheds light on such diverse topics as Oscar Wilde, typology, Michael Wigglesworth, the Popul Vuh, translation, and *The Winter's Tale*. His speculations are continuously original and fertilizing. What more can be asked from seventy pages?

3. Hair, Donald. "Begin at the Beginning." *Brick: A Journal of Reviews* 11 (Winter 1981): 38–9

The appearance of a new book by Northrop Frye is always an event, because one knows from experience that it will be, first and foremost, good reading. There is always the excitement of watching one of the best minds of our age taking up a new topic, and there are the delights of the style—the wit, the imagery, the wide-ranging allusions. *Creation and Recreation* does not disappoint. If one were a Victorian anthologist looking for the beauties of Frye, in somewhat the same way that Palgrave put together his *Golden Treasury* by looking for the beauties of English lyric poets, he would find plenty of treasure here. There are aphorisms, such as "The function of the recognizable in the arts is not aesthetic but anaesthetic" (p. 9); there are images, such as the mosquitoes, "mementoes of the fall" encountered by a Methodist circuit rider in the Canadian bush, or the window of a lit-up railway carriage at night (p. 6)—a figure that Frye himself finds haunting because it is, paradoxically, both window and mirror. The breadth of allusion is, as always in Frye, daunting. One expects references to Blake and Milton and Dante, but it is exciting to find use being made of writers like Paley and Derrida, Eliade and Wilde. Wilde in particular is central to much that Frye is saying, and it will not be surprising if this book brings about a rediscovery of "The Decay of Lying," "The Truth of Masks," and "The Critic as Artist." A friend of mine told me that he went straight from *Creation and Recreation* to *Intentions*; I did so, too, and with the same sense of excitement.

But it is the Bible which, finally, is central to *Creation and Recreation*—the Bible, and its place in our culture and imaginations. For some time now, Frye has been at work, as he tells us in the Preface, on a study of "the narrative and imagery of the Bible and its influence on secular literature." This volume, which consists of the Larkin-Stuart lectures, delivered early in 1980 under the auspices of Trinity College, Toronto, and St. Thomas Church, is a glimpse of that larger work. This brief look is enticing, and makes one long for more.

Most critics, faced with a subject as large and complex as this one, would wonder where to begin. The King of Hearts' advice to the White Rabbit, faced with a similar dilemma, is sound: "Begin at the beginning." That, after all, is how the Bible starts, but it is interesting to remember how often various systems of thought, like those of early mythographers, or of students of language in the eighteenth century, or of geologists and biologists in the nineteenth century, include an account of origins. On the face of it, an account of origins seems absurd, since no one was around to witness creation, and God's question to Job, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?", undermines for all time human endeavours of this sort. Nonetheless, man has been unusually persistent in investigating this topic, and the dilemma is resolved when we realize that speculation about origins is in fact a description of the character and purposes of nature, or man, or society, or art,

or whatever one is studying. Frye, it turns out, is studying all of these, and his main point is that creation is not an historical event, but “a part of the way that we see things” (p. 4).

This “way” is, in fact, two ways, and this double perspective permeates the book. Sometimes we look beyond ourselves, and see a world which is not of our making, and which certainly does not conform to our desires. This view gives us the myth of creation which we have in Genesis, in which a father makes a model world (the discrepancy between that world and ours then has to be explained by the myth of the fall); this view also gives us the myth of creation which is embodied in all the stories about a great earth-mother who is the source and end of all things. But if we look, not beyond ourselves but into ourselves, creation becomes, paradoxically, not a beginning but an end, and man himself is the creator, transforming all things into human shapes. This second way of seeing things is the basis of all the arts; it is man’s proper concern, and it is Frye’s chief interest. Important as is the creation myth in Genesis from a literary point of view (after all, it provided the English language with the material for its greatest epic poem), more important is what Genesis and *Paradise Lost* themselves represent: supreme examples of man’s creativity.

As Frye examines that creativity, the double perspective I have just described begins to dissolve. The sense of a world “out there” and a world within ourselves is a distinction that becomes increasingly difficult to hold on to. Our Western minds are so conditioned by the sharp division we make between subject and object that we find it difficult to deal with creation which is the paradoxical fusion of the two. In literature, that paradox is embodied in metaphor, where a thing is both itself and something else at the same time. In modern physics, the paradox is even sharper, and Frye himself draws attention to the parallel in a number of allusions, and in an especially interesting paragraph on p. 70, where he suggests that God is both a noun and a verb.

The importance of twentieth-century physics in our thinking about creation can scarcely be overrated. It is illuminating to read, along with *Creation and Recreation*, two popular books which, like the books by Chambers and Lyell in the mid-nineteenth century, have made the concepts of science available to a wide audience. Those books are Fritjof Capra’s *The Tao of Physics* (first published in 1975) and Gary Zukav’s *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* (first published in 1979, and a current best seller). Physics, as both Capra and Zukav point out, is a term derived from the Greek word “*physis*,” and that derivation indicates that the discipline’s central concern is to discover the essential nature of all things, or (in that inadequate and misleading image often used by journalists when reporting on science) the basic building blocks of the universe. That image is appropriate to the Newtonian model of the universe, in which time, space, matter, and gravity are the fundamental elements, and where nature is an object of study, governed by laws that are fixed for all time, and only waiting to be discovered. It is easy enough to see Newton’s model as the counterpart of the Biblical account of creation: God created the world, and man has been trying ever since to come to terms with it, and to understand it. Newton’s central image makes that understanding a bit easier to achieve, for, while the Bible gives us as images of creation a garden and a city, Newton gives us a machine—an image that found its final form at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Paley’s famous watch.

Subatomic physics undermines this view of creation in a fundamental way. In this area of study, the world is not fixed and dead, but an immensely complex dance of interrelated forces; matter, which seemed so solid to Newton and his followers, can become energy, and energy can become matter; the universe is not an object of study but the process of study itself, as physicists are increasingly concerned with probabilities, and with the predicting, not of things “out there” to be discovered, but of “tendencies to occur.” They are coming to realize, more and more, that there *are* “tendencies to occur” because there is an observer, because he wants these events to occur, and because he has developed the instruments to detect them. In short, the physicist has become the creator of the reality he sees. This conclusion, which seems, on the face of it, so absurd, is forced on us again and again, in a particularly intriguing way: not, as one might expect, by intuition and fiction, but by the basic

empirical techniques by which scientists discovered the nature of the Newtonian universe—that is, experiments which can be repeated. The experiments that have investigated the nature of light are, perhaps, most widely known. It is possible to prove that light is a particle, and it is possible to prove that light is a wave. The concepts exclude each other, and the experiments prove that the essential nature of light depends upon the observer, and upon the instruments and techniques he is using. Even more intriguing is Heisenberg's "uncertainty principle." This principle, based on firm empirical data, says that one cannot accurately determine, at the same time, the position and the momentum of a moving particle. The more accurate the measurement of its speed, the less accurate the determination of its location, and vice versa. The conclusion is inescapable: we cannot observe something without changing it; or—to go even farther—we create what we observe. The Newtonian model of the universe, with its fixed laws and its fundamental order, dissolves into a chaotic world of possibilities and probabilities, any of which will occur by pure chance, and where the only order is in the mind of the observer. As Capra says, "in atomic physics, we can never speak about nature without, at the same time, speaking about ourselves" (p. 72). Zukav is even more radical. "Physics," he says, "is the study of the structure of consciousness" (p. 31), and "our reality is what we choose to make it" (p. 29).

This statement brings us close to Wilde's 1891 aphorism—he calls it a "doctrine" in "The Decay of Lying," and, like many of Wilde's maxims, it must have seemed too outrageous to be taken seriously—the aphorism that "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life." But the statement turns out to be, as Frye says of all Wilde's work, prophetic. What do we see when we look at nature? Only those effects, Wilde argues, that we have created, "that we have already seen through poetry, or in paintings." Think what the "sea of grass" image has done for us in looking at the prairies, or how the canvasses of Tom Thomson have enabled us to see the Laurentian Shield. I often tell my students that, if they learn a new word, they will, within a short time, see it in half a dozen places where they have never seen it before. Try this, with a word like "eleemosynary," for instance. You see only what you know.

These ideas are exciting, but they are also distressing. Are we doomed forever to be prisoners of our own consciousness? Is there no world "out there"? Or, if there is a world "out there," can we never know it as it is? Modern physics gives no firm answers to these questions, or, if answers are proposed, the answers are paradoxes that duplicate the paradoxes of Eastern religions, especially the Taoism of Lao Tzu. Frye gives us no answers either. Sometimes he talks about creation as an act of God, independent of man, and sometimes he talks about creation as an act of man. This second act he calls a "recreation," and the term suggests the imitation of an original act, or a counter-movement to it. But it is not clear that, in fact, man's creativity is an imitation of anything, or a response to anything. So far as the problem of being prisoners of our own consciousness is concerned, Frye concludes with a vision which transcends only the individual but not the species: a vision of "a world-wide community of action and charity" (p. 73). Perhaps this resolution is sufficient, but questions remain, and one is drawn back to that paradoxical image that haunts Frye: the window of a lit-up railway carriage at night. Mirror or window? Frye, and Capra and Zukav, seem to suggest that it must be both.

4. Harris, Randy. *Our Books Atlantic* 4, no. 1 (9 January 1981).

Northrop Frye ranks easily among the foremost minds in the history of English literary criticism - certainly he is the most renowned and substantial critic currently publishing. His career spans well over thirty years, during which he produced major works of practical criticism on writers as diverse as Blake, Milton, Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot, as well as some of the century's finest theoretical works on the nature of criticism.

He has been called “the best mind in the business,” and one prominent Canadian critic has said of him, perhaps overexuberantly, that he stands “at the clear, unifying, and still centre of the order of words.” His influence on several generations of critics has been monumental and of international compass. His work has been translated into German, French, Italian, Spanish and Japanese. In Canadian letters, his theories can be found in the work of major writers like Eli Mandel and Margaret Atwood. He commands a very impressive figure.

And Northrop Frye is, of course, highly aware of his position. This awareness has unfortunately led to some degree of self-indulgence. His more recent books show a marked increase of personal references. Frye’s style has always been rather chatty, in the manner of Dryden or Mathew Arnold, but where these older critics are familiar and ingratiating, Frye is becoming merely grating.

The first word of his newest book, a slim edition of his 1980 Larkin-Stuart lectures entitled *Creation and Recreation*, is I. The tone is set. Barring articles and connectives, that word is the most frequently used one of the book. Before bringing a series of Oscar Wilde’s critical essays into the discussion, Frye feels compelled to explain where and why he last re-read them. By way of noticing that obsessive minds are often penetrating minds, he mentions his recent perusal of a re-issue of some of his own early reviews. A central analogy is introduced as “a figure that has haunted me since childhood.”

Self-indulgence is also manifest in the book’s sloppy editing. At times Frye addresses himself to his readers, and internal references are to other chapters. At other times he addresses the auditors of his original lectures, and he refers to what he has said the night before, or what he will say tomorrow night. His use of footnotes is as eclectic as ever and it is often difficult to determine which passages or allusions in the text will be noted, which will not. There is no superscription and little system of selection. Some of the references are inaccurate.

But Frye has never concerned himself much with details. His prospect is too broad. The declared subject of his book is the place of creation myths in literature. That subject is in fact more of a convenient rack upon which to hang his wide-ranging observations than a rigorous thesis. He moves with customary ease from Dante and Yeats to a little known colonial New England poet named Michael Wigglesworth. He moves from anthropology and philosophy to oblique commentaries on Canadian politics. The breadth of his learning is vast, and his command of literature astonishing. Yet the book is never obscure. Frye’s great aim is to democratize criticism, and he doesn’t hesitate to define briefly, inoffensively, critical terms as commonplace as *metaphor* and *mythos* for the uninitiated. *Creation and Recreation* is an offshoot of a major study, an eagerly awaited volume on the narrative and imagery of the Bible that Frye has been working on for the past eight years. He is an ordained minister, and hence concerned very much with scripture. But he is primarily a critic and confines his published investigations of the Bible to its literary qualities and influence on secular writing. He is not afraid of stating that Genesis is a humanly generated myth, not a divinely revealed truth—it is one of a series of sky father creation myths. The scriptural account of creation has truth, but is that of literature. It is an accurate statement of mankind’s profound sense of alienation and imperfection. The heart of Genesis is true, irrespective of factual veracity.

Northrop Frye is a brilliant, highly educated man, and despite the self-consciously oracular pose he strikes here, he brings all his intellectual equipment to bear in this book, as he does in all his writing. And the saving grace of this self-indulgence is wit. Frye writes with more wit than anyone in Canadian letters, Ms. Atwood not excepted. Serious students of literature need not be told to purchase this book, they will do so on reflex. For those unfamiliar with Frye’s work, it is an interesting and acute engagement with the greatest literary mind Canada has produced.

5. Jeffrey, David. *Canadian Literature* 91 (Winter 1981): 111–17.

Northrop Frye's contribution to the field of criticism has been both extraordinary and extraordinarily influential. Indeed, his stature has grown great enough that it must seem almost heretical to express a reservation concerning his work. For all that, Frye's latest volume demonstrates that accustomed reverence (no matter how deserved) can generate excessive promotion: some lectures by great Professors should remain unprinted.

Creation and Recreation, a kind of review, by Frye, of himself, was delivered as three Larkin-Stuart Lectures early in 1980 at Trinity College in the University of Toronto. The series is quasi-confessional, marked by a self-conscious replaying of earlier notes, and exhibits too much awkward self-justification. Beyond their collective title (there are no individual essay titles) it is finally difficult to say otherwise precisely what the essays are meant to be about—except, as acknowledged, that they “draw on earlier material,” and involve more than a few “glimpses of charter territory.” Yet the volume raises serious questions about Frye's general doctrine.

The first of the present essays concerns itself primarily with the concept of creation. As rhetorical foil, Frye adduces two opposing views of Creation. First there is the sometime Protestant view, which he identifies with Karl Barth, in which God is sole Creator, man merely creature. The other is the liberal humanist position (presumably represented for Frye by figures such as Feuerbach), which argues that the notion of a creating God is merely projected from the observation that man is maker, *homo faber*. Frye's own dialectic depends on this binary opposition of possible hypotheses as well as upon his evident preference for the second theory. (Some readers may find Frye's one-choice argument to be somewhat disadvantaged by its omission of other theories which have long played a dominant role in literature and criticism, an example of which would be the “creation-subcreation” view represented by modern writers as diverse as J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers and Paul Ricoeur.)

Frye's literary guide through the first essay of this collection is not Blake, but Oscar Wilde. In his own essay, “Wilde had argued that the creative arts are essentially forms of “lying,” or turning away from the external world. Frye applies Wilde's attack on realism as a principle—that which in art is recognizable “Creation” is in fact *dis*creative: for Frye, “the function of the recognizable in the arts is not aesthetic”; creation is their “non-creative element.” This assertion leads Frye (although it might have led him elsewhere) to a kind of Nietzschean dictum:

the humanly creative is whatever profoundly disturbs our sense of “the” creation, a reversing or neutralizing of it. The encounter of God and man in creation seems to be rather like what some of the great poets of nuclear physics have described as the encounter of matter with anti-matter: each annihilates the other. What seems one of the few admirable forms of human achievement, the creation of the arts, turns out to be a kind of decreation: I might have called my lectures “Creation and Decreation”. . . .

The relationship between recreation and decreation, in any normal sense of these words, is oblique enough that their virtual equation is jarring. Vandalism, for example, is sure to be adduced by some sociologist or other as a species of play, but even a sociologist is unlikely to regard child's play and vandalism in his own household with the same loving eye. Something has gone wrong with Frye's language here, and I point to it only because it is indicative of premise and method, both as they apply to his generalized hermeneuticism and to his specific recapitulation in this group of essays.

C.S. Lewis, dealing with similar insights into the nature of creative process could almost agree with Frye that the psyche of the artist is more central to his art than is the (ostensibly) objective reality with which his art must conjure. Lewis suggested, however, that there are various degrees of intention in the artist, occupying a spectrum between the “reality” (i.e., Creation) outside, and the self (i.e.,

creation) inside. Points of intention have significant valence for the way in which we “read” art, since, by definition, there are real differences along this spectrum with respect to commitment to conversation with the reader. And there are differences between authors in the degree of overt commitment they have to “lying” either with story, or with language. In *The Great Divorce* Lewis postulates, whimsically, that early in an artist’s career he may be utterly attracted to the beauty or form of external “reality,” and try to paint that reality as a way of coming to “know” it. (That this drive could forcefully motivate the young Albrecht Dürer or G.M. Hopkins is less concerned with external reality, the “otherness” of his ostensible subject matter, than he is with the light which reveals it, or even the shadow which frames the light. Next the artist might become interested in the means and processes of his own perception, about which he may elaborate theories. Or, in quite a different way than at first, he could begin to become concerned with the way that others see his art as finished “product,” as a kind of new and independent external reality. Finally, the artist so inclined may become concerned only with himself, and above all with his reputation. It is in the last stage, presumably, that the artist is most self-consciously aware of his art as mendacious, and Wilde, presumably, understood this.

From this perspective the first sentence of Frye’s present book could seem disingenuous.

I am a literary critic, mainly concerned with English literature, and I have recently developed a special interest in the way that the Bible has affected the structure and imagery of that literature.

One must otherwise imagine a joke. Frye’s interest, in fact, is far from recent; indeed, in one form of expression or another, from his book on Blake, *A Fearful Symmetry* (1947), to *Secular Scripture* (1976) he has been almost continuously occupied with this subject. On this occasion, whether as critic or as artist, Frye seems at first to be looking at the Bible as an external cultural symbol (rather than as a literary text), relating symbol rather than text to the language and thought of his aesthetic enterprise. But in so doing he “paints a picture” of the Bible as literary text that should shock us into a renewed appreciation for naive realism, or at the least for the humble advantages of new-criticism.

To be blunt about it, Frye does not evidence in these essays a very good grasp of his subject. At the most elementary level, it should be obvious that the Bible cannot be treated *literarily* as though it were a single document: despite a remarkable coherence in respect of governing ideas, the Bible is an anthology, written by many authors over a considerable number of centuries in three languages. Casual generalization are likely to do violence to any number of specific texts. To say, as Frye does here, that “The garden is a symbol of the female body in the Bible,” even when citing *Song of Songs* as an example, is to ignore rather than read the whole text. (Even in *Song*, the very opposite might more credibly be said—that a female body is a symbol of the Garden.) In *Genesis*, or *Isaiah*, or even in *John 20* (where Magdalene mistakes the risen Christ for a gardener), the garden is a primary symbol for Creation, which, we may remember, is Frye’s ostensible subject. But the garden can also be a symbol for human arrogance and perversion, as in the Garden of Adonis (*Isaiah*, 17:10–11). Frye’s generalization, in short, is hopelessly misleading. Moreover, to sustain such generalizations about the text, Frye can be drawn into wilder misrepresentations of its principal artistic traditions of interpretation. Thus, by way of example, Dante is mistranslated by Frye—*legato con amore in un volume*, according to Frye, reads “bound into a single Word by love”—whereas Dante’s word is volume (mass, volume, book or tome). The point is not incidental; the mistranslation misrepresents ascription to the idea of a monistic biblical utterance which, if it were valid, would simply obliterate the various texts as text—something we hope Frye no less than Dante would be reluctant to do.

Frye is already notorious among literary critics for avoiding the actual texts of the secular literature he schematizes. In this volume his subsumed discussion of Shakespeare’s *Winter’s Tale* under

categories of generalization drawn from his view of *The Tempest* exemplifies a general tendency. For Frye the wondrous transformation at the end of *Winter's Tale* is, like the conclusion of *The Tempest*, “a vision of a reintegrated past in which dead things come to life under the spell of *art*.” But by eschewing the careful language of Acts IV and V he misses the play’s key point of reference for his ostensible subject: it is the explicit juxtaposition of Ovidian language (*art*) and specifically Pauline language (*grace*) that lend to this romance its particular source of “future hope.” Here, we remember, it is actually Paulina who tutors the metamorphosis, giving it both language and life, because it is she who induces in Leontes the moral transformation which alone could produce in the old king a reconciliation with that “nature” which is his “nature” too. The music which plays at Hermione’s unveiling is for Shakespeare’s time no more certainly a figure for *art* than for spiritual harmony; indeed, Leontes’ initial sense that he could be less transformed than “mocked with *art*” (V. iii. 68) is confirmed by Paulina. What she says is “—nay, come away,/Bequeath to death numbness, for from him/Dear life redeems you” (V. iii. 101-03). Hermione’s “resurrection” from dead *art* to living wife, from silence to conversation, is actually seen to transform the old Pygmalion story, and to image in Leontes, too, a familiar biblical prospect on creation and recreation. It is Paulina, with her biblical language, who orchestrates and makes possible the retrospective interpretation, and it is she who is able to suggest to us in which way we are to understand that “Our Perdita is found” (V. iii. 120). It is unfair to both plays to treat them as though they were two jellies from the same mold, or, indeed, to suggest as Frye does that each certifies his precept that in approaching Shakespeare’s romances “the Bible . . . is deficient as a guide to human creative perspectives” and that only the classical tradition affords us much help with their interpretation.

What one begins to discern in Frye, as he relates to biblical text, is that it is difficult for him not to express a polemic against the text, rather than actually to “read” it, and this is most disquieting. To say “The Bible has little or nothing to say about man’s cultural past” or even that in the Bible “the beginning is postulated, as something superior to all that follows” seems indefensibly inventive (or deconstructive) of biblical literature, at least as we might be concerned with it from any point of view which respects the actual text. One is forced to conclude, then, that it is not text but some narrower aspect of tradition against which Frye, with Blake at his elbow still, is poised.

I hope that my resistance to this volume will not be misconstrued. Disapproval of what Frye regards as bad criticism is certainly his critic’s prerogative. Confusing or identifying one species of criticism with the text, as though it were itself the text on which it comments is, I think, far less defensible. For one thing, the confusion introduces a risky conflation of historical and eccentric interpretation. Whether one construes the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, as “designed primarily to prevent man from slipping out of the grip of the church”—historically, *c’est a rire*—or, perhaps, sees it as a metaphor designed to explicate distinct yet unified faculties of mind integral to “recreation” or thought itself (memory, intellect, will, as in Augustine, Dante, Jung), may be largely a question of whether one is willing to deform the various texts at issue or else to engage them and their traditions of criticism in such imaginative conversation as could lead to a responsible interpretation. If Frye really wishes to discuss western creation myth or biblical cosmogony, then to make much of the curious seventeenth-century “chronology” which attempted to “date” creation in 4004 B.C., adducing poor Bishop Ussher as a prime example of a *general* “Christian . . . paranoia” about beginnings and endings is, as Frye must realize, at best to go fishing for red herring. Even if interpretation is itself merely another species of fiction, literary critics should aspire to “plausible fictions.” It is a relatively easy thing to find fault with bad and dead exegetes, apparently much more difficult to deal with the complex historical dialogue between Sacred and Secular Scripture—even when that dialogue is germinal to one of the most interesting of contemporary literary questions, that concerning our stance as readers with respect to beginnings and endings.

This is not to blame Frye overly much: anyone who has struggled with any aspect of the task he advertises must have some sympathy. But one has to wish that the Professor would refrain from claiming as a major source what is evidently a short punt. To adapt an incensed Blakean response to the Bible is not to deal effectively with its literary and aesthetic implications for western culture. Merely to express impatience with God's rhetorical questions of Job about whether he was present at creation or could have affected it (Frye: "God seems to regard this as a triumphant argument in favour of the wisdom of his ways and the folly of Job's") is, however emotionally sympathetic we might feel toward Blake or Frye, nonetheless to rob criticism of any valid voice of the text. The Job-narrator's own evident interest in the situation is as a significant apprehension of man's existential limitations, his "middleness"—and thus of his motivation for a keen imaginative enquiry into the issue of beginnings and endings, creation and recreation. In short, the Book of Job offers promising terrain for Frye's subject, but his emotional disaffection from one species of travelogue (or emotional allegiance to another journey) prevents him from seeing any fruitfulness in the land.

There remain a number of points in these essays at which Frye verges on plausible commentary concerning the dialogue between Sacred and Secular Scripture. Art, he says promisingly, has to do with an "idealized vision of society projected on the future." By this reckoning, Biblical narrative is art. Myth, Frye says further, is about what has happened, while faith is about what will happen. Yet one feels the approach of another false dichotomy here: surely myth is also about future vision, and, as historians and philosophers (March Bloch, David Carr, Paul Ricoeur) have argued, we are also obliged to exercise faith in respect to various myths concerning what has happened. In this sense, past, present, and future are all aspects of our interpretation, whether it be as "translation" (*vide* George Steiner) or some less kind of "recreation." Our present activity is intellectual, into which vortex we place in imaginative tension our remembered dream of the past (the texts, the myths of "innocence" and "experience" which have shaped our vision) and the future we intend or hope for (the unwritten, the dreams and visions which shape our growing imagination). Frye's apologetic suggests that when we do this, whether as artists or, here, as critics, we are aware of two possible attitudes with respect to our activity: either there is reality, a creation "outside" (e.g., a text) which calls us to knowing, depiction, and creative translation, or, there is only one real creation, our own, which must decreate the first to find its own recreative voice and vision. This position may represent something more than a restatement of Frye's earlier formulations: in *The Secular Scripture* he was clear about the distinction, but less comfortable with the negation:

The secular scripture tells us that we are the creators; other scriptures tell us that we are actors in a drama of divine creation and redemption. Even Alice is troubled by the thought that her dream may not have been hers but the Red King's. Identity and self-recognition begin when we realize that this is not an either-or question, when the great twins of divine creation and human recreation have merged into one, and we can see that the same shape is upon both.

We see that a continuing problem with Frye is that in his fascination with relationships between myth and religion he often seems to confound rather than connect the two. If biblical text is to be treated as literature, then it must also be granted status as myth, as text about "what has happened," reaching back to beginnings (and creation), motivated by the desire for "an idealized vision of society projected on the future." If Frye wishes to grant to secular literature the status of religious myth, then, like all religious texts, it too must be held to be about the inexplicable, the mystery of presentness, and our longing for a closure more fullsome than we can yet foresee. If I may paraphrase a senior member of our national academy: we usually think of myth as fiction that wants to explain; religion as wanting to celebrate the inexplicable. (In this sense, of course, religion is not the same thing as dogma.) But it seems that, despite his protest, Frye may in this book be explicating neither species of recreation—

myth or religion. What he clearly sees as distasteful about Sacred Scripture, for example, is its ordinary claim to status as a text to be read and interpreted. What his view of both Sacred and Secular Scripture threatens to do is to reject outright what his own early teachers felt to be a necessary relationship of secular literature to its criticism, that the received text, rather than any species of its interpretation, should retain critical authority.

The selling advantage of Frye's theory of secular scripture is that the reader is the authority—or at least the “divinely inspired” reader, the Super-Critic, is authority. In the Frygian cosmos, the critic as Authority provides the key to all mythologies; his decreation is the Creation that is real, and presumably sufficient for our recreation. That this Authority has been generously received in Canada is well enough attested by the curious determination of Canadian creative writers to explicate Frye with their work, to use poetry to interpret criticism rather than to expect criticism to interpret poetry.

Yet in such a circle game there is tacit acceptance. What the re-ordering means for the present exercise is that on Frye's own terms we are finally compelled to evaluate his ostensibly “critical” work as imaginative literature rather than as criticism, or, perhaps, *de facto*, as religious manifesto rather than exegesis. In such a light the complaint of this review—that the Frye of *Creation and Recreation* is not a particularly fruitful or reliable reader of texts—must seem not only heretical but vain. Frye celebrates a contemporary French and American reconception of the critics calling as competitor and ultimately successor to the artist. Thus, as the culminating reflection on his own career, it seems that he, too, heralds a new stage for criticism: Enter dogma: *Exeunt*, literature and interpretation.

Especially in a gifted writer with Frye's genuine depth of culture, the displacement of literary criticism by another species of writing would not be a cause for complaint if it were more accurately advertised. Frye's actual subjects are not secular literature and the literature of the Bible, neither is the relationship he explicates that between the Bible and secular literature. Rather Frye responds to a debate amongst both religious and literary interpreters in the liberal, humane and other traditions since at least the nineteenth century (as yet unresolved) concerning authority in interpretation. In the nineteenth century the authority no longer placed confidently in the text of Sacred Scripture was placed hopefully in secular literature—the best that was said or thought. It may not unfairly be said that the Frye of *Anatomy of Criticism* was still within this tradition. Whether from Feuerbach, Arnold and G. Eliot then, or their twentieth century counterparts, Frye seems in *Creation and Recreation* to have moved forward along an arc of logic self-consciously anticipated by his actual author of occasion, the candidly misleading Oscar Wilde. It is in the text of Wilde's clear self-advertisement that we see how apt is Frye's early remark, that Wilde was “fifty years ahead of his time”:

[This] is what the highest criticism really is, the record of one's own soul. It is more fascinating than history as it is concerned simply with oneself. It is more delightful than philosophy, as its subject is concrete and not abstract, real and not vague. It is the only civilised form of autobiography, as it deals not with the events, but with the thoughts of one's life: not with life's physical accidents of deed or circumstance, but with the spiritual moods and imaginative passions of the mind.

I think that Wilde (as usual, wagging his text behind him) offers in these words a fair and relevant comment on Frye's latest book. It may also, and somewhat more faithfully, advertise its appropriate conclusion.

The idea that everyone's theory of almost anything is finally autobiographical is, of course, hardly original with Oscar Wilde. For this reason alone, any suggestion that universal dogma should be generated from one peculiar autobiography, however carefully hidden in fair words, is a presumption that we expect a great critic to refute rather than to model.

6. Frank McCombie. *Notes and Queries* 29 (June 1982): 282

The narrator of *A Passage to India* remarks laconically upon the tendency of all conversations with Professor Godbole to culminate in a cow. So does all talk on the Bible by literary critics tend to culminate in Milton and Blake. It is a limitation, one particularly to be regretted at a time when theologians of the rank of Edward Schillebeeckx are emphasizing the importance of literary critical skills to biblical scholars. That Blake in fact serves Professor Frye's purposes so neatly in the present instance should make us all the more suspicious of his argument: has the message been tailored to suit the medium?

Creation and Recreation is offered as an analysis of the way in which the structure and imagery of literature have been affected by the complex ideas and images surrounding the word "creation." It was originally a series of lectures delivered at the University of Toronto, and draws upon some old material—"some of it now out of print"—and upon current work Frye is doing on "the narrative and imagery of the Bible," which will appear in some, more considerable volume in the future. The claim that these fused pieces "form a unit which can be read by itself" is perhaps a little too sanguine. The book is in three chapters, the first of which considers notions of creativity, God's and Man's, and makes rather heavy weather of some familiar arguments, and is over-punctuated by aphoristic comment of a kind which, judiciously presented in the autobiographies of elder statesmen, can sometimes pass for wisdom: here it merely distracts.

The rest of the book carries more weight. The second chapter considers some of the possibly crippling effects upon human creative aspiration of the myths of *Genesis*. The definition of "myth" is inadequate to the need—"culturally early narratives"—and some very familiar ground is rather laboriously turned over; but if it is regarded less as an argument than as a clarification of ideas, its fumbings are more easily forgiven. Nevertheless, the third chapter opens with a page and a half summarizing the first two, and so succinctly that one must wonder what all the fumbling was about. Now Frye sets out for us the problems he must confront in his projected larger work, and the sketch of the confrontation is interesting in itself. There was, however, some need felt for a conclusion, and the book ends with what is, in effect, a plea for a liberal and liberating theology of creation: as a conclusion to *this* book, however, this cannot be seen as anything much more than a plea for the syncretic approach to ecumenism and—almost by the way—to literature.

It is always difficult with books compiled out of lectures to determine how far the naivety of what is said merely indicates some supposed naivety in the original audience. In this case, that may have been somewhat exaggerated; and certainly, there is much about this book which suggests a view of the problems of biblical theology a great deal too simple for the needs of the study Professor Frye projects. One hopes, at any rate, that (taking a hint from Frank Kermode's *The Genesis of Secrecy*, perhaps) Professor Frye will sharpen his focus in the projected work: he may otherwise find himself embarked upon something uncomfortably close to "The Key to All Mythologies."

7. Mellard, James M. *Modern Fiction Studies* 27 (Summer 1981): 392

Creation and Recreation is another of those volumes of "demotic" criticism Northrop Frye regularly produces, works such as *The Educated Imagination*, *The Well-Tempered Critic*, and *The Secular Scripture*, each of which originated as lectures for a general, rather than specialist, audience and expressed Frye's conviction that criticism ought to be comprehensible to amateurs as well as to professionals. Frye in a very real way is working from a poet's integrated vision of the world, and that vision (most encyclopedically explicated in *Anatomy of Criticism*) informs all Frye's work. *Creation and*

Recreation is no exception. It begins with Frye's concern for the relation between creation/creativity and "the envelope" humanity "has constructed out of nature, the envelope usually called culture or civilization" (p. 5). In the second essay/lecture, Frye turns to the verbal part of our cultural envelope—mythology, "the total structure of human creation conveyed by words" (p. 7), which has literature at its center. He considers the literary and anthropological bases of myth and *mythos*, and then turns to the two basic types of creation myths—the type located in the Earth-Mother and the type found in the Sky-Father. He is mainly concerned with the negative implications entailed for human creation by the latter's "artificial creation," its necessitating a myth of "a fall," "an alienation myth which expresses the present human condition but does not attach it directly to the work of creation" (p. 33).

Such a creation myth—exemplified in Christianity—makes human creativity the goal or end "of the human journey rather than the beginning of it" (p. 46). Thus, artificial creation myths involve a double movement, a descending movement of divine consciousness as it becomes incarnated in "experience," and an ascending movement of fallen human consciousness rising toward the "original" state intended for it. This "double gyre" of opposed redemptive movements is then related to two visions of art, the one valorizing the "tradition of art in the past," the other, "the vision of an idealized society projected on the future" (p. 48). The third—and last—essay draws together the various themes Frye introduces in the first two. Interestingly enough, Frye here encompasses the current passion for "reader response" criticism. He turns the *reader* into the new "hero," the new artist whose role is recreative rather than creative. So, Frye returns to the creative and recreative functions of words, the *Word*, and the human desire for self-transcendence, which, in Frye's poetic vision, culminates in a worldwide community. As one has come to expect of Frye, the book really turns out to be a sermon, but it is well worth reading despite the hortative bent.

8. Ross, Malcolm. *University of Toronto Quarterly* 50 (Summer 1981): 95–7.

As the author tells us in his preface, these lectures, given under the auspices of Trinity College and St Thomas Anglican Church, Toronto, "draw on earlier material . . . some of it now out of print . . . they are also connected with an ongoing project of greater length, a study of the narrative and imagery of the Bible and its influence on secular literature."

Frye reads the Bible as William Blake read it, in its "infernal or diabolical sense," and he uses a typological strategy to arrive at configurations which would have dismayed the Fathers of the church. At the centre of his thesis is the contention that human creativity is quite at odds with what is "supposed" to be "the original divine act of making the world." More explicitly, "the humanly creative is whatever divinely disturbs our sense of 'the' creation, a reversing or neutralizing of it What seems one of the few admirable form of human achievement, the creation of the arts, turns out to be a kind of decreation."

The biblical myth of the "sky-father," of the artificer god "who starts everything off by making all things in more or less their present form, is not very encouraging for the human artist." Consequently, in much traditional Christian art, man "has no real initiative; liberty, for example, in Milton is nothing that man naturally wants but is something God is determined he shall have." And orthodox Christian dogma, we are told, has served to inhibit human creativity:

Everything that raises man from his fallen level to his to his originally designed one involves some degree of returning to his original creation. It is recreation only in the sense that man is included in it: the actual process is God's redemption of man, man doing very little for himself

that is of any real use. The whole process of human response, in Christian doctrine, is contained within the Holy Spirit, so that man's redemption is a drama within the persons of that Trinity in which man has a very limited actor's role. As the Holy Spirit guides the church, the doctrine of the Trinity, which is so central to Christian dogma in both Catholic and Protestant contexts, seems to have been, in its historical setting, a doctrine designed primarily to prevent man from slipping out of the grip of the church.

The Fathers of the church (and many of her children) would seem to stand accused here of a cunning conspiracy. Nevertheless, the crude secularism of our time has done nothing to deliver us from the inhibitions contrived and imposed by the church. "The older construct wore out because it repressed the sense of human autonomy. . . . But a purely secular construct whether it be humanist or communist may be expressing complementary things."

It is in opposition to all repressive ideologies or myths, whether they be sacred or secular, that Frye proposes his own visionary theorem. His approach to the mystery of creation "starts with the vision that man has a nature recreated in humanized form, the vision recorded in various forms of the arts. . . . It culminates in a vision of recreation in which man himself participates, and which appears to be in fact the total goal and aim of human effort."

In this new vision God "the sky-father," the artificer, the designer, is dead. God, "the noun" (the God "who belongs to the category of things and objects"), is replaced in this higher vision by God as "verb," and as "verb" expresses "a process fulfilling itself." One supposes that Person is a noun, too, and not an "object" or a "thing." But this noun is avoided. Similarly the nouns "Word" and "Spirit," once thought of as divine Persons, are, we are told, better understood as "qualities of self-transcendence." These two nouns, if not "extended into areas beyond the human," can signify and proclaim "the power that has created all our works of culture and imagination," the power "that is still ready to recreate both our society and ourselves."

It is therefore not without some bewilderment that we read a few pages later on that Word and Spirit, in a kind of dialectical identity with their new-found significance as "qualities of self-transcendence," may still be known as "divine persons ready and willing to redeem mankind." After Frye's reservations about all forms of "professed belief" and his pejorative comment on trinitarianism and on the divinity of nouns, it is not altogether clear what he means by the divine personalities of the Word and the Spirit, extended as they here seem to be "into areas beyond the human."

But at the very end of these lectures he assures us that "the goal of human recreation . . . bears a curious resemblance to the traditional versions of divine creation at the source." Is he not saying that man, in transcendence of himself and of all "professed belief," may yet sail on to Byzantium where, freed from all dogmatic repression and outmoded myth, he will see that creation has "finally become one with recreation and the revelation at the end of human effort [will also] be a recognition of something at the beginning"? In our end, perhaps, is our beginning? Does he not mean that in the full and final release of our own creativity we shall at the last know creativity "at the source"?

But when the "process" fulfills itself—in our art, in our action—shall we see IT face to face? And what are we to understand by this "something" which happened "at the beginning"? Was the Word in the beginning? And was this the Word made flesh—the divine Person? Is it that we do not need to be told? Or could it be, as Richard Webster said recently of the structuralists, that Frye is providing "a church for those too pure to entertain the idea of a god"? Such a church, I must suppose, could not be called St. Thomas—or Trinity. Certainly Frye does less than justice to the main line of Christian theology, to the doctrine of Christian liberty, and to the often vivifying influence of the church on all the arts. But Frye's church is not the church which Richard Webster locates in structuralism. Frye's church is The Church of the Holy Verb. And it is indeed a church! For throughout this intriguing and provocative essay in mythologizing and de-mythologizing, done in the

hope of searching out the dark mystery of creation in the visible act of human creativity, we cannot be unaware of an authentic kind of religious impulse. Frye's quest seems to be a quest for *pure act*, nameless, beyond personality, beyond and before the tentative transience of myth—pure act to be made present to us ultimately in the untrammelled freedom of our own creativity. This is the religious quest—or, rather, an aspect of the religious quest. But one wonders if Northrop Frye has not needlessly hampered this great enterprise and narrowed and shortened his own bright vision by the repression, or dismissal, or avoidance of the pertinent insights of Christian theology and the rapt knowledge of the mystics.

9. Tolomeo, Diane. *English Studies in Canada* 8 (June 1982): 245–8.

This little book consists of three essays delivered as the 1980 Larkin-Stuart lectures. They are avowedly the precursor of a full-length study of the influence of Biblical narrative and imagery on secular literature. As such, they are all too frequently a frustrating disappointment. While one hesitates to throw pebbles at one of the giants of literary criticism, there is little in these essays to indicate what the contours of that larger study will be and to what audience it will appeal.

Frye says he is concerned with the biblical and literary concepts of “creation.” The parallels and distinctions he draws between creation as a divine and a human activity are valid, but he also asserts at the outset that the fact that we entertain any concept of Creation at all is of far more importance than exactly what our belief is concerning the relationship between creator and creature. This is the key to understanding these essays, and also the reason they might well prove disquieting to those who believe that the relationship of man to his Creator is quite important, and not just for literary reasons.

The first essay examines creation as a human activity which cannot be dissociated from human culture and civilization. We do not live in isolation, nor do we live in intimacy with nature. Frye argues that, while science attempts to look through our “envelope” of civilization to see nature directly, literature is more like a mirror in which we see all things in reference to ourselves. It acts to evoke the repressed, past, and sometimes disturbing aspects of our lives, and consequently often meets with social resistance. This tension created by certain of the arts can become a transforming force in a society. Using the first six chapters of Genesis as a model, Frye argues that the vision of a future more idealized society lies at the bottom of man's desire to create, and his activities are described in Frye's use of the term “recreation.” This is closely tied to his understanding of the comic vision in literature with its frequent emphasis on regeneration and reconciliation.

But all of this is really not very new, and readers of Frye will recognize much familiar territory here. In fact, this is one of the major problems of the book, the sense that one has heard much of this before but continues to hope for some genuinely new insights as the essays develop. The second essay is devoted to an examination of the myth of divine creation as expressed in Genesis. Its approach to much of the Bible as myth will undoubtedly be offensive to some, who will not find it easy to agree with such assertions as: “it is only when the creation story is considered factually false that it can be of any conceivable use to us.” Frye goes on to discuss two types of creation myth, that of the sky-father, representing an “artificial creation” not the result of sexual union, and the older one of the earth-mother, derived from agricultural societies. While both are represented in the first two chapters of Genesis, Frye argues that both seem to be “intolerably patriarchal,” and, further, that “the emphasis on the male in the Bible is connected with its resistance to the cyclical fatality of all religions founded on Mother Nature.” He explores the implications of this very briefly, but one of the problems with these essays is that they raise complex issues and dismiss them very quickly. One hopes this will be remedied in the larger book. But, in the meanwhile, this can make the essays frustrating.

Frye often moves so quickly and synthesizes so much information into a single thought or sentence that his sequence of ideas is sometimes difficult to follow. What is apparent to him is not always immediately clear to his readers. Thus in a single paragraph he can move from the opening of Genesis to an Oscar Wilde essay to Eliot's *Family Reunion* (p. 29) without any apparent difficulty, but he seems to do so more out of self-indulgence than a desire to clarify a point for his reader.

Nevertheless, the second essay contains the most interesting and stimulating ideas in the book. Using images from the Bible, Dante, Yeats, and Donne, Frye shows how the human consciousness attempts an ascent from its fallen state and is met by the divine consciousness descending through incarnation. Once again, the ideas need to be fleshed out more fully and with a clearer indication of where they are leading. In at least one instance there is unnecessary difficulty created because of a problem of translation.

Frye quotes a passage from the King James Version of Genesis 3:22–23 in which God says that “man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever: Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden.” Frye uses this admittedly awkward passage to argue that God's fear of the threat posed by mankind is “so great that he cannot even finish his sentence” (p. 45). This is an unfair blow to strike. Surely Frye is aware of numerous other translations which remove the faulty syntax, such as the Jerusalem Bible's rendition of the passage thus: “Then Yahweh God said, ‘See, the man has become like one of us, with his knowledge of good and evil. He must not be allowed to stretch his hand out next and pick from the tree of life also, and eat some and live forever.’ So Yahweh God expelled him from the garden of Eden.” Here the disputed passage poses no problem whatsoever, and Frye's conclusion about the “threat” man poses to God seems unfounded. This is especially irresponsible because Frye does deal later on with the problems of translation and is fully aware of the need to capture the sense of a passage.

Going on to discuss the concept of the “Word” as a creative force, Frye seems to confuse sacred and secular concepts. He states that “even the Christian version of the myth implies that as soon as God speaks and becomes the Word of God, he has condemned himself to death” (p. 45). This then leads to Frye's rather silly conclusion that man has, with the power of speech, become “the potential murderer of God.” While the concepts of creation and incarnation are terms that may indeed be used to shed light on the activities of both God and man (as Dorothy Sayers so clearly illustrated as early as 1941 in *The Mind of the Maker*), the argument here seems rather to present man in a Promethean sense as one who has unlawfully stolen power from the gods. To present this implicitly as part of “the Christian version of the myth” is quite simply not accurate.

Yet one can sense what Frye is driving at here, and if such distracting statements as those given above are ignored, bothersome though they be, Frye's point is that man's “recreation” will ultimately take the form of a reaching out, or up, to God even as God reaches down to man. Dante is of course Frye's model for this, and while Frye's argument is at its best here, there is yet a nagging sense that not very much of it is new, though it is cleverly put.

The third essay enters the realm of professed belief, or traditional Christianity, and it is here that some readers may find certain statements inflammatory or offensive, such as the assertion that the doctrine of the Trinity has, historically, been “designed primarily to prevent man from slipping out of the grip of the Church” (p. 53). While such statements are neither pervasive nor central to the essay, they are distracting enough when they do occur to weaken other aspects of Frye's argument.

For whom, then, are these essays meant? They are possibly intended for beginning students of literature and for the general reading public, since at times they state such obvious facts as “every reader recreates what he reads.” This book frequently functions at such an elementary level, but not always. Hence the beginning student of literature may well be glad to be provided with a basic definition and example of the concept of typology and Old Testament “types,” but may be bewildered

by, say, the discussion of Blake's world of the "tyger" and allusions to complex schemes of cosmology. Students of theology and biblical literature may also be disappointed by certain aspects of these essays. Not all will think of the creation story in Genesis as "essentially a poetic account," nor will all agree that Nietzsche's statement that "God is dead" has been "widely accepted," or that the terms "Word" and "Spirit" may be "understood as qualities of self transcendence." Much of what Frye has to say, would place him as a spokesman for a secular theology which places humanitarianism above professed belief and asserts the value of "common action and social vision" in helping man discover the "creative force" in the world.

This is, then, a book for Frye enthusiasts and anyone who enjoys the tricks that words can play. It is probably not for serious students of secular or biblical literature; perhaps the longer work promised will be a more fulfilling study for them.

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